

NIGERIA POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT: THE CHALLENGES OF ETHNO-RELIGION CONSIDERATION

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Abstract: In an ideal political society, what informed democratic process or governmental policies are issues that are germane to improving the fortune of the citizenry. Unlike in Nigeria where decisions and government appointment are influenced by myopic view for ethnic affiliation and religion sentiment. The role of ethnic affiliation and religion alliance in democratic arrangement and party politics in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. Voter's behavior is often determined by ethnic interest and religion sentiment. It sometimes resulted in the best candidate not being elected or picked for a leadership position. Religion and ethnic affiliation indirectly influenced the political dynamics of Nigeria. The effort to balance religion interest is a challenge to the government. The manifestation of the struggle among the ethno-religion groups was glaring during the 2023 presidential election. Sensitivity around religion interest can be attributed to the complexity in the process in governance. This view can be buttressed by the antecedent of the two major religion divides. Evidence from the activities of CAN, MURIC and others is recent. Politicians no longer consider the sacredness of churches and mosque but for political campaign. Nigeria constitution and government structure have over-emphasized the role of religion. The trend is tilting towards a dangerous part of political divides or polarization along religion line. No evidence from the constitution to affirm the religion obligation of the government, but religion affiliation is usually linked to notable political appointments and opportunity to take up leadership position. The work investigated evidence and challenges from the increasing use of religion and ethnic yardstick for choosing political leaders. The research used secondary data, such as books, journals, and other existing literature relevant to the study.

Keywords: Ethnic affiliation, Religion Sentiment, CAN, MURIC, Political Campaign

Introduction

In an ideal political setting, leadership assumptions must be product of democratic outcome, without prior religion or ethnic interest. Leaders must come from the generality of the people and grow with the people to understand their peculiarity and aspiration. Leaders are expected to make good use of multiethnic population strength to promote socioeconomic growth, stability, and security. He must not be such that will use religion and ethnic affiliation to polarize the people. Ethnic affiliation and religion interest is an increasing trend and unimaginable factor in the political sphere of Nigeria. It is fast becoming unavoidable within the political parties and appointment placement. It is used to mobilize support by politicians. The development is not only popular, but complex to manage for the politicians and administrators. The new wave is challenging and making the possibility of using merit to fix political appointment difficult., Brandon 2016 emphasized that Religion activism and activists have played a crucial role in the country's

50-year struggle to craft a stable democratic system, and with more than 90% of its citizens (Muslim and Christian alike) identifying their religion as “very important” to their personal and public lives, religions belief is central to politics across the country. Ethno-religion alignment is a much stronger indicator in political appointment. Often time less consideration for professional background and experience.

The Nigeria political experience over the years has been tilted towards ethnic affiliation or religion sentiment. It has brought some limitations and sometimes resulted in the best candidate not being elected to positions. The recent practice is that politicians or political office seekers sometimes position themselves from ethno religion angle to pursue their political ambition. Such that politicians craftily use religion and ethnic affiliation to mobilize for votes by visiting churches, mosques, seeking chieftaincy titles across regions and participating in traditional events with ulterior political motives.

Nigeria’s existing institutions too often turn their aspiration into zero-sum conflicts, in which recognition for the demands of Muslim communities inevitably mean limiting those of Christians (and vice versa). The principle of federal character was originally designed to guarantee merit and equitable representation of Nigerians from all state. The principle has not only been jettisoned but manipulated to reflect ethnic and religion interest by politicians. Emerging candidates are no longer the best and fair representatives of geopolitical zones or states. According to Momoh, 2016 The government changed its policy of non-interference into religion matters by sponsoring and regulating the number of people performing Islamic and Christian rites of pilgrimage within and outside Nigeria. This check on religious freedom comes from trying to have political control of the citizens by using religion as a weapon. In the southern parts of Nigeria, the situation changed the way that families and government think. The religion groups thereafter created institutions to control religion affairs.

Poor governance, ineptitude of the past and challenges of the present may be the reason why many concerns about the Nigeria state are shared by representatives of ethno-religion alignment to secure an assurance of inclusion.

The negative development can be observed prior and during military era, where some military officers were retired to give way to ethno-religion interest in the leadership arrangement. Such decisions often lead to disharmony, underground, insincerity in the fight against insurgence, agitation, and instability in governance.

The goal of the study is to investigate evidence and challenges from the increasing use of religion and ethnic yardstick for choosing political leaders. The present study tends to identify if the level of ethno-religious affects the choice of Nigeria leaders. The study exposes the prevailing circumstances, challenges, and adverse effect of the present concern in Nigeria politics. Following the introduction section, the remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides disposition of Nigerians to ethnicity vis-à-vis politics. Section 3 gives the antecedent and the infiltration of religion into politics. Section 4 showcases the leadership arrangement and successors according to ethno- religion affiliation. Section 5 presents the geo-political presidential result of 2019. The concluding remark was given in section 6.

Disposition of Nigerians to ethnicity vis-à-vis politics

Ethnicity constitutes the foundation of society. It provides security for the group, as well as individuals within the group. It provides the group with a common ancestral and

historical antecedent. Language is a major means they used to share ideas. They use language to interpret ideas, skills values, and cultural beliefs. Therefore, it sometimes determines or influence the voting pattern or direction, essentially to support their kinsmen politically. It is used to mobilize and campaign when elections are to take place.

Ethnicity in Nigeria is a factor militating against the evolution of a true democracy and good governance. In Nigeria ethnic affiliation has become a veritable platform where individuals and various groups mobilize primarily to actualize personal and socio-economic goals through politics. Whereas politics is about the control and exercise of power through meritorious democracy, without underline interest. It can be as well viewed as who gets what, when and how, but not at the expense of merit and attachment to ethnic interest. Ogugua & Ogugua (2015).

Ethno-religion cleavage can be ascribed to unevenness and lopsidedness of relation to the state, which translate to mistrust and resultant fear to extinction, that bring about retaliatory practices and unhealthy agitation among Nigerians. The leadership pattern in Nigeria lacks the necessary focus for national integration, development, and political stability. These can be attributed to poor party politics bedeviled with religion sentiment and ethnicization. Politicization and ethnic manipulation are a problem (Adetiba & Ralim 2012). Poor governance, ineptitude of the past and the challenges of the present may suggest the concern of the various ethnic groups, and why the Nigeria state are shared by ethno- religion alignment to secure an assurance of inclusion.

Most Nigerians are deeply rooted in ethnic affiliation and have very strong emotional attachment to history and culture, which is the bases for ethnic attachment. An average Nigerian think of self before others. Often times when he thinks of others, it is underlined, as the thought may be about members of both the nuclear and extended families, or people from his native village or town to the level of the ethnic group.

Iyanya (2018) affirms that multiethnic states are often prone to political conflict and unhealthy competitive relationship as different communities' struggle to control political power and other economic resources of the state, which in turn constitute an impediment to political and socio-economic development.

The Nigerian indigenous elites including the military and politicians, are not free of blame in the nurturing of ethnic nationalism. They have been accused of using ethnic sentiments to mobilize support in their personal struggles for political and economic gains. They have been able to use this because of the general low level of enlightenment in the country. Literacy level and political awareness is still very low, coupled with poverty, that those who cannot easily fall to the manipulations of the elite are very few.

Aluko, 2003 emphasized that in the theoretical model of patriotism, the allegiance and loyalty of a typical Nigerian towards the Nigerian state are sometimes alien or underpinning with certain interest. A typical Nigerian think of self before others. And when he or she thinks of others, the thought is about members of both the nuclear and extended families. A Nigeria is more likely to think of people from his or her native town or village and then to the level of the ethnic group.

The antecedent and the infiltration of religion into politics

Most Nigerians are deeply or very religious and have very strong emotional attachment to one religion or the other. The history of religion in the political affair of Nigeria can be traced to when either of the two major religions started going to the extreme of giving

favour, condemned the others faith and never consider professionalism in placement of appointments. It is of note that members of each religion attempt to influence public policy in favour of their religion, and religions faithful attracts contract from their religions brothers in power. Such development tends to explain the inextricable link between politics and religion in Nigeria. Religion has largely been used to fan narrow objectives in political circles. According to Oguntola –Leguda (2008) study of the Nigeria experience of the relationship between religion and politics conclude that religion and politics interact effectively. It stated that religion had been used as a tool for political jogging and manipulation of the oppressed. In other words, the complexity of politics is sometimes attributed to religion interest.

The unevenness of relations to the state contributes to mistrust among the religious groups, and the resultant fears of exclusion contribute to retaliatory practices and unhealthy agitation. Such that many public office seekers have largely exploited religion to realize their political ambition. Davidson (2011) argues along the line of the utility of the relationship between politics and religion in Nigeria. He opined, no positive outcome would come from the mix of politics and religion, either by way of economic growth, improved standard of living, reduction in unemployment, improved infrastructure and security of lives and assets. Rather than using religion to improve governance at least in terms of moral sanctity, it has become an albatross on politics. Eso (2003) posited that mixing politics and religion has posed a grave danger in Nigeria. In a broad view, religion in Nigeria is used for the penetration of violence, fueling ethnic consciousness and solidarity, acquisition of power and socio-economic gains. Conflicts over religious participation are often tied up with dispute over access to state resources and leadership. Such opportunities are mostly used to benefit brethren through appointment and contract awards. Garba (2002) observed that the inability to maintain the principles of a secular nation and separate the state from religion had added another dimension to existing national tension in governance.

In the 2003 generally elections, it was alleged that Major Gen Mohammed Buhari of the All- Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) admonished Muslims not to vote for Christian candidates (Familusi, 2012). This brought about heavy critics and may have accounted for a choice of a Christian pastor as a running mate in the 2011 elections to “steal” the hearts of Christian voters. Goodluck Jonathan of PDP did something similar by attending the frontline church programs and fraternizing with influential Pentecostal pastors who admonished their members to support him as a Christian candidate. Some pastors conspicuously campaigned for him. The “men of God” who allowed themselves to be used by unscrupulous politicians to fan religions interest to divide Nigeria to achieve political goal.

The fear of marginalization by adherent of various religions is worrisome and creates instability and insecurity. Such that statistics of political appointee and political offices are considered and evaluated to protect religion interest. Religious consideration in voting has been a disturbing factor in Nigeria electoral politics, Oboh (2007) submit that religion and ethnicity influenced the voting pattern in the 2015 general election in Nigeria. Writing on religion and election in Nigeria from historical perspective, Adamo (2018) observed that strong evidence exists of the serious aggressive influence of religion on Nigeria elections. In 2015 politicians brought up recognition and sympathy for religion. Jonathan of PDP, from southern majority, the incumbent President ran from various churches to the other

seeking support. While Mohammed Buhari of APC from the North was advised within his party to choose Professor Yemi Osinbajo, a pastor of Redeemed Christian church and a Christian southerner to balance religion interest. The interest in such arrangement is often not based on merit or professionalism, but the essentiality of religion to checkmates the opponent.

In 2019, religion was used to manipulate elections indirectly, as politicians use clerics to woo voters to seek support, while clerics also woo their congregation to support certain political party for political fortune and relevance, and the policies of government that might not favour their establishment. Many perceived that the religions clerics will maintain neutrality, but it was not so. Manipulation is a political game in which politicians use religion affiliation or strategy to hit at their goals, and not necessarily to serve the interest at the people.

The interruption of democratic rule in 1966 remains a reference point. It was viewed from ethno-religion perspective. It led to the death of many military and political office holder from southwest and Northern extraction. Most of who are Hausa and Yoruba military men and politician. It has ever since brought ethno-religion suspicion, unnecessary agitation, coup, and counter coup over the years. In the military, hierarchy is no longer recognized, some officers are sometimes retired unduly to give way to ethno-religion interest in leadership arrangement. Such decision further resulted in disharmony, underground agitation and consequential coup-de-etat.

The recognition of the strength of religion on politics has produced a culture of joint ticketing of Muslim/ Christian or Christian /Muslim over the years. The development can be traced to both military and civilian regimes at the federal level of governance. The state is not left out in the ethno- religion sentiment. By implication, according to Suberu, 2009, the practice of balancing the number of Muslim and Christian office holders, has contributed to a tacit understanding that government will ensure Muslim Christian parity in federal constitution. Unfortunately, the arrangement is not constitutional.

Leadership arrangement and successors according to ethno-religion affiliation

This section discussed the assessment of some Nigerian leadership. The table below highlighted majorly and perpetual pairing of the Northern Muslim with a Southern Christian. It showed the marginalization of the Southern Muslim and the Northern Christians, who have been deprived of leadership position. These groups are well educated and politically conscious in their regions. The table also gives credence to ethno-religion consideration, though not constitutional but determines leadership appointment and successor.

Table 1 List of Nigerian presidents and vice presidents from 1966 till date

President/Head of State	Vice President
Aguiyi Ironsi (Christian Southerners)	Babafemi Ogundipe (Christian Southerners)
Yakubu Gowon (Christian Northerners)	Joseph Edet A. Wey (Christian Southerners)
Muritala Mohammed (Muslim Northerners)	Olusegun Obasanjo (Christian Southerners)
Olusegun Obasanjo (Christian Southerners)	Shehu Musa Yar'dua (Muslim Northerners)
Shehu Shagari (Muslim Northerners)	Alex Ekwueme (Christian Southerners)
Muhammadu Buhari (Muslim Northerners)	Tunde Idiagbon (Muslim Southerners)

Ibrahim Babangida (Muslim Northerners)	Ebitu Ukiwe(Christian Southerners)
Ibrahim Babangida (Muslim Northerners)	Augustu Aikhomu (Christian Southerners)
Sani Abacha (Muslim Northerners)	Oladipo Diya (Christian Southerners)
Abdusalam Abubakar (Muslim Northerners)	Mike Akhigbe(Christian Southerners)
Olusegun Obasanjo (Christian Southerners)	Atiku Abubakar (Muslim Northerners)
Umaru/Musa Yar'Adua (Muslim Northerners)	Goodluck Jonathan (Christian Southerners)
Goodluck Jonathan (Christian Southerners)	Alh. M. Namadi Sambo (Muslim Northerners)
Muhammadu Buhari (Muslim Northerners)	Yemi Osinbajo (Christian Southerners)
Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Muslim Southerners)	Kashim Shettima(Muslim Northerners)

The Build-up and the 2023 Presidential Election Permutation by APC

Political parties play an important role in the democratic process. They formulate political and policy agenda, select candidates, conduct election campaigns, and monitor the work of their elected representatives. According to Abibu (2002), political parties constitute the heart of the democratic process. Therefore, it will be difficult to imagine any modern democracy without political parties. Political parties are expected to recruit competent individuals for political leadership through periodic elections, educating the electorates through political rallies and campaign, dissemination of information about government policies agenda and forming a progressive opposition against the ruling government. Unlike, the primary roles of political parties, Nigeria politics and political parties have presented an image of struggle among various ethno-religion groups for the sharing of national resources. Nnoli (1980).

Over the years, ethno-religion interest has dictated the political parties' structure and selections of candidates flying the "kite" of the various political parties. The trend has produced unofficial tradition of joint ticketing of Muslim /Christian or Christian/Muslim of the political parties at the presidential and some governorship elections in Nigeria. The political interest of the religion groups started coming to play immediately the various political parties started preparatory for primaries to choose their flag bearers.

On June 11, 2022, CAN caution the leading political parties in the country against flying Christian/Christian or Muslim/Muslim Presidential ticket in the 2023 election. CAN insisted that a balance of both religions should be considered in the choice of running mates of the candidates. The Northern Christian Elder Forum (NOSCEF) advised political parties to consider Nigerians ethnic and religious diversity when choosing the running mates of their Presidential candidates. In the same vein, the Southwest Muslims has always emphasized many years of marginalization of the Muslims in the political and scheme of things in the Nigeria project. MURIC in its apostle to protect the interest Muslims identified that Southwest Muslims were deliberately denied participation in the pre-National conference sittings. According to MURIC, "It was not an accident that Friday was picked on both occasions while the time for starting the sittings was 1:30pm". There is no single Nigerian who does not know that Friday is the days of worship for Muslims and that the time for Jummah prayer is 12:30-2:30pm".

The fear of political exclusion made the RCCG, a major Christian denomination to set up the Directorate of Politics and Governance. It was obviously criticized and associated with the effort to promote the interest of one the flag bearer, who is a pastor in their domination.

It was classified as an “invitation to Armageddon” by one of the fellow presidential candidates who happens to be a member of same denomination.

The Islamic jihadist are not relating, having realized the major weapon is the press to expose the limitations of the past years. MURIC come out with a rejoinder that when Obasanjo and Jonathan were presidents. All the Ministers from Southwest were Christian”. The group further emphasized that the policy of total exclusion for Muslims in states with most Muslims was in violation of the principles of participatory democracy, heartless political exclusion, and the pinnacle of religion apartheid in the nation. Pronouncements like these sent religion signal and consciousness in the people to be wary of government decision without adequate consideration for merit and professionalism.

In the same religion agenda, the socio-economic interest of the nation was never considered. CAN specifically noted that Tinubu administration must make use of faith leaders to seek genuine peace that would be all inclusive. The rejoinder was at a meeting to address the hostile Christian environment because of the atrocities of Boko Harran and other evil groups. The church was part of the process and campaign as CAN president congratulates and warmed the parties flag bearers not to fly a Muslim-Muslim ticket. He said “It will not fly. It will not stand. Rather, it would set the nation against each other”. The candidate who will emerge is the one who works with the church. Please, do not alienate the church.

The 2023 presidential election took on a different dimension. The ruling party, presidential candidate, Bola Ahamed Tinubu broke the unwritten tradition of pairing candidates along religion affiliation. He chooses a fellow Muslim from Kanuri ethnic group of Borno State as running mater.

He emphasized that the objective is to win elections, but not to take any religion for granted, or to slight any ethnic group. He assured of competence in his choice of running mate. He based his choice on the study of voting patterns, voters’ population of the geopolitical zones and available voting statistics of previous presidential elections.

Geo-Political Breakdown of the 2019 Presidential Election Result

This section presents the result from the 2019 Electoral process for the two most popular political parties in the country, APC and PDP only. The break down is how the two main political parties fared in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

Geo-Political	Political Party	Figure	Percentage
North-West (7 states)	APC	5,995,651	72.45%
	PDP	2,280,465	27.55%
	Total	8,276,116	
North-East	APC	3,238,783	74.36%
	PDP	1,116,873	25.64%
	Total	4,355,656	
North-Central (6 states + FCT)	APC	2,465,599	54.92%
	PDP	2,023,769	45.08%
	Total	4,489,368	
South-West (6 states)	APC	2,036,450	53.41%
	PDP	1,776,670	46.59%
	Total	3,813,120	

South – East (5 states)	APC	403,968	19.26%
	PDP	1,693,485	80.74%
	Total	2,097,453	
South-south (6 states)	APC	1,051,396	32.01%
	PDP	2,233,232	67.99%
	Total	3,284,628	

Source: Naira land

The outcome of the 2019 presidential election was proof to identify the strong hold, the average performance and the weak point of the two major political parties. It is also a useful tool for analysis and forecast for the 2023 presidential election. The facts in figures can also be used to strategies for and against along party line and the objective of winning an election.

Discussion from the result

His decision was taken as an aberration and violation of traditional trend in political arrangement. The development caused a stir and displeasure in religion and ethnic circles. The Christian leadership, especially the Pentecostal churches see it as unfair and a denial of ethno-religion interest in governance. A stiff campaign was mounted against the candidacy of APC Presidential flagbearer. Some of his party members decamped to another political party because of Tinubu decision. In the southern geopolitical zone where he came from, some decided not work for him because of his religion and ethnic alignment. He eventually won the election.

The evidence from the 2023 presidential election, was that politics is indeed a science that can be studied empirically. It is a game of numbers and strategy. Therefore, it involves knowing your strength and challenges, vis-à-vis- your opponent. It is not always your religion inclination or ethnic affiliation.

Concluding remark

The use of religion and ethnic affiliations as preference for political appointment and candidacy is a dangerous path that can never be exhausted, and the challenges associated with it are unending agitations that sometimes heat the polity. Bearing in mind, the over 50 ethnic groups and multi-religion nature of Nigeria, some ethno-religious groups will always feel disenchanting and accuses government and leaders of marginalization, because leadership might have eluded them for longer period than anticipated. The backlash is poor and bad attitude towards national development when their commodities or geo-political zone are needed for a common national objective.

When governance or government appointment are laced with ethno-religion interest, the disposition or allegiance of candidates may not be for national development, but for common ties or religious interest they represent. Such a mindset may not be consonant with national or government objectives. Evidence abounds where projects of national importance by past government are abandoned, and new ones initiated and embarked upon to satisfy the yearning of narrow interests. Nigerian governmental responsibilities and jobs must not only be based on quota, merits, and professionalism, it must exercise deep religion interest at its best.

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