

Religion and Politics in the Context of National Development

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjpsa.2013/vol11n37889>

Published: September 26 2023

Citation: Dada O.M. (2023) Religion and Politics in the Context of National Development, *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, Vol.11, No.3, pp.78-89

ABSTRACT: *The quest of every nation in the world upon attaining the status of a state is to attain sustainable national development aimed at improving the socio-economic well-being of its citizenry. National development is a multi-faceted transformation of every sector of a nation vis-a-vis economy, politics, religion, science and technology, and medicine among others. This will improve citizens' standard of living, reduce the mortality rate and improve the life expectancy rate. This national development goal can only become a reality through the interplay between the various systems that make up a nation. One of the major systems within a nation that can determine its development is religion and politics. Religion and politics are inseparable in a religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria. Religious influence on politics is very glaring. Religious politics can be a catalyst for national development if its positive side can be explored. The aim of this paper is therefore to highlight the role that religious politics can play in national development. Descriptive and analytical research method has been adopted based on library and internet materials within the theoretical framework of Aristotle's political theory of constitution which underscores the fact that everything government does must be for the good of the populace. This correlates with the religious ethical value of doing good to all. The paper finds out that religion and politics are inseparable and if positively explored can help in national development. It is recommended that religious ethical values should be the guiding principles in our political landscape which is essential for national development.*

KEY WORDS: religion, politics, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

After a long period of postwar neglect by mainstream scholars, religion assumed a new prominence in political science during the late 1970s. National development is an economic index that determines the general well-being of the citizens of a country. It measures the standard of living of the citizens. It is a parameter that differentiates between a developed country and an undeveloped country. National development cuts across every facet of the nation's life. Oladejo highlights the key elements of national development which are economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and social sustainability.

The goal of every nation as far as sustainable development is concerned is to ensure that citizens of the country can live comfortable lives and maintain the available infrastructures and resources to meet the needs of today without compromising the infrastructural and social needs of tomorrow's generation. Hence, there are social institutions that are put in place, by and large, to ensure that this development goal is not only achievable but also sustainable. Religious politics as a social institution plays a major role in ensuring national development. Every nation of the world that harnesses religious politics positively has experienced monumental national development. Of course, religion can be used to play politics by people which will adversely affect national development. This has been the experience of Third World Countries like Nigeria. Religion and politics are inseparable in a religiously pluralistic nation like Nigeria. Scholars have always argued that religious politics is a determinant factor in national development. The fact remains that any nation that fails to understand the technicality and interdependence of these two, (religion and politics), such a nation will be far from development. The purpose of this study is to understand the current relationship between religion and politics with respect to national development and of course specifically the relationship between them in terms of power. Does separating religion and political ideology from each other (though may be seen as similar) mean that the latter has power over the former?

Statement of the Problem

It is worrisome to discover that despite the fact that Nigeria gained independence from the British government on Oct.1st, 1960, she is still crawling as far as national development is concerned. Several systems of government have been practised ranging from military regime, parliamentary system of government and presidential system of government. Nigeria is yet to be among the world superpowers that control the global economic landscape.

Abdullahi, in his own view, describes corruption as one of the greatest obstacles to national development. The writers of this paper align with Abdullahi's view which of course is incontestable looking at the issue of billions of naira stashed in foreign accounts by past leaders and various anti-graft agencies put in place to nip this hydra-headed monster in the bud. Hence, religion which teaches ethical values of honesty, transparency, accountability, probity, equity, and sacrifice among others can help stem the tide of corruption and good governance can help engineer national development. Previous studies have suggested solutions to national development from human, sociocultural, economic and environmental perspectives with little or nothing from religious and political perspectives. This is the lacuna in scholarship that this paper seeks to fill.

Purpose of the Study

This paper seeks to highlight:

- i. The role that religious politics play in national development.
- ii. Separately consider the impacts of religion and the impacts of politics on national development
- iii. Synthesise the role of religious politics in national development.

Significance of the Study

This study is primarily of significance in three dimensions:

Academic Significance: It will contribute largely to the existing body of knowledge in the field of religion and politics and will doubtlessly serve as a good literature for further research in this field.

Political Significance: It will help the government to pay attention to the issue of religion more than before and explore its potential to stimulate national development rather than the usual religious sentiments that have been plaguing Nigeria as a nation. It will help the government to stop playing politics of calumny, character assassination and mudslinging and to desist from ethnic bigotry and corruption which are cogs in the wheel of national development.

Social Significance: It is believed that this study will also be of social significance as it will help religious leaders to think of how to use their privileges in promoting peace and unity which is a *sine qua non* to nation building.

Scope of the Study

This research work only looks at the role of religious politics in national development. Scholarly arguments and counter-arguments on religion, politics and nation-building are not within the scope of this paper. The work on the subject matter is not exhaustive. There is still room for further studies on it.

RESEARCH METHODS

Data was gathered basically for the study using the archival method of data collection. Descriptive and analytical methods of research were then adopted based on information gathered from library and internet materials.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Constitution

The paper is foregrounded on Aristotle's political theory of Constitution which stipulates that a country should adopt a Constitution that will promote the good of the people. Pursuing the good of every citizen is one of the ethical values which religion promotes. Aristotle a famous Greek philosopher, logician, and scientist in this theory argued that "the politician and lawgiver is wholly occupied with the city-state, and the constitution is a certain way of organizing those who inhabit the city-state"

Conceptual Review

Religion

We stick to the functionalist definition provided by the French Social Philosopher, Emile Durkheim which states that Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to

sacred things, that is, things set apart or forbidden-the beliefs and practices which unite into a moral community called Church, all those who adhere to it.

Politics

Politics by definition implies a set of activities concerned with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations among persons, most especially relating to the equitable distribution of resources. It is the methodology and activities associated with running a government, an organisation, or a movement. The task of politics is a duty performed by politicians just as the field of medicine is of significant concern to medical personnel. One of the critical responsibilities of politicians is to give the law by framing the appropriate constitution for the state and system of morals which guide the behaviour of the citizenry.

Constitution

The constitution is a body of fundamental principles with which a state is acknowledged and governed. No state can function accurately without a substantial constitution. In fact, it is the totality of the basic principles or grounded precedents which constitute the legal basis of any nation and determine how such nation is to be governed. Once the constitution is in place, the politician needs to take the appropriate measures to maintain it, introduce reforms as and when necessary, and prevent developments which might subvert the political system.

National Development: This implies the improvement in the well-being and living standard of citizens of a particular country. This is usually determined by the availability of basic amenities and equal access to the nation's resources

Democracy

According to David Owen, democracy is a form of government that appeals to the idea of popular sovereignty. Simply put, it is a system of government that upholds the rule of law and its supremacy overall and sundry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

National development cannot take place in a vacuum. There are several factors responsible for national development in any country. Some of the factors identified by scholars include human, socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors. The literature review shall be thematised along these factors.

Human Factor: Human capital resources are essential elements of the national development of any country. How a country utilises its human resources will determine the result it gets for national development. The importance of human resources cannot be overemphasised. Motivation of workers through financial incentives plays a major factor in how they will put all their physical, emotional and mental strengths into productive activities.

Socio-cultural Factor: There are socio-cultural dimensions to national development. For instance, women are not allowed to perform certain jobs in some societies. This will limit the

national development of such a society. This may be on the grounds of discrimination and population. Women are expected to stay at home to do house chores and some of them are denied access to quality education on the belief that they will end up in a man's house.

Economic Factor: There is no nation that can develop beyond the management of its economic resources. The level of production, distribution, commerce as well as foreign earnings and reserves affect economic growth. The economic growth of a nation is determined by an increase in income level, an increase in the total capital, expansion in the labour force and a higher volume of trade and consumption.

Environmental Factor: Environmental factors such as climate-related diseases, lack of natural resources, being landlocked with bad neighbours and climatic hazards-flooding, hurricanes etc. negatively affect national development. All human life depends on the health and resilience of the natural environment which in turn plays a major role in national development. Katsoulakos *et al* identify other environmental factors that impact national development. They include air, water and soil pollution, the desertification of large areas and the gradual effect of greenhouse. They note that the environment is a source of raw materials and a space for waste accumulation and storage.

From the above review of related materials, it can be concluded that national development is multidimensional in nature. All the factors that can impact on national development must be harnessed for a holistic effect. However, religious politics has been undermined as a major force for national development. This is the gap in scholarship this work sets to fill.

The Concept of National Development

The strength of each nation is measured alongside its national development hence the nations of the world are classified under three categories: under-developed, developing and developed. In fact, there is a correlation between the economic performance of a nation and its development. Hence, "economic development is a major index of determining national development of any nation. Economic development is the process whereby the level of national production, national income or per capita income increases over a period of time." The three main aims of development are life sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. Life sustenance is concerned with the provision of basic needs. Development is supposed to raise people out of primary poverty and to provide basic needs simultaneously.

"Development is a process by which a continuous increase in a system's efficiency produces the condition which results in general upliftment". Development can be either qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative development has to do with the emotional and psychological well-being of the people. This is made possible through the provision of adequate security, peace of mind, healthcare, a conducive environment, quality education etc. Quantitative development is measured by the physical or material advancement of a nation. This includes the provision of infrastructural amenities such as good roads, pipe-borne water, bridges, electricity, schools etc. A physically developed nation has functional industries providing secured jobs for the teeming population. The majority of youth are gainfully employed. It encourages small, medium and

large-scale business enterprises providing an enabling economic environment through people-friendly government policy. All major institutions are functioning very well thereby attracting foreign investors who pump their capital into the economy with the hope of having high returns. There is no nation that can develop in a vacuum. National development is made possible through adequate interaction of all the institutions and sub-systems in the society. Religion and politics are vital players or in other words stakeholders in national development. They can both either engender or endanger national development.

The Impacts of Religion on National Development

Religion has been a powerful and pervasive phenomenon in human society. Religion is a powerful cultural phenomenon that permeates and pervades the fabric of man and his society. The influence of religion is ubiquitous cutting across man's social, political, educational, economic, family and ideological components. "Religion is a cultural phenomenon which reflects man's attempts to come to terms with his environment particularly as it concerns those aspects of it which he does not understand such as death, pain and suffering"

Religion has played a major role in national development. Afolabi's position on this is very instructive:

Religion has been a catalyst for national development. It has affected and still affects all the social institutions in any society. For instance, religion affects politics and is in interaction with it. Religion determines who is voted into office and the public office holders who formulate and implement policies influence national development. Therefore, in achieving good governance and political stability, religion should serve as a guiding factor in all political activities that the country engages in.

The impact of religion on politics can enhance sustainable development. In Nigeria, voting for public officers is done based on the religious inclination of the person.

Religion is an economic institution that owns properties and is an employer of labour. Religion, apart from having an influence on politics has played a major role in national development in the following areas:

- **Provision of Quality Education:** Early Christian missionaries were pioneers in the establishment of schools in Nigeria. They established Primary and Secondary schools which necessitated the establishment of higher institutions. One of the challenges for students gaining admission to higher institutions in Nigeria is inadequate infrastructural facilities. This gap is being bridged through the establishment of private universities by religious groups. Of course, no nation can develop beyond the manpower available to her which quality education provides. There is no gainsaying the fact that education enhances the human capital development of a nation which later translates to national development.
- **Religious Tourism:** Visitors from other countries visit Nigeria in search of spiritual solutions to their problems. Foreigners attend the special programmes of their denomination at her Headquarters in Nigeria. These people lodge in hotels; and buy food and other needed materials at the venue boosting the economic

development of such places. Osun Oshogbo Festival attracts visitors from all over the world. Foreigners troop in to attend the programme at The Synagogue Church of All Nations in Ikotun, Lagos State. Christian denominations such as The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Winners Chapel and a host of others pull crowds from foreign countries during their annual convention which adds economic value to the country. The same thing goes for Muslims. NASFAT, Ansar-Ud-Deen and other Islamic sects gather together in a place where people sell different products thereby boosting the economy.

➤ **Employment Opportunity:** Religion is an employer of labour. Religion provides jobs to clerics such as Pastors, Imams, Priests etc. who in turn plough back their income into the economy.

➤ **Provision of Healthcare Services:** Adequate healthcare delivery is one of the qualitative measures of national development. Religious groups have provided medical facilities like Bowen Teaching Hospital of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The outbreak of an epidemic can hamper national development. Religion has helped to contribute to national development in healthcare delivery.

➤ **Provision of Welfare Package during National Disaster:** Religious groups have provided welfare packages such as cash, foodstuff, bedding etc. to people displaced by religious crises like Boko Haram victims in the North, and people affected by flood or fire outbreaks. This measure contributes to national development.

The discovery of Max Weber, a German Social Philosopher about the functionality of religion lends credence to the impact of religion on national development. In his work, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber discovered that certain Protestant work ethics such as diligence, frugality, honesty, hard work, faithfulness, dedication etc. been a catalyst to the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Hence, religion provides a moral compass enshrined in their religious sacred texts which if adhered to can help develop any nation. Familusi submits that “religion as an agent of social transformation helps to keep people within the norm of the society which is the real basis of politics”. So, religion provides a moral basis or ethical values that can support national development.

Having considered the positive role of religion as an agent of national transformation and development, there is a need for us to underscore the fact that religious crises have been affecting national development in one way or the other. “Religious crises in Nigeria can be understood as a monster that has threatened national survival in all ramifications”. The effect of religious crises on national development can be better appreciated from the submission of Familusi thus:

It should be noted that security challenges in northern Nigeria have cost the economy of the country #1.3 trillion (The Sun Newspaper 2016: 22). Resources which normally could have been used to improve existing projects and start other ones are being diverted to restructure and replace what has been destroyed by the insurgency. Since no investor would want to invest his capital in an atmosphere of insecurity, it is, therefore, suffice to say that the menacing activities of Boko Haram are a bane to economic development. Education is worst hit by the Boko Haram insurgency in

northern Nigeria. Apart from the fact that the agitation of the sect is that Western education is forbidden and un-Islamic, formal education has remained the bedrock of human and capital developments in Nigeria.

In spite of the negative effect of religion on national development in the area of crises, religion has engendered national development in all ramifications. “There is ample evidence that religious practices have a positive to economic growth and orderly development of some societies. In Nigerian, the multi-religious practices have played more positive roles in growth and development than the negative consequences of some of the religious practices”.

The Impacts of Politics on National Development

While religion has an indirect impact on national development, politics has a direct impact on national development. In fact, politics which is an act of governing a state, has a major role to play in the national development of a nation. The origin of politics in human history is traceable to Greece which bequeathed the world with democracy. Politics from the Greek word ‘*Polis*’ meaning ‘city’ is the management of the affairs of the city. “Politics is the intelligent regulation of life in the city, the rational management of human relationality”. Therefore, how politics is played in a nation will determine the rate of its national development.

The main objective of politics is to provide a government that will promote good governance. The masses in most cases are not interested in the personality, party affiliation and religious or ethnic background of the person who governs. They are only interested in a government that will formulate and implement policies that will make life better for them. This is substantiated by Adesina and Adefolaju, “political leaders are ordinarily expected to lead by example and ensure that rules and regulations are adhered to. They are also expected to formulate policies that would enhance the well-being of the Nigerian citizenry”. Political leaders determine the rate of national development in any country. “The gaps in development in Nigeria are a function of leadership”.

According to the Aristotelian political theory adopted earlier in this paper, politics should not be an avenue for personal selfish enrichment but for promoting the well-being of the citizenry. Aristotle posits that man is a political animal. To him, politics should pursue the good of the citizens. “The moral quest for the good turns out to be a political quest because the quest for the good life is a quest for the best way to live together”.

The impacts of politics on national development cannot be over-emphasised. Political leaders filed a candidate that would govern different aspects of the nation. Their pedigree will determine their performance which will in turn affect the national development. Political leaders appoint technocrats who work with them and take directives from them. It is believed that technocrats make better leaders than politicians. More often than none, these people are appointed based on party affiliation rather than on merit. Political leaders formulate and implement policies that would have a socio-economic impact on the masses. Budget preparation and budget implementation are all within the purview of our leaders which will

affect the economy. They control and drive the economy for the good of the citizens. The essential goal of politics is winning and using power for the advancement of society.

However, “bad governance in Nigeria has impoverished the masses and hence creating an avenue for easy formation of criminal groups who are searching for means of livelihood”.

The Impacts of Religious Politics on National Development

Religion has played a major role as a social phenomenon in influencing politics in a religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria. The influence of religion on politics is very obvious. Hence. Religion and politics in a religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria are two Siamese twins that cannot be separated. Religion and politics are intertwined and inseparable because man is incurably religious and takes his religion to bear on whatever he does including politics. “In the area of politics...religion has been a strong determining factor in aspects such as style of governance, policy formulation and the electoral process in Nigeria, especially the post-independence milieu.”

According to Familusi, religion manifests itself in Nigerian politics in many ways. The public gathering prayers are said based on religious quota between the two prominent religions in Nigeria namely Christianity and Islam. Public holidays are declared during Christian and Muslim festival periods. Religious practitioners display their interest in politics by praying for politicians of their choice to win an election. The government established the Pilgrim Welfare Board where public funds are used to sponsor pilgrims to either Jerusalem or Mecca as the case may be. Religion influences the electoral process where the choice of party flagbearers is based on a Muslim/Christian ticket or Christian/Muslim ticket as President and Vice President respectively. The above grounds of religious influence on politics really show that religion cannot be separated from politics in a religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria.

At this juncture, we need to look at the influence of religious politics in the context of national development. This is necessary because if religion can influence politics so much as aforementioned, then one needs to accept the fact that its influence on sustainable development cannot be overemphasised. As noted by Familusi, “the impact of religion on politics will enhance sustainable development if, and only if, the impact is positive.” This positive impact will be noticeable when religious ethical values manifest in politics. Politicians and public functionaries must put their religious ethical values into practice which will in turn engender national development. Firstly, religion as an agent of social control will enable people to follow the norms of society which is a catalyst for development. Secondly, religion will promote a hitch-free election and thirdly it will help public functionaries to adhere to the oath of office. At the same time, looking at the other side of the coin, religious politics can serve as an impediment to sustainable development. The religious crisis has greatly affected the progress of this country. Farmers cannot go to their farms to produce crops in large quantities for commercial purposes. Public installations and infrastructural amenities have been destroyed which will make the government source for funds to restore them, the funds that could have been used for other things. The religious crisis has led to the loss of lives majority of whom could be leaders of tomorrow. Public funds used to sponsor pilgrims on political grounds could

have been used for national development. Our leaders politicise religion when they want to hide their flaws or incompetence which is a cog in the wheel of national development.

CONCLUSION

It is crystal clear that the impacts of religious politics on national development cannot be over-emphasised. How a nation is able to handle this social institution determines the extent of its national development. Religious politics can engender or endanger the development of a nation. As man is religiously inclined so is he politically. For religious politics to promote sustainable national development, public officers and politicians including religious practitioners must embrace religious ethical values such as honesty, truthfulness, transparency, love, sincerity, diligence, trustworthiness, accountability, probity, equity etc.

In order to utilise religious politics as a catalyst for sustainable national development, we recommend the following:

- Religious leaders should inculcate religious and ethical virtues in their members through sermons, doctrinal messages, teachings, seminars etc.
- Religious leaders should promote religious dialogue, harmony and tolerance since Nigeria is a religiously pluralistic society.
- Political leaders should exhibit religious virtues of compassion, servant leadership, integrity, accountability, transparency etc.^[41]
- Religious leaders should desist from hate speech or any statement that can incite religious crises.
- Political leaders should desist from corruption but promote people-friendly policies. The good of the masses should be their pursuit
- Government should desist from funding pilgrimage and divert the money to critical sectors of society for economic development.

On a final note, religious politics can be a precipitator of national development if it is well-managed for the benefit of the masses. Religion is an integral part of politics. Since every religion preaches the need to procreate what God has created through development, it becomes imperative for religious politics to be channelled for national development.

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