

## **Religious Factors in the Electoral Process and the Quest for an Enduring Democracy in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** Religion has continued to be a potent force in the society because of the apparent unavoidable interaction between the duos. Arising from the foregoing, it is incontrovertible that religion is a factor in the electoral process in Nigeria as every stage has an input of religion either covertly or overtly. The attention of several scholars has been drawn to this reality hence, researches of various kinds on the subject matter abound. Though the positive contributions of religion to election can not be ignored, a major challenge is its failure to ensure a free and fair election, which is expected to translate into consolidatory democracy. It can therefore be said that Nigeria's socio-political problems have religious undercurrent. This paper discusses the issue of religion in the electoral process in Nigeria with attention paid to the problems and prospect of this observable fact as it concerns the yearning for an enduring democracy. It explores the positive role religion can play in ensuring a free and fair election while eschewing manipulation of religion for selfish interest is recommended.

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**Key words:** Religion • Electoral process • Democracy • Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

That religion has an interactive relationship with other social units of a society is an undeniable fact. This is to say that religion goes beyond the context of people's communion with the supernatural, an expression of an instinctual reaction to the cosmic forces and an explicit set of messages from a deity. Thus it follows and illustrates sociological principles and laws [1]. According to Dzurgba, it can be argued that religion created the society in as much as God created the universe. He represents religion while the universe represents society. Thus, all aspects of society, such as marriage, homes, schools, medical institutions and business corporations, among others, are influenced by religion [2]. Corroborating this, Awolalu opines that In traditional African society, religion and political authorities were interdependent as the king promoted religion by building places of worship as well as enforcing doctrine and observing rituals. Also in Islam, there is no dichotomy between religion and the state given the fact Islam is a religion as well as a way of life and government. In classical Islam, the state is not sovereign; the ultimate sovereign is God and it is the duty of each Muslim to obey the state, since the purpose of the state is the promotion and protection of Islam. In the old Testament, there was no clear cut division between the church and the state. God was the acknowledged ruler working through his chosen servant. Consequently Israel was different from other nation until the institution of monarchy while Jesus' statement "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" implies both the validity of the authority of earthly rulers in their own spheres and the illegitimacy of their claims to an absolute obedience that belongs to God alone [3]. The inference that can be drawn from the foregoing is that religion and society are, in practice, inseparable entities. For this reason, the claims by Comte and Marx regarding the relevance of religion have come under severe attack and they

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cannot be established. Mbiti and Idowu have once argued that Africans are obsessively religious because in all things they do there is religion and that every segment of life is permeated by religion [4, 5]. While one agrees with them, it can equally be said that it is not only Africans that are caught in the web of religiosity. The point being made is that every society recognizes the indispensability of religion; its negative impact notwithstanding. It is on the basis of the foregoing that religion has become an issue in the electoral process and this is what has prompted the writing of this paper.

**Religion and Election:** This section discusses election as it relates to religion with particular reference to Christianity, Islam and African indigenous Religion. The inseparability of politics from religion, which had earlier been established suggests that election, which is a form of political behaviour has a link with religion. Of course, there is no clear evidence of the antagonism of the three major religions to the phenomenon of election. In fact, election irrespective of its type or method is an essential practice in these religions. Unarguably, taking part in electoral process is a civic duty and demonstration of good citizenship which religion emphasizes. It can therefore be said that religion is a fundamental factor in the electoral process. Let us examine in brief the position of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion on election so as to decipher the possible implications for political stability

**Christianity and Election:** The Old Testament idea of election was part of the covenant God made with the Israelites. It connotes his preference for them to other nations. Election in this context is different from democratic election, which is the main focus in this paper. However, casting of lots, which is an ancient method of election and other forms of election are reported in both the old and the New Testaments. This depicts election as a Christian practice. The selections of Saul and David as the first and second king of monarchical Israel buttress the foregoing claim. Though the process was not as democratic as expected in a democracy, one could say that there was no human manipulation and that the candidates (Saul and David) met certain requirements, hence their preference by God to others.

Oduyoye notes that Christianity is familiar with the concept and practice of election. Making reference to the election of Mathias in the book of Acts to fill the vacant post created by the defection and death of Judas, he stresses that electoral process was formerly a religious affair which later became secularized [6]. In the same book of Acts, the need arose for the appointment of seven Deacons. As was the case with Saul, David and Mathias, the seven Deacons were most qualified to be appointed among those who were available. Thus their eventual appointment signifies that they were those whom God wanted for the assignment. In the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and other churches where episcopacy is practiced, bishops are elected. For instance, in 2005 Pope Benedict XVI was elected following the death of Pope John Paul II. In other Christian denominations and organisations, election of different kinds takes place to choose leaders. Without equivocation, one can say that if Christian leaders are elected, it will not be wrong to conclude that election is not antithetical to Christianity. In the words of Elder III "A person who takes his Christian citizenship seriously is the one who applies the Gospel to his world through responsible involvement in the political process" [7]. However, it needs to be mentioned that what we have in the Bible is more of appointment, because the process is devoid of the principles of ideal democracy such as freedom of choice, universal adult suffrage and political sovereignty of the electorate. In most cases people were not consulted before such appointments were made. Perhaps, Saul and David wouldn't have emerged as winners in a democratic election. They were merely sought for, appointed and imposed on people through divine arrangement. However, there was an element of consultation before divine appointments were made. It can be adduced that democracy has its own understanding even in a theocratic system of government. It is pertinent to acknowledge what obtained even when God is at the centre of a government. For example, God usually consulted with his prophets whenever the fundamental decision that has to do with leadership was to be taken. While we are aware that God has the power not to consult, He still made consultations on important basis for democratic approach to leadership. A major difference between theocracy and democracy is the facts that in a democratic system people have a say in electoral process thereby conferring power on leaders but power is understood to be divinely conferred in theocracy. Inasmuch as election is a Christian activity, one expects that in political elections, if Christians are involved. Consequently, Christian form of election can be taken as a model by those who participate in the electoral process in Nigeria.

Islamic scholars have argued that election is not un-Islamic although the Quran and Hadith do not make a categorical statement in respect of this, it is implied. According to a source, if Muslims delve into their theological and historical heritage, they would find that Islam not only encourages but obligates them to conduct their political affairs in a consultative manner through the *shura*. This is enshrined in the Qur'an in two places. In the first, the Prophet is ordered by God to "deal gently [mercifully]" and not to be "severe and harsh-hearted" in governing, but rather to "consult with [the people] in their affairs." The second reference appears in *Surat al-Shura*, where Muslims are enjoined to "answer the Call of their Lord, perform the *salat* [prayers]...and...conduct their affairs by mutual consultation [8].

In Shafaat's opinion, to say that elections are un-Islamic, one must be able to "Present clear evidence from the Quran and authentic Hadith or at the very least, be able to quote some recognized Muslim authority. Opinion expressed on the basis of hearsay and vague impressions are extremely dangerous for the Ummah and for the persons who express them". They are dangerous for the Ummah because unsubstantiated opinions create confusion; and misinformation is wrong, for the person who expresses it because if he is wrong he will face the consequence on the day of judgement for misleading others. He says further that one of the opinions which are held without evidence and which people have continued to express is that elections are un-Islamic. Therefore he states affirmatively that elections are not un-Islamic and so permissible. In his opinion, there is not a single reputed 'alim, who has declared that elections are un-Islamic. Moreover, the predominant view among Islamic scholars is that Islam has not categorically prescribed any definite political system, but given only general principles of government and that a system based on election is acceptable in Islam; and preferred to military dictatorship and kingships; that exist in many Muslim countries. Islam's acceptability of election is equally supported by Muslim practice. For example in 1973, a new constitution came into force in Pakistan and among its objectives was establishment of a system under which the state may exercise its authority and powers through the representatives elected by the people. Under this system, the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, decency and social justice as prescribed by Islam will be fully put into practice.

After the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran became a republic and its constitution recognized the principles of elections in its articles as follows:

In Islamic Republic of Iran, the state affairs shall be administered as voted by the people i.e. through elections: election of President, representatives of Majlis (National Consultative Assembly) members of the councils and the like, or through a referendum as stipulated under other articles of this law.

Elections are also held in Egypt. However, this is done in such a way that the ruling party or president usually wins by a very wide margin. This method as a matter of fact negates the principle of democracy because the process is being tailored to favour a particular candidate. In other words, the power of incumbency is being used to take advantage. This notwithstanding, it is not on record that Egyptians Ulama have ever raised their voices to condemn the practice of the election. This may be due to the influence of theocracy on the people [9].

In the light of the Quran and Hadith, elections are permissible in Islam. It is held that some Muslims, blinded by self interest or ignorance, seem to suggest that anything that did not exist in the early days of Islam is un-Islamic. According to Shafaat, if this were to be true, most of the things people do today would be un-Islamic. For example the use of phone and cars, calling of prayers or speech to worshippers in a loud speaker among other things that have been invented through science and technology. The Holy Quran condemns monopolistic control of wealth and states how to use the wealth God bestows on the prophet "This is in order that the wealth may not become something that goes round among the rich in your midst.Q59.7" This view is corroborated in other Islamic principles such as prohibition against hoarding, usury and the principle that the land belongs to the tiller. Election as a means of becoming leaders provides a way of avoiding monopolistic control of political power. Since political and economic wealth often go hand in hand, elections help in wider distribution of wealth and ensure that political power is not held permanently. Humility is a desirable virtue in Islam; therefore leaders who are elected tend to be more humble and accessible than kings and dictators. Another principle taught in the Quran and Hadith is equality. The system of elective government creates equality to an extent, since every

individual's vote counts. It must also be stated that unity and peace enjoined by Islam are ensured in a democratic government than in a dictatorial regime. The reason is that if people are not satisfied with the existing government, they can hope to peacefully change things in the next election [10].

It is practically impossible to separate politics from Islam because, as a religion it cuts across every aspect of life, politics inclusive. Therefore election is an issue that cannot be done away with in the religion. The elections of the second, third and fourth Caliphs-Umar, Uthman and Ali lend credence to this claim [11]. Today, in Islamic countries like Iran and Egypt, democratic elections are held to choose their leaders.

It is important to note that the variety of methods through which the concept of *shura* was practiced—both then and to some extent, now—clearly indicates that there is no single model of governance in Islam. Hence, from a jurisprudential point of view based primarily on the Qur'an, Muslims are free to implement any system of governance, provided that it is fair, just and consultative. There is therefore no fundamental conflict between Islam and democracy. In Nigeria, it is not an accidental occurrence that Muslims are more politically conscious than Christians. The inference that can be drawn from the above claims is that election is not a forbidden practice Islam. However, not all Muslims subscribe to this viewpoint as it is opined in some quarters that elections, like economic competition, produce winners, but these are not necessarily the best candidates, morally speaking. The biggest drawback to democracy, is that elected representatives may not consider good governance their objective and may seek to usurp the electoral process in order to satisfy their own interests—and this unfortunately tarnishes the democratic ideal. Furthermore, in many cases democracy does not conform to the classical model of citizens directly electing their representatives; instead, leaders are chosen by caucuses, which limits competition, which are un-Islamic [12].

Election is equally an essential feature of traditional African societies. In the pre-colonial days the traditional rulers who exercised executive, legislative and judicial powers were appointed in ways peculiar to each locality. In Yorubaland for instance, the appointment of kings is usually preceded by an electoral process. In this case everybody is not an electorate but a select group of people called kingmakers. For example a Yoruba town or village usually has many ruling houses or families and it is among them that the title of Oba or Baale is expected to rotate. The process may differ in matter of detail from one kingdom to the other, but there are some striking similarities, which are enough for generalizations. Candidates are expected to be free born, people of integrity, sound mind and not physically deformed [13].

The privileges, fame and rights that go with kingship do make many people to aspire to be made king when the stool is vacant as a result of the death or dethronement of the reigning king. When this happens the kingmakers would consult the Ifa oracle to know who among the contestant is suitable for the post, after which the name will be submitted to them for ratification [14]. The decision of the Ifa oracle is not normally altered because it is believed that he is Olodumare's (GOD) mouthpiece. Whichever method is used in a particular place, both the kingmakers and Ifa play a prominent role in the selection process, the last lap of which is the final approval by the state government. It is important to note that the process is rarely easy and free from rancour because there are usually many qualified candidates.

In the modern time, the influence of politicians is significant as they have discovered the advantage of having friends in position of authority in the traditional setting [15, 16]. Also the wealth and the educational qualification of contestants are considered nowadays before a person is selected as a king. The impact of modernity notwithstanding, the process has not completely changed. On the whole, as obtained in Christianity and Islam election is a practice in African Traditional Religion.

In this section, we have discussed the concept of election as it features in Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. In these religions, because of the involvement of the divine in the process, elections are expected to be free and fair. Thus it is expected that the religious persuasion of stakeholders in electoral process will make them discharge their duties responsibly during electoral process if they imbibe the ethical teachings of their religions.

**Religion as a Factor in the Electoral Process:** It is pertinent to note that there are some fundamental principles underlying religious factors in the electoral process in Nigeria. One of such is how religion often determines the choice of a flag bearer/running mate for the posts of the president and governor in states that have a large representation of Christians

and Muslims. This is done to ensure that the interests of adherents are protected, given the sensitivity of religion. Where and when this principle is adopted, there is usually a Muslim/Christian or Christian/Muslim ticket. Thus in 1979, the National Party of Nigeria (N.P.N) adopted a Muslim/ Christian ticket while the Unity Party of Nigeria (U.P.N) did not take religion into consideration, hence its adoption of a Christian/Christian ticket. Perhaps, Chief Awolowo saw this as one of the reasons why he lost, he chose a Muslim from the North as his running mate in 1983. Even some military regimes recognized religion as a factor in governance. For instance the Murtala/Obasanjo era was a Muslim/Christian ticket and Obasanjo, upon becoming the Head of State, chose a Muslim as his deputy. However, the Buhari/Idiagbon regime was Muslim/Muslim, while the two Chiefs of General Staff in the General Babangida administration were Christians. Both Abacha and Abubakar maintained the status quo as they picked Diya and Akhigbe (Christians) as their second in command, respectively.

In subsequent political dispensations, religion has continued to be a sensitive factor in choosing candidates at the national level. During the aborted republic, the National Republican Convention (N.R.C) had a Muslim/Christian ticket, while that of the Social Democratic Party (S.D.P) was Muslim/Muslim. This however did not affect the outcome of the election as available record shows that that duo of Abiola and Kingibe were massively voted for. In the same vein, former President, Obasanjo, had a Muslim as his vice while the immediate past president who was a Muslim picked a Christian as his vice. In 2011, all the major political parties adopted the principle of zoning on the basis of religion. It is important to remark that religion is only being considered on the surface; it is not strictly based on how religiously committed the candidates are but, at least the tension will not be generated if no religion feels marginalized. This is indeed a political diplomacy, but it is problematic because the signal is that only Islam and Christianity are existing religions, given the fact that the adherents of traditional religion and others are not, in any way, considered. One can not but mention how religion came to play shortly before president Jonathan publicly signified his intention to contest the 2011 presidential poll. On the day prior to the event Muslim faithfuls prayed during the Jumat service which was attended by vice president Namadi Sambo for the team's success while a special prayer session was equally organised by the Christian Association of Nigeria for the same purpose. This scenario left many people wondering whether CAN had become partisan. This is not healthy in a politically and religiously pluralistic country like Nigeria.

It is also an issue that voting and campaign, in some cases, are based on religious sentiment. In this case, religion could be used either to canvass support for a candidates or dissuade the electorate from voting for him or her. This is why some Muslims will not support Christian candidates and vice-versa. On this, Johnstone opines that:

A widely recognized point of religious influence over politics is that of peoples' voting preference and behavior ...Such interest gives very explicit recognition to the correlation that exists between religious affiliation and commitment, on the one hand and voting behavior, on the other. That there should be a correlation is exactly what would be expected, of course, if religious affiliation and commitment mean anything at all [17].

During the 1983 electioneering campaign in the North, Alhaji Dankwaro composed a song enjoining Muslims to vote for Shagari and the N.P.N, as follows:

Since the time of Ahmadu Bello, there has never been another leader with power, except Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the trusted one. He is the grandson of the servant of God. He is a servant of God- Bawan Allah. My happiness is that, our flag, which has been lying down in Mecca, the reign of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, has raised it up. In the face of Islam today in the world, Nigeria is first [18].

Still on this subject, in 2003, Major General Buhari, of the All Nigerian Peoples Party, was criticized for his stand on religious matters and this, no doubt, worked against his political fortune. As a perceived advocate of the Sharia law and fundamentalist, he was quoted to have said that Muslims should not vote for Christian candidates. In 2011, he devised a strategy to opening up to the Christian community by selecting Pastor Tunde Bakare as his running mate and on several

occasions paid official visits to influential Christian clerics [19]. What can be inferred from the foregoing is that religion could be a dangerous factor in an electoral process. The input of religion has been both liberal and radical in that it is not, in all cases, that religious beliefs govern political attitudes or that Nigerians vote on religious sentiment. For example, in 1979, Muslims in the southwest voted for Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Christian, while Christian in the north voted for Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a Muslim. The result of the annulled 1993 presidential election lends credence to this claim as the victorious party adopted a Muslim/Muslim ticket and Christians did not because of their decision not to cast their votes for its candidates. On a radical note, religion is not a unifying factor, but an agent of division and a negative determinant. On this issue, an Islamic Cleric, Abubakar Ahmed Gumi is quoted to have predicted that religion and the north-south divide was going to determine the Babangida transition programme. According to Clarke:

It was Gummi's contention, then that the stage would be set for a political contest between Islam and Christianity, ending, possibly, in the breakup of the federation. The reason he gave was that since Muslims could not, on grounds of faith, join a Christian led party or if the Christians refused to join a party led by a Muslim, then there will appear a two party system and the two party system will not be south against north, but Islam against Christianity [20].

It must not be understood as a chance occurrence that states like Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi and Kano, among others, have never produced Christian governors while also it may take a very long time before a Muslim governor is produced in the South Eastern Nigeria. This is because the percentage of Muslims in the region is negligible. The questions that come to mind at this juncture are: of what relevance is religion in the choice of candidates? Does religion determine the level of competence and performance of a leader? Unarguably, Nigerians do manipulate religion for their selfish ends in ensuring electoral victory. Ironically, this does not guarantee good governance. Religion is often used to cause confusion or woo or pacify the electorate. General Babangida promised "Insa Allah", in 1993, to hand over to a democratically elected president, but it was later discovered that the statement was made, just like any other statement, while Chief Obasanjo claimed that he would have fulfilled the third ambition, if he had asked for from God. Also in 2003, Pastor Chris Okotie and some other aspirants claimed to have received revelation from God that they would emerge as winners. It is funny that after he had lost, he was still optimistic that he would be sworn in as president on May 29. He has always contested for the highest office in the country and God has always assured him of victory, which has never happened. Also in 2003, Senator Peter Adeyemo, who decamped from the Alliance for Democracy having lost the senatorial ticket, tried to win the support of Christians in Oyo State, claiming that God had commissioned him to lead the state to the Promised Land. Interestingly enough, none of them gave any reason why God did not fulfil, or has not fulfilled, that promise. Shortly before the election, there was a crisis in Ibadan when some fundamentalists wanted to enforce the wearing of Ijab by Muslim girls in all schools, including the ones funded by Christian Missions. This move was seen by a group of Christians as a calculated attempt to destabilize Nigeria's nascent democracy [21].

After an election, the oath of office is administered on whoever is elected or declared as such. The main thrust of the oath is the promise to act faithfully and in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In doing this, the help of God is solicited. Though religious leaders are not given specific roles to play when the oath is being administered, the mention of God's name, coupled with the holding of scripture or any religious object, is enough to establish the invocation of the divine [22, 23].

The infiltration of religion into the electoral process is consummated with thanksgiving by politicians in Churches and Mosques to acknowledge God's sovereignty and faithfulness; and for granting them victory no matter how fraudulent the election might be. It has not been recorded, in recent time that such people were prevented, by religious leaders, who ideally should not be part of any fraud [24]. This has been understood as partisanship of religious leaders and one needs to ask whether God, in his sovereignty, granted those people; dubious and questionable victory or simply allowed rigging; or, as the Omnipotent Being, rigging is His handiwork. Conversely thinking, as the omnibenevolent God, He wouldn't have supported rigging, which is a form of evil. The fact that many religious leaders have not been courageous enough to condemn rigging and other social vices has consistently questioned the relevance of religion in society.

**Implications for an Enduring Democracy:** Our task in this section is to examine how the permeation of religion into the electoral process can make or mar democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This position is valid because religion performs both positive and negative functions; the negative ones often times, being a product of manipulation by individuals. In a religious community like Nigeria, one expects a credible electoral process, if the rules are obeyed. In this case, all stakeholders who are mostly religious people are expected to abide by the ethical teachings of their religions. Religion, being an agent of social control, helps to keep people with the norm of the society, which is the real basis of politics. In Adeleye's view:

Religion breeds an ideal heart in man to be able to be conscious of the need to have a clean heart. By this, he will grow to have a philanthropic or patriotic thought before venturing to lead or represent his people in government of the state. In another words, religion will prepare the mind of man to be a good politician who will constantly fall back upon his religion to guide him. The teachings or threats of religion are expected to guide him to be able to lead his people aright as a politician with fear of God in him. He will never consider himself first, rather he knows that he is the servant of the electorates (sic)-his people. Religion in an idealistic set up, therefore, serves as oil to lubricate politics. This is to say that religion bears peace and love, both of which are vital ingredients that can sum the interests of societies together for an ideal and a very healthy and purposeful politics [25].

Without mincing words, a hitch-free election will produce legitimate and disciplined leaders who will govern with the fear of God; and obedient followers. This will be possible if religion is not seen as a mere tool for achieving selfish ends, but that religious practitioners are committed and adhere to religious ethical values. The foregoing will solve problems, such as political instability, violence and insecurity, maladministration, retardness of growth and development and international stigmatization and apathy towards politics, which apparently are bye-products of electoral malpractices, which is a major threat to an enduring democracy in Nigeria. Jonhstone corroborates this view that "what one believes, with respect to that which is good, true and desirable as well as what God intends for people and society, could be expected to influence the choice one makes in the political arena. That is, religion should affect people's voting pattern" [26].

Another expected, positive input of religion in politics is adherence to the oath of office. In this case, political leaders, having invoked God when the oath is being administered, will rule with the fear of God. We must be cognizant of the fact that every content of the oath is a guarantee for good governance, if imbibed. However the political scene does not suggest that oath of office is taken with any sense of seriousness because political office holders do the opposite of what they promised to do when they were being sworn in. Disregarding oath of office or any other oath is not alien to Nigeria. This is why Ilesanmi argues that oath taking is nothing but psychology of mutual mistrust [27].

On the other hand, there are many reasons to suggest that religion in the electoral process is a threat to political instability given the level manipulation of religion. As earlier noted, choosing candidate on religious grounds is nothing but an expression of religious sentiment as there is no means of determining how committed those people are. Therefore, they may not act according to the precepts of their religion. This is why there have always been cases of bad governance even when religious people are at the helm of affairs. The implementation of Sharia law by some governors in the northern Nigeria cannot be absolutely understood in terms of religious commitment; it is equally political. This scenario is not unconnected with opinion of some Nigerians that Major General Buhari is a religious extremist. Consequently, his bid to become the President was seriously campaigned against. One can equally imagine how the calamity that befell Nigeria in year 2000 when the Kaduna state government began its implementation.

A very devastating violence followed the 2011 presidential elections in some states namely; Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Niger and Borno in the northern part of Nigeria. Many observers concluded that the poll was generally peaceful and described the development as a new dawn in the political history of the most populous black nation in the world. But as people preparing to celebrate the success of the election that returned President Goodluck Jonathan as the president-elect, many youths took to the streets raiding, looting and destroying properties of innocent people. The youths freely wielded weapons, unleashing mayhem on everything and everybody on sight, set houses and cars ablaze; burnt churches, maimed and killed ordinary people who knew little or nothing about politics. Unfortunately, youth corps members who were

serving in the Northern part of the country became an endangered species as many of them lost their lives. The unruly and misinformed youths vented their anger on corps members whose lives they were supposed to protect. Those who participated in the election as ad hoc staff of INEC and those who knew nothing about the exercise were victims of the unwarranted attacks. Some of them were killed, while others were injured. Not less than 1000 people were confirmed dead; and this led to the postponement of gubernatorial elections in Kaduna and Bauchi states. Onapajo notes that the 2011 elections appeared to be a political battle between the Muslims and the Christians as Jonathan and Buhari signified the major contenders of the presidential elections [28]. The outcome clearly confirms this observation as the voting pattern largely reflected religion and ethnicity. While Jonathan, the eventual winner had a landslide victory in Christian dominated areas of the country, Buhari swept in many northern states dominated by Muslims.

The post-election unrest was blamed on the type of campaigns embarked upon by politicians and political party leaders before the election. The president, Ijaw National Congress. Kumse Okoko, traced the immediate cause of post-election violence to the campaign of the Congress for Progressive Change. He recalled that the CPC, while campaigning for the presidential election, asked members of the party to protect their votes by all means. According to him, there is no doubt that the incitement before and during the elections by the CPC leadership had a role to play in it. The reason was that they had the hope that they would win the election and therefore told their members to protect their votes at all costs [29]. Lending credence to this, Onapajo says that:

Muhammadu Buhari, who had earlier openly supported the *Sharia* cause, had been tagged a Muslim fanatic by many especially the Christians. The political party he successfully floated for his presidential ambition after leaving the ANPP over unsettled ideological conflict –the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) – was also categorized as an Islamic northern party... CPC enjoyed the patronage of the Muslim masses, *Almajari* students and Muslim clerics in the north who gave Buhari the epithet, Mai Gaskiya (the truthful one) as a mark of their high trust in him [30].

There are several other reasons to suggest that the violence had religious underpinning given the insinuation that many northerners believed that they were betrayed because the PDP zoning arrangement was not followed; couple with the fact that the person who eventually emerged as the flag bearer is a Christian. According to an ex corps member who served as a presiding officer in one the northern states, the utterances of many of those who came to cast their votes did not suggest that they were favourably disposed to the emergence of a non-Muslim as president. It will be difficult to absolutely explain the violence in terms of religious acrimony. This is because both Christians and Muslims were victims. Establishing this in address, the Sultan revealed that over 800 Muslims were killed in the post-election violence and called for restraint by religious leaders in discussing such matters to avoid incitement. He blamed the incidence on ignorance and moral decadence among Nigerians and the elite for what he called the perennial ethno-religious disaffections in the country. The Sultan noted that corruption and greed as well as injustice were also threatening the corporate existence of the country and cautioned religious leaders to prevail on their followers to tow the path of morality and justice. Also the Christian Association Nigeria (CAN) disclosed that over 200 Christians lost their lives during the violence and that 770 churches were burnt and vandalised during the violence. It was lamented that Christians in the North were not allowed to build their worship places, adding that the development does not augur well in a country that wants to promote unity and peace among its citizens [31].

Eke however holds that the election riot has exposed the fact that riots in north Nigeria has very little to do with religion but that religion has become a smoke screen for achieving political objective through violence. It is a reaction driven by interplay of delusional religious beliefs, political ideologies, ignorance and poverty. It should be recalled that protesters targeted churches and indigenous population that belong to different political parties but who are of the same religion. Therefore, If it was simply political protest, churches wouldn't have been set on fire and If it was religious protest Moslems who belong to different political parties shouldn't have been attacked. The riot is an expression of intolerance and prejudice which is masked through either religion, political or ethnic identities [32]. It cannot be controverted that religion is often manipulated to achieve some selfish ends. Of course those who are truly religious will not commit crime



under the guise of religion. Whether or not the post election violence of 2011 can be blamed on the misuse of religion, the fact remains that it was a threat to democratic consolidation and the corporate existence of the country or how can one describe the killing of corps members who died while serving their fatherland? It is ironic that the scheme was established so as to guarantee the unity of Nigeria. Many of those who were lucky not to be killed redeployed to other states mostly their states of origin while not many southerners now wish to be posted to any of the states in the north.

Apart from the foregoing, the activities of Boko Haram are believed not to be absolutely religious as they are often politics driven. Many members of the sect are those who were used as political thugs during elections only to be abandoned. This is not unconnected with why they often target government establishment. The confession of a suspect that a serving Senator is one of their sponsors suggests that Nigeria may be sitting on gun powder. Bombing has become a recurring decimal in the north while other parts of the country are threatened on daily basis.

**Concluding Remarks:** That religion is an ingredient in politics cannot be controverted as established in this piece. However, given the negative impact of religion on the electoral process one cannot but suggest that manipulation of religion must be avoided by those who are involved in democratic elections. It is expedient for government to be dispassionate in religious matters in line with what the constitution stipulates. Doing this will douse the tension generated by religious dissonance that may be engendered by non-neutrality of the government. On a serious note, those who are guilty of religious violence must be severely dealt with so as to serve as a deterrent to others. The issue of sacred cow has always impelled people to disregard the law; de-emphasizing this will uphold the sanctity of the constitution. Also, it will not be out of place to suggest the need for religious education so as to understand the importance of inter religious harmony. As a matter of urgent necessity, religious leaders must abstain from partisan politics, rather they must see themselves as fathers of all. In the same vein, those whose victories are questionable must be prevented from coming for thanksgiving either in the Church or Mosque. Condoning this has been a major minus for contemporary religious leaders in Nigeria hence the need for them to them not to allow fraudulent politicians to drag their integrity in the mud. Interestingly, religion is a veritable tool for achieving a free and fair election. In view of this it is imperative to invoke and respect religious moral values towards ensuring this.

In this paper, the place religion in the electoral process in Nigeria has been pointed out; with emphasis on its positive and negative influence on democratic consolidation. Given this, the foregoing recommendations were made. Sustaining the current democratic experience cannot be compromised. Therefore, efforts must be made by all and sundry to achieve this.

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