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Published by AFRICAN SUN MeDIA

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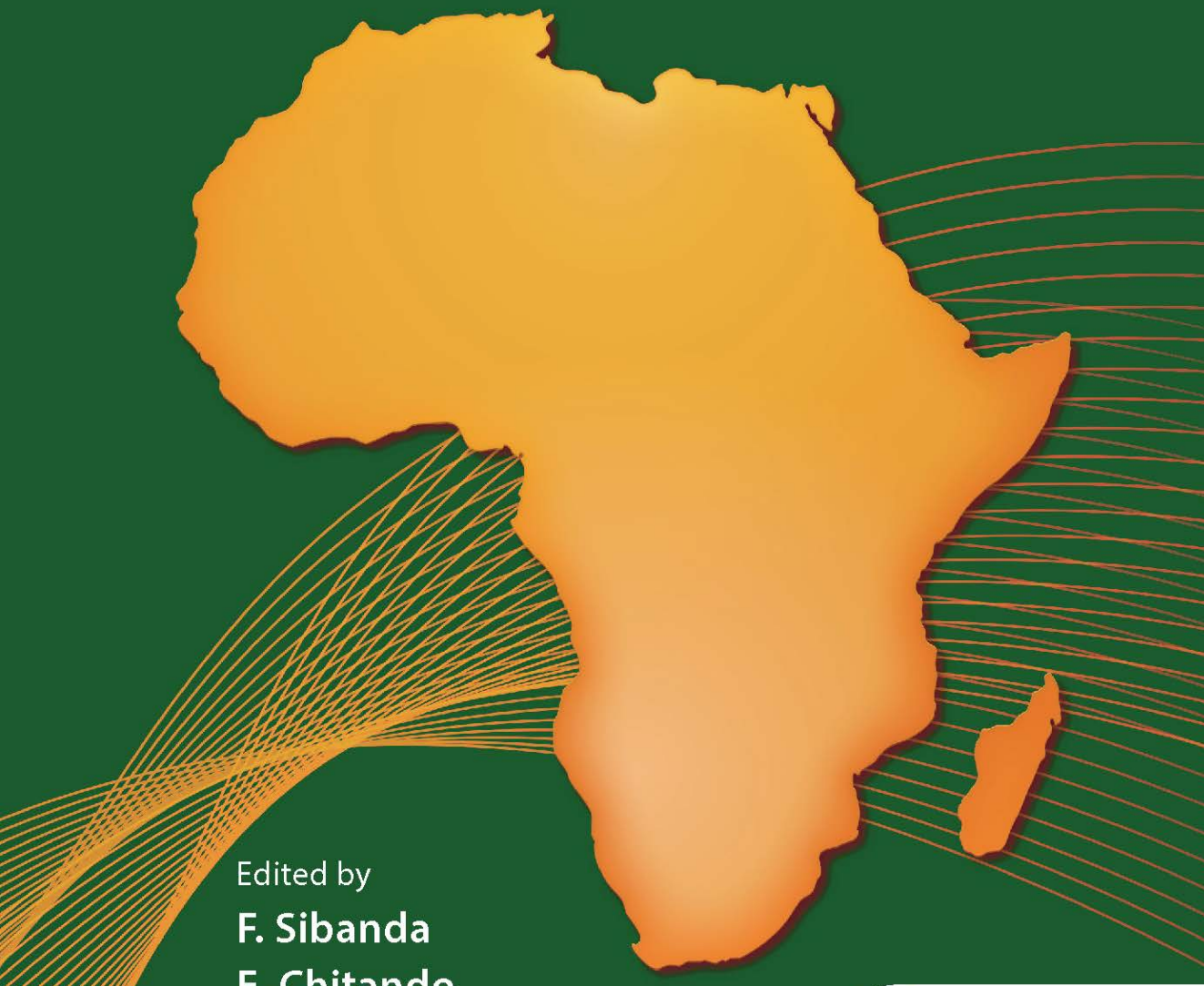

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https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

ACLARS
AFRICAN CONSORTIUM FOR LAW AND RELIGION STUDIES

14 "What has God got to do with elections!?": Dialectics and discourses of Muslims' participation in leadership and political power in contemporary Nigeria

Is-haq O. Oloyede[1]
Afis A. Oladosu[2]

> Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security. [For] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that - then those are the defiantly disobedient.[3]

INTRODUCTION

A few weeks before the 2023 general elections, a popular cleric in the city of Ibadan in southwest Nigeria, Shaykh Amubieya, while delivering a sermon on Friday, declared *ex-cathedra* that participation in the general election for the purpose of electing new leaders for the nation was unlawful.[4] According to the cleric, democracy is a man made institution that privileges human rights over the sovereignty of the Creator and His unassailable right to enact law for His creatures. In the view of Amubieya and his group, popularly known as La-Jama'ah (which translates literally to mean "no group affiliations"),[5] there can be no reconciliation between Islam and democratic practice that is rooted in the fundamental principles of agency and fiduciary duties.[6] The outright rejection or disavowal of participatory democracy therefore became, for the group and their followers in southwest Nigeria, a categorical imperative.

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3 Quran 24: 55.

4 Friday Khutbah delivered by Shaykh Sulayman Amubieya at his Central Mosque, located at Bodija Express Way, Ibadan, Oyo State, on 10 February 2023.

5 For more on La-Jama'ah, see Sanni RA. 2013. *Internal Challenges of Nigeria Muslims on Unity.* Ibadan: Shiba Prints.

6 Fadel M. 2018. "Political Legitimacy, Democracy and Islamic Law: The Place of Self-Government in Islamic Political Thought", *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 2(1-2):59–75.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

However, apart from the La-Jama'ah, there are two other groups that also considered participation in politics, either as candidates for leadership positions in the nation's public service or as ordinary voters, not permissible in Islam. These include the Makondoros[7] and the Jama'at Tabligh.[8] As for the Makondoros, participation in general elections in any capacity is antithetical to the fundamental principles of Islam based on "precedent". Precedence here is not hinged on any legal text in Islam, be it the Quran, traditions of the Prophet of Islam or juridical postures of Islamic scholars, modern or premodern. Rather, the Makondoros' view about the non-permissibility of participation in politics was based on the simple fact that their forefathers were apolitical—that is, citizens who never participated in the electoral process either as candidates for leadership positions or as voters.[9] As for the Jama'at Tabligh, the exclusive goal of human existence on earth is the pursuit of eternal salvation. This, they posit, requires the avoidance and abandonment of all earthly or mundane activities particularly participation in the democratic process. Thus, these groups, namely, La-Jama' ah, the Makondoros and the Jama'at Tabligh belong to the anti-participation spectrum within the Nigerian Muslim circles in the discourses of leadership and political power.

The second main group within traditional Muslim circles that emerged in the period leading to the 2023 Nigerian elections were those who belong to the pro-participation spectrum. Lacking any label or sectarian identity, membership of this group cuts across large sections of the Muslim populace. These were Muslims who considered participation in the elections for the purpose of electing quality leadership for the country an obligation (*wajib*). The group found support for their posture in several sources in Islamic traditions.[10] The last distinct group within the Muslim circles regarding political practice was the non-participants. These were Nigerian Muslims who became disenchanted with the electoral process and

7 For more information, see Alagunfon SA. 2023. "The Dynamics of Makondoro's Arabic-Islamic Pedagogy in Western Nigeria", *Islamic Studies,* 62(1):43-63; Aliyu SA. 2015. *Transmission of Learning in Modern Ilorin: A History of Islamic Education 1897-2012,* PhD Thesis, Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University, 127-133.

8 For more on Jama'atu al-Tabligh, see Oladimeji LF. 2012. "Jama'atut-Tabligh in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective", *AD-DIRAYAH International Journal of Islamic Studies (DIJIS), Nassarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria* 1(1):67-88; Oladimeji LF. 2016. "Analytical Review of Fada'il A'mal (The Magnum Opus of the Jama'atut-Tabligh)", in Imam YO et al (eds), *Dynamics of Revealed knowledge and Human Sciences, Essays in Honour of Professor Is-haq Oloyede.* Lagos: Spectrum Books Limited, 158-183.

9 Interview with the leaders of the group conducted by the researchers at their mosque in Agbeni, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, 7 January 2023.

10 Quran 24:54. This lays to rest the concern of those who belong to the anti-participation spectrum within the Muslim populace that the Almighty shall hold voters responsible and accountable for the infractions and inequities of those elected into public offices. Here, it is made clear that everybody shall be answerable and held accountable for their individual actions on the day of resurrection, either as leaders or followers; be they electorates or those elected into public offices. Other *āyāt* that emphasise the necessity for participation in democratic process include: Quran 22:41, 4:59, 32:24.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

therefore decided to refrain from participating in the democratic process either as potential candidates for leadership positions or as ordinary voters.

But despite these postures, the 2023 general election in Nigeria proved to be a tour de force in the nation's annals. Apart from witnessing the largest participation of the electorates, particularly of youth, in recent times and the deployment of technology such as BVAS (the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System) on a scale never witnessed before,[11] the election also produced the first Muslim president and vice president in the nation's annals. Whereas the elections have been won and lost, an appraisal of the discourses that preceded and circumscribed their conduct, including the permissibility or otherwise of Muslims' participation in the electoral process in the country, requires analysis. This chapter tries to fill this gap. It begins with a review of theories proposed by contemporary scholars on the necessity or otherwise for Muslims to be involved in the governance of their societies through participation in electoral processes. This is followed by the analyses of issues that circumscribed the 2023 general elections in Nigeria especially the legal frameworks introduced by the Nigerian government the overall objective of which was the prevention of infractions and malpractices that had marred previous elections in the country.[12] The paper thereafter discusses the dialectics of the discourses of political power in religious places in Nigeria, particularly their manifestation in the postures of the anti-participation, pro-participation and non-participation elements within the larger Muslim population. The paper posits in its conclusion that since leadership in Islam is a trust, the processes and procedures that would guarantee its credibility, such as full participation by Muslims in the electoral processes in consonance with fundamental injunctions of Allah in the Quran, therefore becomes an undeniable necessity.

THEORISING LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL POWER WITHIN ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE

Any attempt to theorise Islam and leadership or political power would most likely begin by considering the perspective which the American Islamic legal theorist Khaled Abou El Fadl, refers to as "authoritative text" in Islam.[13] Abou El Fadl avers that the authoritative has a triadic dimension in Islam—Allah, Quran and *Rasul*

11 Oyinmiebi PT and Inokoba PK. 2023. "Electoral Technology and Credible Elections in Nigeria: A Study of the 2023 Presidential Election", *Kenneth Dike Journal of African Studies (KDJAS)* 2(1):56-71.

12 Hardly has there been an electoral process in Nigeria since its independence in 1960 that has been free from different kinds of infractions such as rigging, ballot snatching, vote-buying, campaign for vote at polling booths, voter intimidation and destruction of lives and properties, amongst others. Consequently, arguments have always been canvassed that electoral process in Nigeria has never been free and fair. For more on the factors, features and impacts of these infractions on the democratic process in the country, see Chinweuba GE. 2023. "Nigerian State and the Challenges of Election: A Critical Review" *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)* 6(1):383- 394.

13 Abou El Fadl K. 2003. *Speaking in God's Name*. London: Oneworld Publications, 23.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

(messenger). To Abou El Fadl, these are the authorities that matter from which other authorities derive. With particular reference to the connection between Islam and participation in political process, the promise of Allah as enshrined in the following *āyah* finds relevance.

> Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me.[14]

The above *āyah* clearly delineates the inseparability of the spiritual and the mundane in Islamic *Weltanschauung*. In other words, the *āyah* positions Muslims and righteous ones as individuals who would also be saddled with political authority in managing the affairs of the society. Ibn Kathīr, one of the most respected and popular Quranic exegetes, expounds on this *āyah* of the Qur'an by recounting how the Prophet's responsibility as the ultimate leader of the Muslim *ummah* during his lifetime extended beyond the spiritual.[15]

The Prophet was not only commissioned to provide spiritual guidance to the early believers in Makkah and Madinah. The authority vested in him also demanded that he provided leadership in all spheres of human life, including the political and the economic. He even interacted with political leaders beyond the Arabian Peninsula, such as Heraclius (the Byzantine emperor from 610-641 CE), Muqawqis (Egyptian ruler from 628-642 CE) and An-Najāshī (Abyssinian king from 614-631 CE),[16] thereby, laying the foundation for international relations in Islamic jurisprudence. The Prophet's watchword while serving as the head of the then nascent Islamic State, was: "All of you are shepherds and all of you shall be called to question on how you manage your flock."[17] The Prophet further displayed the basic elements of an Islamic State through his style of governance while serving as the Muslim leader in Madinah. This includes *shura* (consultation),[18] *al-muhaasabah* (accountability),[19] *akhlaaq* (high moral conduct),[20] *al-musaawaat* (equality before the law),[21] *at-tasaamuh* (tolerance)[22] and *ʿadl* (justice),[23] amongst others. Thus, notions of inseparability of

14 Quran 24:55

15 Ibn Kathir. *Tafsir.* Riyadh: Darussalam, Q24:55.

16 Rahim A. 2010. *Islamic History.* Kaduna: Islamic Publications Bureau, 35-36.

17 Bukhari, hadith no. 7138.

18 Quran 3:159 and 42:38.

19 Quran 7:6-7, 17:36 and 17:71.

20 Quran 68:4.

21 Quran 5:45.

22 Quran 29:18 and Quran 109.

23 Quran 5:8.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

Islam and leadership and governance becomes not only logically valid, but also divinely ordained.

Sourcing inspiration and guidance from authoritative texts cited above,[24] Muslim jurists, theologians and philosophers of the contemporary period, have gone further to provide fresh insights into the connection between Islam, leadership and political practice. These include the Tunisian Muslim scholar, Ibn 'Āshūr (1879-1973) and the Pakistani reformer and Quranic exegete, Sayyid Abu'l A'lā Mawdūdī (1903-1979). In their postulations, we see a constellation of traditional and modern critical engagements with the question of the necessity or otherwise of Muslim participation in leadership and political practice. Situating his discussion on the argument that Islam is *dīnu al fitrah* (religion of nature),[25] Ibn 'Āshūr, a Tunisian scholar and the Quranic exegete who wrote *Al-Tahrir wa'l-Tanwir* (freedom and illumination), argues further that the religion aims at creating a unity between nature and faith, which explains why most *Sharī'ah* injunctions and ordinances are constructed to satisfy human needs and their aspirations. In order to solidify this argument, M.E. El-Mesawi, a Malaysian scholar of Islamic jurisprudence, recounts Ibn 'Āshūr's quadratic approach towards Islamic polity.[26] This approach covers "*musāwāh* (equality), *ʿadl* (justice), *hurriyyah* (freedom) and *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance)".[27] To Ibn 'Āshūr therefore, the ultimate aim of Islam and the definitive goal of politics can only be achieved at the convergence of these precepts, where, there is equal treatment of people, there is a guarantee of justice, there is freedom for all and there is tolerance for differences. This clearly shows the compatibility of Islam and politics and a manifestation of the grandeur of the Islamic faith.[28] In this regard, El-Mesawi presents Islam as the religion of inclusiveness which cannot be separated from politics. Specifically, El-Mesawi argues, "Islam has laid down the most solid psychological, intellectual, moral and legal foundations for a sustainable pluralistic society and civilisation where different faiths are respected and social, intellectual and political interaction and cooperation between various religious communities are encouraged and promoted for the sake of the common good and well-being."[29]

Sayyid Abu'l A'lā Mawdūdī, the popular Islamic reformer from Pakistan and modern exegete, on the other hand, argues that leadership and political power can be segmented into a trialectic that forms the foundation for an Islamic state: *Tawhīd/mulk* (oneness of Allah/sovereignty), *risālah* (prophethood) and *khilāfah*

24 Such other *āyāt* of Quran that emphasise the importance of leadership in Islamic law include Q2:247, Q17:71, Q21:73, Q25:74, Q28:5 and Q32:24.

25 El Mesawi ME. 2009. "Towards an Integrated Islamic Political Theory: A Systematic Analysis of Ibn 'Āshūr's Political Thought", in Kausar Z (ed). *Contemporary Islamic Political Thought*. Kuala Lampur: International Islamic University Malaysia Press, 95.

26 El Mesawi, "Towards an Integrated Islamic Political Theory", 95.

27 El Mesawi, "Towards an Integrated Islamic Political Theory", 95.

28 Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsir*, vol 3, part 17,165-169.

29 El Mesawi, "Towards an integrated Islamic political Theory", 95.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

(man's vicegerency of Allah).[30] According to him, success of a state is dependent on adherence to these three principles. Predicating his expositions on the ayah that reads *'ini-l-hukmu 'illā li-lāh* (only Allah has the legislation prerogative)[31] and *tabi'ū mā unzila 'ilaykum min Rabbikum* (follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord),[32] Mawdūdī argues that since Allah is the Creator and fashioner of everyone, it is only logical to allow His ordinances to pilot the affairs of the world, hence the principles of *tawhīd* and *risālah*. Similarly, the ephemerality of life has established that Man does not have sovereignty over the world but only manages the world in a vicegerent capacity. This is exactly the argument of Mawdūdī that notions of politics in Islam largely hinge on *mulku'llāh* (Allah's sovereignty) and *khilāfah* (representation/vicegerency) system. Extending the antennae of his Islamic political thought, he also delineates constructs like loyalty (which he argues should be given to Allah, the Prophets and the leaders), organs of government (which he separates into *Majlis al Shu'rā* [the legislature], *Amārah* [the executive] and *Qadā* [the judiciary] and citizenship [which he partitions into Muslims and *dhimmīs*]).[33] It is clear from this discussion that as far as Mawdūdī is concerned, there is a strong connection between Islam and political practice. For him, the symbiotic relationship between the two categories is so fundamental that to be Muslim is to be politically active, even as political practice will enjoy credence and validity by the extent to which it conforms with the fundamental tenets of Islam.

What these postulations do amongst others is to bring to the fore the existence of a trend in Islamicate settings which is described by Sudanese Islamic law scholar Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im and American religion scholar Sherman Jackson as "Islamic secularism", or the "secular Islam"—a nuanced perspective that advocates for a conceptual distinction between religious and political authority while maintaining Islam's ethical and moral influence on governance.[34] As far as these scholars are concerned, and contrary to popular traditional notions within the Muslim world, the historical Islamic governance structures, such as the early caliphates, were not theocratic in the sense of direct clerical rule but rather operated with varying degrees of administrative autonomy. This perspective resonates with interpretations that emphasise Islam's adaptability to different socio-political contexts, allowing for a separation of religious and state institutions without necessitating the exclusion of Islamic values from public life.

30 Mawdūdī SAA. 1976. *Human Rights in Islam*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 9.

31 Quran 12:40.

32 Quran 7:3.

33 Mawdūdī SAA. 1983. *Islamic Law and Constitution*. Lahore: Islamic Publications, 245.

34 Dressler M, Salvatore A and Wohlrab-Sahr M. 2019. "Islamicate Secularities," *Historical Social Research* 44(3):7–34; Enayat H. 2022. "Talal Asad and the Question of Islamic Secularities," in Stenberg L and Wood P (eds) *What Is Islamic Studies?: European and North American Approaches to a Contested Field*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 60–81.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

For An-Na'im, an Islamic framework can coexist with secular governance by fostering a pluralistic legal and political environment where religious principles inform personal and communal ethics but do not dictate state policies.[35] Indeed, as far as he is concerned, the "Islamic secular" is a necessity that should be leveraged. An-Na'im declares:

> I am proposing the principles of constitutionalism, human rights, and citizenship, which can work only when they enjoy sufficient cultural and religious legitimacy to inspire and motivate people to participate in organized and sustained political and legal action. An Islamic discourse is essential for legitimizing the necessary strategies for regulating the public role of Islam. At the same time, that discourse cannot emerge or be effective without the security and stability provided by the secular state.[36]

Thus, the "Islamic secular", in An-Na'im's conception, refers to the interplay of the fundamental precepts of Islam regarding state practice and the protection that it enjoys from secular authorities. Despite its seeming logicality, the concept of "secular Islam" or "Islamic secularity" does not account for a situation where authorities that protect the fundamental principles of Islam are themselves inherently "Islamic" and premised on fundamental principles of statehood in the religion.[37]

In accordance with An-Na'im, Jackson says political practice is not governed by *sharia* ordinances. In other words, Islamic secularity is clearly differentiated and distinguished from the religion of Islam. In Jackson's view, Islamic secularism "is not only the realm of that which is differentiated from religion, but also is a realm that is relatively untouched by divine injunctions and, consequently, distinct from the realm of sharia".[38] Therefore, "the 'secular' was neither outside 'religion' nor a rival to it",[39] and the secular is "more of an excavation than an innovation".[40] Amplifying his position further, Jackson says "the secular resides in the perpetual

35 An-Na'im AA. 2008. *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

36 An-Na' im, *Islam and the Secular State*

37 Reference here is to for example Iran and Saudi Arabia. On statehood for these two countries, both of which follow different creedal streams within the Islamic theological framework, see: Dahlan MR. 2018. "The Ideological Drivers of Submerged Statehood in the Afterlife of The Hijaz," *The Hijaz*, 1 August, 279–338; Chikrizova OS. 2019. "Saudi Model of Development for the Islamic World: Peculiarities and Limits", *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 19(4):545–65.

38 Jackson SA. 2017. "The Islamic Secular," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 34(2):1-41 (cited by Enayat, "Talal Asad and the Question of Islamic Secularities", 72).

39 Jackson SA. 2024. "Shari'ah and the Islamic Secular: Between Political Theology and Political Philosophy", The Annual Anwar Ibrahim Lecture, AbuSulayman Center for Global Islamic Studies, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, USA, 16 April.

40 Jackson, "The Islamic Secular", 1.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

dislocation it visits upon religion through the generation and deployment of an evolving series of cognitive oppositions".[41]

The interrogation of the relationship between Islam and politics has always foregrounded Muslims' participation in democratic process across different parts of the contemporary world, including Nigeria. Understanding of this relationship is also important to understand Islamic concepts of leadership. This was especially evident, as noted above, in the events that led to the 2023 general elections to which we now return our attention.

CONTEST FOR LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL POWER IN THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: BETWEEN THE LEGAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

Just before the 2023 general elections, the Federal Government of Nigeria amended the existing Electoral Act.[42] The amendment gave the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) the powers to issue guidance and regulations for the conduct of the national elections in the country. One of the most fundamental steps taken by INEC was the issuance of guidelines for the conduct of the general elections, off-cycle elections, bye-elections, re-run elections, and supplementary elections. Relying on Section 92(3) of the Electoral Act, which says that "places designated for religious worship, police stations, and public offices shall not be used for political campaigns, rallies and processions or to promote, propagate or attack political parties, candidates or their programmes or ideologies",[43] INEC went further in its guidelines for the elections by prohibiting political campaigns in churches and mosques. It clearly stipulated stiff punishments for offenders of the law in S97(1), such as the imposition of a fine of N1,000,000 naira, or twelve months imprisonment or both, for defaulting individuals and N10,000,000 for political parties.[44]

For perceptive critics and observers of Nigeria's chequered political history, particularly since the beginning of the Third Republic in 1999, the law prohibiting political activities in churches and mosques—two religious places frequently and notoriously patronised by politicians in the course of election campaigns—had become a necessity. This is in consideration of the sanctity of house of God, which is meant to be freed from any potential desecration and the tumultuous process of elections in Nigeria. So, if an election, in line with the arguments of election specialist Tajudeen Adeyinka and social scientist Musediq Lawal, "constitutes the main instrument of leadership selection",[45] then it its conduct becomes meaningless "where

41 Jackson, "The Islamic Secular", 4-5.

42 Electoral Act, 2022, *Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette* 109(61), 29 March.

43 Electoral Act, 2022.

44 Electoral Act, 2022.

45 Adeyinka TY and Lawal MO. 2022. "Electoral Law Reforms and Emerging Political Realities in Nigeria", in Baikady R et al (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Change*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-17.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

the rules of engagement are violated or completely discarded".[46] Amplifying the role of the state and adequate legal provisions in ensuring efficient electioneering process, Adeyinka and Lawal further posit that "the success or failure of the election in yielding constructive changes in terms of value orientation, attitude, norms and experience across the web of a society depends on the capacity and genuine willingness of the state authorities to create a functional and conducive legal milieu for the emergence and sustainability of credible electoral outcomes".[47] This appears to be at play in the promulgation of the 2022 Electoral Act by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The Act, by all intents and purposes, was meant to impose order on the electoral process and the ideals that Adeyinka and Lawal advocate.

RELIGIOUS PLACES AND THE NEGOTIATION OF POLITICAL POWER

However, beyond the necessity for and the normativity of legal authority as enunciated in the 2022 Electoral Act that was introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria, experience has shown that in contemporary Nigeria, religious places, particularly churches and mosques, have become locales for transaction in and negotiation of contest for leadership and political power. Here the clergy, while not posturing as professional politicians, usually deploy their oratory and subjective interpretations of sacred texts—the Bible and the Quran—as weapon through which their followers are railroaded into supporting one political party against the other. Indeed, in the days and months leading to the Nigerian general election of 2023, some religious places, particularly churches, became manifestly partisan in their activities. The excuse for this was their strong aversion to the so-called "Muslim-Muslim Ticket", a strategy devised by one of the major political parties in the country to win the general election.[48] The nation consequently witnessed a situation where the church was weaponised for political reasons.[49] Churchgoers were told that success of candidates who professed Christianity at the polls would guarantee their access to political power—a power that they considered was their right, not

46 Adeyinka and Lawal, "Electoral Law Reforms and Emerging Political Realities in Nigeria".

47 Adeyinka and Lawal, "Electoral Law Reforms and Emerging Political Realities in Nigeria".

48 While it is not a requirement in the Nigerian Constitution or the Electoral Act, it is often a conventional practice for political parties to present an executive and a vice from different faith backgrounds for elections. Sometimes political parties do not follow this convention when such arrangement may constitute an impediment to their victory. This manifested in the 2023 presidential elections when the All Progressive Congress Party presented both presidential and vice-presidential candidates who wereMuslims. For more on Muslim-Muslim ticket, see Ibrahim J. 2022. "The Muslim-Muslim ticket and religious mobilisation in Nigeria", *Premium Times Nigeria,* 15 July; Igboin BO. 2023. "A theo-political analysis of Muslim–Muslim presidency in a 'secular' Nigeria: *Theologia Viatorum* 47(1):169.

49 Owonikoko SB. 2025. "'Muslim–Muslim Ticket,' Christian–Muslim Relations and Peacebuilding and Development in Nigeria, "A Reflection on Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Elections," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*. Published ahead of print 27 January. https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166241304805; Reef MS. 2023. "Weaponising Religion For Elections," *Leadership*; Anifowose OA. 2017. "Religion as a Tool of Political Manipulation in Nigeria", *Àgídìgbo: ABUAD Journal of the Humanities* 5(1):56–63.

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merely a privilege. As might be expected, this development aroused the interest of some Muslims who would ordinarily not have been keen on participating in the electoral process. Thus religion, contrary to its previous role as silent tool of mobilisation, was brought to the centre of political discourse and campaigns.[50]

Ironically, in traditional Muslim settings in Nigeria, the provision of the Electoral Act prohibiting campaign in religious places had been preceded by extremely passionate discourses over the permissibility of Muslims participation (either as candidates or voters) in general elections, the purpose of which was to produce new leadership for the country. In line with our discussion in the introductory section of this paper, at least three different postures had been preeminent: anti-participation, pro-participation and non-participation. Starting with the anti-participation sector of the Muslim populace, it should be noted that these Muslims detest democracy for its secularity, for its constant attempt to position humanity as an alternative to divinity and for its potential to orchestrate "corruption" on earth.[51] As far as this group is concerned, participation in general elections is unlawful (*haram*). Muslims should therefore neither present themselves for election nor vote for any candidate desiring public office. Belonging to this group were La-Jama'ah, the Makondoros and the Jama'at Tabligh in Nigeria.

The second posture belonged to pro-participation posture. This is premised on the argument that participation in the general elections was a legal necessity (*al-Darurah*), since the alternative to this option would be the appointment or rather election of people of dubious characters into positions of leadership. This situation would potentially have had grave implications for the five objectives of the Islamic law: the protection of faith, life, intellect, property and kinship ties.[52] For this group of Muslims, participation in general elections is therefore *wajib* (obligatory).[53] From this group therefore emerged Muslims who contested for various political offices in the land and many others who worked as vote canvassers, party agents and electoral officers.

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50 See Oloyede IO. 2014. "Theologising the Mundane, Politicising the Divine: The Cross-Current of Law, Religion and Politics in Nigeria", *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14(1):178-202; Oloyede IO, Egbewole WO and Oloyede HT. 2016. "The operational complexities of 'free exercise' and "non-adoption of religion" clauses in the Nigerian Constitution", in Coertzen P, Green MC and Hansen L (eds). *Religious Freedom and Religious Pluralism in Africa.* Stellenbosch: African Sun Media.

51 Reference to the word corruption here is in line with the Quranic framework that considers it as ailment that is spiritual before it becomes or manifests in the physical. For more on this see: Oladosu AA. 2012. "The Honey and the Poison: Corruption and Its Hermeneutics in Islamic Jurisprudence", *ICR Journal* 3(2):320-336.

52 Afolabi KA. 2023. "Islam, Muslims and 2020 # EndSARS Protests in Nigeria", *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 22(2):351–76; Liman SH and Elesin AMJ. 2022. *Basic Principles of Sharī'ah (Islamic Law).* Zaria, Kaduna State: Ahmadu Bello University Press.

53 For notions of "the obligatory acts" in Islamic law and jurisprudence, see Liman and Elesin *Basic Principles of Sharī'ah,* 15 See also Al-Zarkashī AA. 1984. *Al-Manthūr fī al-Qawā'id* (The Dispersed in [Legal] Principles) vol 2. Kuwait: Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs, 19.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

In between the pro-participation and anti-participation posture was the non-participation posture.[54] The question of interest to the latter, has always been: *What has God got to do with elections?* For this group of Muslims, particularly the elite, elections are secular activities whose purpose is the production of the most suitable candidate for leadership positions in the country. Since religion is exempt from the conditions that guide participation in the process, to bring God into it therefore is tantamount to apophatism–the description of God by what cannot be said of Him. But more importantly, the non-participation posture within Muslim political circles, has been fed by feelings of disappointments on the part of the electorates (both Muslims and Christians) from previous political experience that the country has had. This has been exacerbated by perceived failure of successive government to provide basic necessities of life for the citizenry and the increase in incidences of corruption in public offices.

POWER POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP IN ISLAM: INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNAL

But despite the non-participation posture of a section of the Nigerian populace, it is common knowledge that since it attained independence from British rule in the year 1960, political practice in Nigeria has always been circumscribed by the invocation of God as strategy to gain political power, which for ordinary politicians references the "chance of a man or several men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action".[55] To achieve their goal, Nigerian politicians often seek the support of churches and the mosques where pastors and imams enjoy what American sociologist Steven Lukes refers to as "limitless power" as representatives of the Almighty.[56] Having monopolised access to the interpretation of the scripture and having succeeded in becoming the custodians of authoritative texts in the two traditions of Christianity and Islam, it often becomes easy for religious leaders to convert the pulpit to political platforms and mobilise their followers for candidates of their choice. Indeed, shortly before the 2023 Nigeria general elections, not a few churches hosted what Abraham Raymond Eli, a preacher and teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ,

54 Those who belong to this group within the Muslim populace are those who were born during the early independence period or shortly thereafter. In our conversation with some of them in the period before the 2023 general elections, they disagreed with the invocation of the name of Almighty by politicians, no matter their religious affiliations. For them, invoking the Divine in matters that are purely secular such as politics and election amounts to acts of dishonesty and deceit. One of them, by name Alhaji Abubakar Garuba, aged 60 years, is an employee of the University of Ibadan.

55 Warren M. 1992. "Max Weber's Nietzschean Conception of Power", *History of Human Sciences* 5(3):19-37.

56 See Lukes S. 2005. *Power: A Radical View.* Second Edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Scott JC. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven:Yale University Press.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

labelled as "prophetic" celebrations and "festivities".[57] As Eli described it, many preachers, pastors and prophets left their first love—the Lord Jesus Christ—to become "campaign directors" and "campaign stalwarts" for politicians.[58] The most frightening aspect was how God's pulpit became a soapbox for political rhetoric by preachers, pastors, prophets and politicians alike.[59]

Islam by contrast holds that access to power and ascension to position of leadership either through elections or other means should be for service to God and humanity and for purposes that are greater than the leader or the "powerful". For example, Allah says: "Those who, if We establish them on the land, establish regular prayers and give regular charity, enjoin that which is right and forbid that which is wrong: with Allah lies the decision on all affairs."[60] Exegetes of the Quran agree that this verse exemplifies the purposes to which power and leadership should be dedicated in Islam. It establishes not only the necessity for leadership for proper functioning of human societies and equally highlights the characteristics of those who should be appointed into positions of authority. Thus, the phrase "those who whenever We give them authority on the land",[61] it is argued, refers not only to the sovereign, the President, the Minister, the Governor or the Local Government Chairman. It also views the governed, the citizens, the ordinary members of the society as people imbued with different kinds of powers and authorities by which they could carry out the duties of statehood at their local levels.

These duties are broadly divided into two: the spiritual and the temporal. They include the necessity for the powerful to facilitate worship of Allah, and to promote the welfare of the citizens. The attainment of this would lead to social reformation and regeneration, such that corruption and other acts of immorality would not become the new normal, as has been the case in our world today. There is a necessity to avoid seeing power as belonging only to the select few who have been privileged to occupy the transient positions of authority in contemporary societies. It is based on this notion of leadership in Islam that Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "All of you are shepherds; and all of you shall be questioned on how you took care of your flock."[62]

What emerges from this tradition is that power and leadership are realisable at two levels: individual and communal. At the individual level, known in Islamic law and jurisprudence as *fard ayn* (individual duty), people are deemed to be imbued with the power to take care of themselves, and individuals become responsible and liable for such actions as worship of Allah. They are under obligation to lead a life

57 "2023: Catholic Church will mobilise "effectively" for polls – Priests", *Premium Times Nigeria*, 26 October 2022.

58 "2023: Catholic Church will mobilise "effectively" for polls – Priests".

59 Eli AR. 2023. "Lessons for the Church from the 2023 Nigerian General Elections", *Fields of Grace Newsletter, The Good New Bulletin*, Substack.com, 27 May.

60 Quran 22:41.

61 Quran 22:41.

62 Sahih Muslim. *The Book on Government*, hadith 1829a.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

of dignity and nobility. The day the child reaches the age of puberty and becomes what is known in the *sharia* as *al-mukallaf*,[63] he becomes a responsible agent. He becomes responsible for his own security, for the preservation of his dignity.

But individual responsibility in Islamic law can also have communal, national or global implications. In other words, once the believer assumes the position of authority over his fellow human beings, he becomes responsible and accountable for them all. In a report, the second *khalifah*, Umar bn al-Khattab, is reported to have said: "If a mule were to stumble on the road in Iraq, Allah would ask me about it saying: why did you fail to repair the road for that mule O! Umar."[64] A *fard ayn* is therefore an act that is obligatory for Muslims individually–each will be rewarded for performing it or punished for failing to perform it.

The second level at which notions of power and leadership come into play is communal or global. Known in Islamic law as *fard kifayah,*[65] this principle holds that whenever people come together to form or live in a community, a town, a state or country, their communality leads to communal leadership. They jointly come under a collective obligation to undertake certain actions or obligations for which they would all suffer dire repercussions should they all fail to rise to discharge same. If, however, some among them rise up to discharge the responsibility on behalf of others, the rest become free of liability. Participation in general elections for the purpose of selecting leaders of the nation therefore fits into these analyses. Through such an exercise, the construct known in Islamic law and jurisprudence as *fard kifaya* (communal responsibility) becomes *fard ayn* (individual responsibility) for which the latter shall be rewarded bountifully.[66] In other words, if election of leaders in a nation where Muslims are citizens is constitutionally binding, participation in that process would become *fard ayn* (individual responsibility) in that instance where there is no certainty in the active and collective involvement of the citizens in the process. The Nigerian electoral history shows that it is usually very difficult for the electorates to rectify the outcome of the electoral process after the declaration of result. This makes Muslims' participation in the process (i.e. registration as ordinary

63 *Al-mukallaf* (a Muslim who has attained the age of puberty – responsibility); refers to a person's responsibility for their actions in the Hereafter. Three requirements must be satisfied for someone to be deemed Islamically liable (*mukallaf*): The individual is of pubescent age, sane and has accepted Islam's core teachings. For more on *al-mukallaf,* see Hannani, Bedong MAR, Tahir A and Muhsin A. 2018. *Maqāshid Al-Mukallaf* [Applicative Solutions to Comprehensive Fatwa]. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* 6(1):22–29.

64 Ghazal R. 2021. "Why we should care if a donkey falls or a cat goes hungry", *The National News*, 14 June.

65 Muhammad UJ. 2021. "Featuring Knowledge as the Means to the Essence of Creation: An Islamic Exposition", *Al-Misbah (Jurnal Islamic Studies)* 9(2):115–27; Hanapi MS. 2017. "An Analysis of the Scientific Research Mould Based on Fardu 'Ayn Knowledge from Ibn Al-Haytham's Thought", *Social Sciences* 12(12):2344–2351.

66 Muhammad, "Featuring Knowledge as the Means to the Essence of Creation".

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

voters, participation as electoral candidates and monitoring the election to ensure compliance with the law) a categorical necessity.

ELECTIONS AND LEADERSHIP AS SACRED TRUST

Insights from Islamic history are instructive of the process that early Muslims followed in appointing their leaders. For example, a semblance of election took place shortly after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE that led to the emergence of Abubakr al-Siddiq as his successor. The preference of other companions for Ali bin Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin, shows that with the demise of the Prophet, ascension to leadership positions in Islamic polity had become an essentially secular exercise for which God may not be invoked in any way. Apart from the schism that eventually broke out within the *Ummah* thereafter as evident in the Sunni and Shia politico-theological spectrum, the caliphate after Abubakr al-Siddiq witnessed the same process. Indeed, the emergence of the third *khalīfah*, Uthman bn Affan, took place consequent upon the decision reached by the council of electors constituted by the second *khalīfah*, Umar bn al-Khatab.[67]

Thus, notwithstanding the dialectics in approach and methodology by which it is obtained, Islam considers leadership to be a sacred position and a trust (*amanah*) for which its possessors would be held to account on the day of resurrection. Provision of good leadership therefore becomes a pathway to success here on earth and in the hereafter,[68] particularly when it is seen as service to the Almighty and His creatures.[69] Consequently, the notion that public institutions are essentially secular becomes tenuous.[70] Indeed, most questions that often arise regarding lack of good governance in the contemporary period are traceable to the discordance between ethical intent and ethical conduct.[71]

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67 For more on the processes that led to the emergence of the successors of the Prophet of Islam after his death in 632 AD, see Charfi A, Filali-Ansary A and Ahmed SK (eds). 2012. *The Prophets' Successors.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

68 Rafik IB and Jamaal AB. 1999. *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective.* Hartford, CT: Amana Publishers.

69 Rafiki A. 2020. "Islamic Leadership: Comparisons and Qualitie", in Franco M (ed) *Digital Leadership—A New Leadership Style for the 21st Century*. London: IntechOpen Limited. For more, see Abou El Fadl K. 2001. "Islam and the theology of power", *Middle East Repo*rt 221(Winter 2001):28-33.

70 Iversen HR. 2017. "Secular Religion and Religious Secularism", *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 19(2):75–92.

71 For more analysis on the disconnection of spirituality from public life see: Van Niekerk B. 2018. "Religion and spirituality: What are the fundamental differences?", *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 74(3):a4933.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

It is generally acknowledged that in the contemporary world there are different patterns of state-religion relationship.[72] Yet there is a growing group of scholars who believe that the demand for the state to maintain a neutral position towards religion is no longer feasible. For example, Sean Yom, a political scientist with interest in Middle Eastern politics, contends that in a society that is becoming more interconnected, such that religious identities are becoming more pronounced and believers are becoming more adept at communicating and preserving their narrative visions of the past, present and future, and secularism is becoming less and less meaningful.[73] This may be the reason behind the suggestion by Louis Fry, a professor of management and leadership, of a causal theory of spiritual leadership which combines ideas of spiritual survival, workplace spirituality, and vision, with hope, faith and altruistic love.[74]

THE 2023 NIGERIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS: ENGAGING THE TABLIGHIS, MAKONDOROS AND OTHERS ON ANTI-PARTICIPATION AND NON-PARTICIPANTION

Given the above discussions, the question "What has God got to do with elections?" invites contemplation once again. This becomes pertinent if it is read against the explicit Quranic injunctions on good governance as contained in Quran 24:50. In other words, since the appointment of good leaders is, by Islamic law, a necessity and therefore lawful, it is arguable that God who prescribes the establishment of good governance can, indeed, be invoked as encouraging popular participation in politics and more specifically in the choice of who to be elected as leaders.

But the invocation of the divine for the seemingly secular vocation of partisan politics should be in consonance, again, with the law. Here the guidelines issued by the INEC prohibiting campaigns in religious places therefore enjoy credence from the dual perspectives of theology and jurisprudence. The theological or scriptural can be gleaned from Quran 4:59, the jurisprudential principle which says "that which is certain cannot be invalidated by doubts".[75] Thus, the discourses of the Tablighis, Makondoros and La-Jama'ah and their disavowal on participation in the democratic process can be said to be in contrast to normative Islam, as enunciated by the authoritative sources cited above. In fact, Allah invalidates any opinion by believers that is premised on the opinions of their predecessors whose conducts were not in full compliance with the law and Quranic injunctions. Allah says: "When it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has revealed,' they reply, 'No! We only

72 Oloyede et al, "The Operational Complexities of 'Free Exercise' and 'Non-Adoption of Religion' Clauses in the Nigerian Constitution".

73 Yom SL. 2002. "Islam and Globalization: Secularism, Religion and Radicalism", *International Politik und Gesellschaft* (IPG) [International Politics and Society] 4:27-46.

74 Fry LW. 2003. "Toward a theory of spiritual leadership", *The Leadership Quarterly* 14(6):693–727.

75 For more on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, see Abdul-Haqq A. 1333 AH. *Qawaid al-Usul wa Ma'aqid al-Fusul* (Rules Governing the Fundamentals and the Complexities of the Sections).

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

follow what we found our forefathers practising'. Would they still do so, even if their forefathers had absolutely no understanding or guidance?"[76]

Besides that, one other logical argument may be canvassed to counter the opinion and position of the groups in southwest Nigeria who stood in opposition to participation in the democratic process. This has to do with the rational inconsistency in their argument that while participation in politics may be unlawful, the act of partaking in the dividends of democracy is lawful.[77] It can only amount to an act of hypocrisy which is abhorred in Islamic theology for the believer to prohibit an action for others while benefitting from it. If participation in politics is unlawful, it therefore stands to reason, that those who consider it as such should also avoid profiting from it in any way. The combination of the textual and the logical argument in support of the participation in politics may have played a very significant role in the large participation of Muslim populace in the 2023 general elections. The elections not only produced the first "Muslim-Muslim" president and vice-president in Nigerian history, but also witnessed active involvement of Muslim women, not only as voters, but also as gubernatorial candidates.[78]

CONCLUSION

It is axiomatic from these analyses that participation in politics and in choosing those who would occupy public offices is therefore not only lawful but indeed an obligation upon Muslims. This is based on authoritative text in Islam and evidence gathered from the history of the religion since the classical period. This served as basis for the exploration of the connection between Islam and political practice and the theorisations that have branched out from that within Muslim and non-Muslim scholarly circles. It is also clear that the 2023 general elections in Nigeria functioned in bringing these discourses to the fore. While it is true that some sections of the Muslim populace in the country, particularly in southwest Nigeria, such as the La-Jama'ah, the Makondoros, and the Tablighi sought to dissuade the vast majority from either presenting themselves as candidates for election, or in participating in the process as voters, the outcome of the elections showed that large sections of Muslim voters actually turned out to discharge their civic duties through their participation in the electoral process. This partly led to the success of the All Progressive Congress at the polls, the party that presented two Muslims as presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the first time in Nigerian annals. Similar to what the former Premier of Western Nigeria (1954-1960), the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Christian, did by choosing Chief Philip Umeadi, a fellow

76 Quran 2:170.

77 This is with reference to the statement credited to the leader of the La-Jama'ah group in Ibadan southwest Nigeria during one of his sermons on 5 January 2023.

78 Oladosu-Uthman H and Afolabi KA. 2024. "Aisha Binani, the First Elected Female Governor in Nigeria that Never Was- UN Affirmative Action , Gender and the Leadership Question in Nigeria", *Journal of International Politics* 5(1):23–32.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

Christian, as his running mate for the 1979 presidential election in Nigeria.[79] There is no gainsaying the fact therefore, that the invocation of the Almighty in political practice labelled by some scholars as Islamic secularity, is, as far as Islamic normative principles are concerned, a categorical imperative.

79 For another perspective on the role of religion in Nigerian politics, see Abass, A. 2022. "Muslim/Muslim or Christian/Christian ticket?" *The Nation*, 22 July

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888