



JOURNAL OF Political Studies

SPECIAL EDITION ON

DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

JULY 2006

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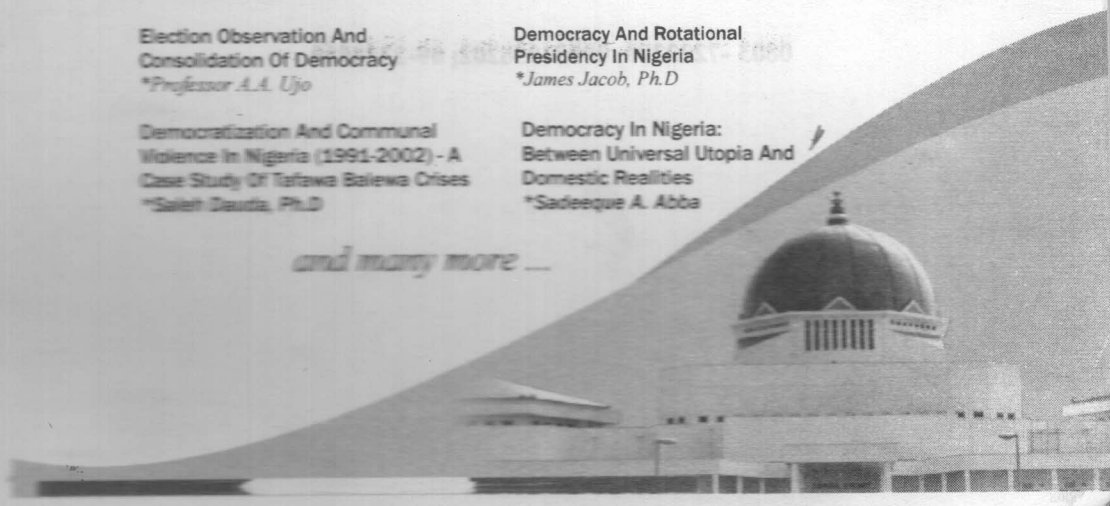
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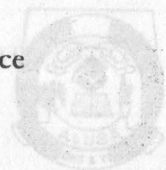
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RELIGION, PARTY POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY: IMPLICATIONS OF RELIGION FOR NIGERIA'S 2003 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

By

*Abubakar O. Suleiman Ph.D And **Abdulrasheed A. Muhammad

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to show the relationship between Religion, party politics and the democratization process, especially in Nigeria, with particular regard to the country's 2003 Presidential Elections. The authors note the impact of Religion on the country's political firmament since time immemorial, and, most especially, during the Fourth Republic. The authors observe that the interaction between religion and politics in Nigeria has its origin in the multi-religious character of the country which was, itself, engendered by Nigeria's colonial experience.. The paper concludes that, even though the 2003 Presidential elections had been adjudged as the most successful civilian-to-civilian transition programme in Nigeria, the rise of religious considerations has raised questions about the ability of Nigeria to conduct a credible civilian-to-civilian elections devoid of ethnic and/or religious sentiments. Suggestions on how to ensure an enduring democracy in Nigeria are also given.

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Introduction

There is, indeed, an age-long association between politics and religion as both are products of man's physical and social environment. Religion essentially was borne out of man's crave to understand the supernatural in the context of a world he lives in. Politics on the other hand results from the compelling necessity of man's association with other men within the society. Thus, man is both a religious and political being (Jawondo 2004: 180). As society grows, so also is the complexity and pattern of religious beliefs while both continued to influence each other. Following emergence of the modern nation-state and institutionalization of democratic culture happened on fundamental rights of citizens and the rule of law, the state naturally becomes a neutral arbiter that guarantees the security and freedom of all segments of the society. In religious matters, this idea manifest in the secular ideology. That is, the belief that the state is and should be independent in matters of religion. However, perhaps due to factors such as persistent socio-economic crises, declining state capacity and increase

in the level of religiosity of the society, there has been a growing crisis of confidence in the secular ideology. In other words;

many people have lost their confidence in the secular principle and have been making demands for a review of the secular ideology that underpins the state (International IDEA 2000:40).

The above situation consequently further raised the tempo of interaction between religion and politics. In Nigeria, the interaction between religion and politics is rooted in its multi-religious character engendered by her colonial experience. Colonialism brought together disparate entities under a single national authority. This implies that, different ethnic, religious and cultural groups have to co-exist and compete within the geopolitical entity.

Although, there are different religious groups in the country, the duo of Islam and Christianity have assumed a dominant status. Thus, any references to Nigeria's multi-religious character usually have these two in focus. Curiously, as noted by scholars, Nigeria's religious character also has a geographic existence (Suleiman, 2004: Kurian 1979). That is, while the North is

predominantly Islamic oriented, the south is predominantly Christian. The implication of this is that relations between the groups more often than not are usually intertwined with religious and/or ethnic connotations. This coloration also more often than not plays itself out at moments of political contests and elections. Thus, religion as a political force capable of pushing in different direction (Ball and Dagger, 1995:253), constitutes a major player on Nigerian government and politics. This is to the extent that since independence, religious polarizations has since been a common feature of governance and party politics in the country because it determines, at times, citizens perception of state policies as well as their party affiliations. This of course is not without some consequences for the state as a whole. It is against the background of the foregoing that this paper examines implications of religion in Nigeria's 2003 presidential elections. The intent is to highlight when and why religion suddenly became an issue in the election bearing in mind its conspicuous absence as a factor in the previous 1999 election and to draw out its implications for democracy and governance in

Nigeria. Aside the introductory remark, the work has four rubrics. The first attempts a theoretical insight into the concepts of religion, party politics and democracy. Second is an overview of religion and party politics in Nigeria while the third part Zero in on religion and party politics in Nigeria's 2003 presidential elections. The fourth part concludes the work by drawing out its implications for the Nigerian state.

Religion, Party Politics and Democracy: Theoretical Considerations

The idea of religion suggests an attempt by man to work out a relationship between humans and a supreme being whether God or something else. This is premised on the belief that human perceptions of things, wimps and caprices require higher powers to help them respond to all their concerns (Odey, 2004:81). According to scholars, it is any system relating man to an ultimate value, epitomised in God or Supreme Being and embodying a creed, code, cult and a mode of communion (Kenny Op, online; Adegbesa, 1987:96). Scholars have also exposed different

perspectives on the concept and idea of religion. Dominant among them are (i) the evolutionary perspective which sees animism as the earliest form of religion and therefore central to understanding the concept; (ii) the functional perspective which reflects in the writings of Emily Durkheim and Parsons and sees religion as performing a functional role of reinforcing the collective conscience of the society requisite for social order and stability and (iii) the radical perspective which receive stimulus from the writings of Karl Max. It sees religion as a sigh of the heartless world, feeling of the oppressed creature and opinion of the people. Religion from this perspective is an instrument in the hand of the state to maintain its rule and perpetuate its hegemony over the masses (see, Gofwen 2004; Ogunji 2004; 115; Odey 2004:81). In spite of the different perspectives, it is generally believed that there is an interaction between religion and the society within which it functions. First is at the level of the individual as it affects behaviour (morality) and second, it interacts and influences other facets of social institutions. That is, policy and economy. These institutions also in turn influence the religious

institutions, the effect of which affect in a fundamental way, a people way of life (Gofwen 2004:32). Thus, religion from this stand point becomes a significant influence in politics.

Viewed from another angle, religion confers on the individual a form of identity in the society. It is thus part of the complex pattern of other social identities that colours human relationships, struggles and competition. Consequently, because of its penchant for colouring relationships especially in multi-cultural societies such as Nigeria, it plays significant roles in societal politics including the process making vital decisions such as elections.

Politics, in the broad sense, is a universal aspect of life in human societies. It encompasses a broad range of situations in which people's objectives vary but in which they work together to achieve those objectives they have in common and compete where objectives differ (Tansey 1995:6). The process of cooperation and competition therefore involves bargaining, argument, compromise and wielding of influence. Where this is narrowed down and conducted on more or less strict adherence to the rules and

policies of a political party is when we can talk of party politics which is largely characteristic of democratic polities. According to Yaqub (2002:22), a political party represents an instrument for contesting elections for the purpose of selecting candidates as well as parties to exercise political power. But beyond fielding candidates for election and seeking control of political power, a party also perform several functions which make it a *sine qua non* for any democratic arrangement. These include, political recruitment and education; interest articulation and aggregation; political socialization among others (see, OkoosiSimbine 2004; Yaqub 2002; Ujo 2001).

Worthy of note however is that the ability of a party to effectively perform its role is largely, as Ake (1987) notes circumscribed by issues such as the socio-economic structure of that society (*viz*: whether skewed in favour of restricted segment of society), its level of social pluralism (*i.e.* the kind of social differences in that society) and the anatomy of the state (whether restricted or otherwise among others, the extent of appropriate usage of state apparatuses) (quoted in Okoosi-

Simbine 2004:87). In other words, since parties are institutions in the society competing for spheres of influence in the politico-economic configuration of the society, there is the tendency for their activities to become intertwined with the socio-political sentiments prevailing in the society. This is more likely so in societies fragmented along ethnic and religious lines and with underdeveloped political culture. Consequently, party strength and support for candidates are deeply rooted in ethnic, religious and other sentimental attachments. Such sentiments also impact on the extent of legitimacy enjoyed by the government as well as citizen's perception of state policies. As will become obvious later, this has been a characteristic feature of politics in post colonial Nigeria. The above situation notwithstanding, political parties and party politics are essential features in the enthronement of democracy.

Indeed, the subject matter of democracy has enjoyed much patronage in social science literature and political discourse in general. According to Ake (1992:1), it has been defined with a profusion of meaning that verge on anarchy. Yet, the confusion continues to grow

with every attempt to bring clarity. In spite of ranging debates, contemporary meanings and interpretations rages from a tight focus on electoral procedures to an expansive vision of citizens participation in political life (Muhammad 2005:3). For instance, it has been defined as a form of political regime in which the citizens choose, in competitive elections, the occupants of the top political offices of the state (Bratton and De Wall, 1997:13). Obviously, this definition restricts itself mainly to one of the processes of enthroning democratic regime. On the other hand, an expansive definition of democracy places premium on the basic freedom and fundamental rights of citizens such as equality; right of opinion and freedom of expression; free flow of information; the rule of law; popular participation and the right of choice among others (Alemika 2000:71; Yusuf 2000:115; Omafume 1997:16). Democracy from this perspective is the foundation for a sustainable social political and economic order within the society. It transcends the mere rituals of periodic election to one that ensures the coexistence of plurality of opinions guaranteed by

freedom of expression under the rule of the majority (Kabongo 1986:35). Success in this regard, however, greatly depends on the extent to which the spirit of tolerance and compromise is allowed to take root among competing forces in the society, be it political parties, ethnic or religion interests.

From our discussions above, it can be inferred that there is a kind of inter-relationship between religion, party politics and democracy. Religion represents one of the functional groupings within a nation state. Though an informal grouping, it functions in the same way as more formal organisations (and at times influences them) such as labour movements, pressure groups and professional associations. It therefore has a penchant for colouring relationships in the process of struggle for power and resources. Consequently at the slightest prompt, citizens are ready to be influenced by religious considerations at moments of political contest. This interplay to a large extent have implications for democratic processes because groups or sectional interests often overrides the national interest both in the exercise of political power and

support from the citizens situation which further pitches the various groups against one another. Within this malady lies the Nigerian predicament since independence.

Overview of Religion and Politics in Nigeria

There is indeed a growing body of literature on religion and politics in Nigeria. This we may attribute to the veracity with which religious sentiments have continued to dominate political considerations leading to state's veneration of religious groups. Religion has become a potent political force that it cannot be ignored in any matter of national importance be it foreign or domestic. Buttressing this assertion, Folola (1998:2) writes that, religion has become as destructive as ethnicity to the peace and progress of the country since the late 1970s. This is because the period 1977/78 is believed to mark the beginning of formal introduction of religion into issues of national discourse. While this view represents a general tendency among scholars, Kukah (1993) makes a departure from it. According to him, argument that 1977/78 constituent Assembly's (CA) Sharia debate marked the

beginning of introduction of religion into Nigerian politics 'can be misleading'. The real source of the problem in his view lies with the diametrically opposed views on the perception and definition of the basis of modern democracy as it contrasts with powers in Nigeria' (Kukah 1993:115). Tracing it to the colonial period and the establishment of 'Anglo-Fulani rule' (indirect rule system) leading to manipulation of the ideals of Islamic law and practice. He identified two issues that are central to this development. First was the native courts ordinance of 1955 which subjugated the then Sharia courts to the British law by allowing appeals only to a higher court which was based on English common law. This development sowed the seed of conflict of laws in Northern Nigeria and did not go down well with the Emirs (Kukah 1993:116-117). Second, the Northern Muslims saw the penal code as 'a colonial imposition which had got rid of Muslim law' a fact which became obvious to them after independence. Thus, the 1977/78 CA provided opportunity for them to seek redress. (Kukah 1993:118). Ever since, the association of religion with politics in the country have

continued to take different dimensions.

Consequently, from the explosive debate on having Sharia court of appeal in the constitution that marred the constituent Assembly of 1977/78, and its reincarnation in the constitutional conferences of 1989 and 1995, religion has become an important aspect of Nigeria's domestic politics. To this extent, and the linkage between domestic politics and foreign politics, it has also become a force to be reckoned with in the country's foreign policy arena. Indeed as Birai (1996:28) notes, ignoring religious undercurrent in Nigeria politics can only be done to the detriment of grasping the substance of some of the issues that have arisen in the history of its political development. For incisive commentaries on the religious factor in Nigeria's foreign relations and Nigerian politics in general including, rivalry among the dominant Christianity and Islam see, Suleiman (2004); Birai (1996); Gofwen (2004); Kukah 1993, Akinwunmi 2004; Davies 1995; Muhammad 2002). But while a discussion of religion in the general context of Nigerian politics would not be allowed to delay us here, its

specific role in party politics and electioneering processes deserves our comment.

According to Akinyele (2002:27) the most direct reference to religion in election matters was in February 1959 when one Gideon Urhobe, president of God's Kingdom society delivered a sermon titled, "Scriptural Commentary: Jesus, Mohammed and Zik" to an audience in Lagos. According to him, the preacher;

exalted Christ as the only saviour and denounce Mohammed as a false prophet. He then called on Nigerians to support Zik not only for his ability to change the country but also in order to bring God's kingdom to the people.

Expectedly, the statement generated public outcry and stiff condemnation from especially the Muslims with the colonial government warning editor of the paper that carried the sermon against libel.

In the second republic, religion also became prominent in party politics and electioneering processes. For instance, Kukah (1993:150) attributes victory of the NPN in the 1979 election to what he termed as 'high sense of political

ecumenism'. This strategy according to him involves fielding candidate for elections from among the dominant religious group in a particular constituency. Thus, the party was able to have a land slide victory across the country. Equally, the NPN was reported to have told its followers in some constituencies' prelude to the 1979 elections that the V for Victory sign of the UPN represent polytheism. Hence the adoption of one raised finger by the NPN to signify monotheism (Akinyele 2002:28). The above however is not to suggest that the NPN was the only party involved in the use of religious sentiments. Rather, all the five and later six political parties of that republic are culpable in one way or the other. At least, virtually all had their presidential candidates and running mates from different religious groups. This to a large extent is to gain solidarity on religious platform.

However in the third republic, it could be argued that religious controversy was defused to a large extent. This was partly because the constitutional requirements for nationally based parties compel some level of moderation from aspiring politicians.

Consequently, the initial manoeuvrings for partisan advantage within and between the NRC and the SDP reflected complex and shifting patterns of alignments that do not directly reinforce or revolve around the Christian Muslim divide (Suberu 1997:499).

It is therefore not a surprise that in spite of the SDP's nomination of Chief M.K.O Abiola and Babagana Kingibe (both outspoken Muslims) as the presidential flag bearer and running mate respectively, the party still enjoyed an overwhelming electoral support across Nigeria. In fact, as Akinterinwa (1999:289) notes, the SDP victory was national in scope. It was in two of the then 30 states, Sokoto and Kebbi, that the SDP fail to obtain one-third of the total votes required in two thirds of the states in order to be elected. However, while it is difficult to discern religious affiliation of either the NRC or SDP, there were still some insinuations from some quarters. For instance, the role of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the whole electioneering process was unprecedented at various levels. In fact, the association was reported to have organised special prayers for Chief Michael

Otedola, NRC governorship aspirant in Lagos state while priests and Christian students' organisations did extensive work for him as volunteer campaigners (Akinyele 2002:29; Birai 1996:32). In addition, CAN was reported to have sent a list comprising ten Christians from the north among whom they expect chief Abiola to pick his running mate from (Birai 1996:42). Eventually however, Abiola ended up choosing a Muslim running mate. Thus, in spite of the various insinuations, outcome of the third republic elections greatly downplayed the relevance of religion in the electoral process. All the same, the republic was made moribund by its own architect, General Babagida who annulled the presidential elections. The inability of the general to chart a direction out of the impasse led to his stepping aside in August 1993 after setting up an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Earnest Shonekan. Resignation of Shonekan saw the assumption of power by General Sani Abacha, who also instituted a transition to civil rule programme that saw the emergence of five political parties. Much of the occurrences of this period have been well documented

by Olurode (2004). What is however significant for our purpose here is that, the various occurrences climaxed by the death of Sani Abacha are what help set the stage for and shaped the trend of politics in the emergent fourth republic.

Religion and Party Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Party politics in Nigeria's fourth republic began in 1999 following inauguration of a transition programme mid-wifed by General Abdulsalami Abubakar who assumed power after the death of General Sani Abacha in 1998. It was the shortest transition period in the history of the country (Eleven Months) and this could be explained in the context of several build ups and political impasse that has been on since annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections. Thus party politics to usher in a new democratic project began in earnest with the registration of three political parties (PDP, ANPP and AD) in 1998. Although registration of the three parties is not devoid of some politicking and bending of rules, it was however based on their relative electoral performance (see, Yaqub 2004: 100-101; International

IDEA 2000: 135 136). What is however important for our discussion here is that, party politics in the 1999 electoral process was devoid of some of the usual sentiments that often characterized party elections in the country. For instance, religious sentiments were greatly down played or non existent. This is evident in the nomination of two known Christian candidates as the two presidential flag bearers for the elections. While the PDP has, Olusegun Obasanjo, the APP and AD jointly nominated Olu Falae. This development however may be hinged essentially on two factors namely (i) Nigerians are tired of military rule and as such not so disposed to whipping up such sentiments that is capable of derailing and delaying a transition to civil rule (ii). There is the necessity for power shift to the south. Given the geo-cultural composition of Nigeria therefore, it is not unlikely that a Southern candidate has higher probability of being a Christian. Thus, outcomes of the 1999 presidential election saw the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian from South West, as Nigeria's new civilian President.

Although religion was not a major consideration during the

election, it however became a major issue after inauguration of the government. The embers of religious controversy was stirred when in January 27, 2000, the Zamfara state government began implementation of the Sharia legal system in fulfilment of his electoral campaign promises. Shortly after, other states in the North follow thus sparking off an era of religious recriminations in the country between Christians and Muslims. The ensuing conflagration in several parts of the country, the utterances and views expressed, arguments and counter arguments from Nigerians including leaders of thought could be said to be what consequently constitute build ups towards another election scheduled for April 2003. For instance, while the controversy rages on, General Muhammadu Buhari, former military head of state who was later to be presidential flag bearer of ANPP was quoted to have urged Muslims to vote only for Muslim candidates in the next election (Akinyele, 2000:29). Also at the first national convention of the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria, he was reported to have openly and bluntly canvassed for Sharia through out the country in the following words:

I will continue to show openly and inside me, the total commitment to the Sharia movement that is sweeping all over Nigeria. God willing we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia legal system in the country.... What remains for Muslims in Nigeria is for them to redouble their efforts, educate Muslims on the need to promote the full implementation of Sharia law and there should be nothing to be afraid of (Thisday, August 21, 2001).

In spite of the General's later attempt to deny the bluntness of his assertions and justify Sharia within the precinct of constitutional provisions (see *Thisday* Interview, February 01, 2003), his statements continued to attract criticisms especially from the Christian folks with some pouring invectives on him (see, *Thisday*, August 28, 2001; September 9, 2001).

Little surprise therefore, that when it became obvious that Buhari would be running for the presidency under the banner of ANPP against the incumbent president Olusegun Obasanjo, religious undertone had been read into the presidential contest. For instance, while berating

Buhari's sentiments, Odutola (2002) writes that:

In as much as I do not believe that Babangida could ever atone for his rape of the Nigerian state, I believe firmly that Mubammadu Buhari would be adjudged well, but only if he retraces his steps back to the basic fundamentals of old Buhari and champion what endears many of us to the greatness in him.

In similar tone, Marahatha Christian Journal has this to say:

For millions of Nigerians, religion will play a prominent role in their choice of leaders... Muslim Christian rivalry is so intense that none of the 30 political parties in the country has managed to develop a firmly national support base. Muslims consider Obasanjo's ruling People Democratic Party (PDP) as a Christian party. The All Nigerian Peoples (ANPP) of his nearest rival, Mubammadu Bujari is considered by Christians to be a Muslim party.

Although it cannot emphatically be stated that the PDP and ANPP machineries are serving Christian Muslim interest as implicit in the statement above, the statements nonetheless represent a

predominant mood with respect to candidature of the two presidential flag bearers, vis-à-vis their religious affiliation. Nonetheless, this was the prevalent mood under which the presidential poll was conducted in April 19, 2003. The outcome of the presidential election is incisive enough to show the extent of religious influence.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Total Valid Votes in the 1999 and 2003 Presidential Elections by Geo-political Zones.

Zones	1999			2003			
	PDP	APP*	TOTAL	PDP	ANPP	OTHER PARTIES	TOTAL
South - South	76.39	23.61	100	91.97	4.83	3.20	100
South - East	69.98	30.02	100	69.45	5.56	24.99	100
South - West	22.30	77.70	100	88.71	3.44	7.85	100
North Central	70.05	29.95	100	57.87	28.48	13.65	100
North East	69.03	30.97	100	43.85	54.99	1.16	100
North West	62.34	37.66	100	30.38	68.17	1.45	100

*The APP which later changed name to ANPP shortly before 2003 elections had jointly nominated the same candidate with the AD for the 1999 presidential election.

Source: Computed from figures as released by INEC, Abuja.

The table above indicate party strength for the presidential election in each of the geo-political zones of the country. To the extent that the PDP was able to capture an overwhelming majority of votes in zones of the South (SS = 91.97, SE = 69.45 and SW = 88.71), we may contend to say that it goes a long way to reveal the extent of resentment which voters in these zones have against the ANPP flag bearer who before the elections have been variously labelled as 'an Arewa Irredentist, an Islamic Jihadist and a Sharia enforcer' (Ojameruaye 2003a and 2003b). Although the PDP was victorious in the previous election of 1999 which saw two Christians as presidential flag bearers of the then three parties, but when we juxtapose the figures/percentages of 1999 with 2003, one cannot rule out the influence of religion especially against the background of religious bickering that pitched the largely Christian dominated South against the predominantly Muslim North prelude to the elections.

Similarly, Muhammadu Buhari, the ANPP flag bearer was able to have an edge over his rival in the North East and North West geo-political zones. Of course some factor(s) that worked against him in the Southern

zones could be said to have aided his victory here. This is because most states in the two zones happens to be the ones at the fore front of campaign for the implementation of Sharia law in the country a sentiment which has become associated with Buhari. Again when compared with the 1999 elections (table above), one notices preference for a Muslim candidate in the trend of votes. However there is the North central zone where the PDP has the day (57.87 percent to ANPP's 28.48 percent). The reason for this is not unconnected with the fact that states in this region (also called the middle belt) harbour most of those considered to be Northern Christians. For most of the voters here therefore, a pro Sharia presidential candidate cannot be in their interest.

Although the South West has a roughly equivalent combination of Muslims and Christian, politics in this region especially at national level is governed by ethnicity rather than religion. This is more so in the 2003 elections especially against the background of alleged political marginalisation from the North. Religion thus paves way for ethnic consideration. For instance, to support this assertion, the South

west arm of National Council of Muslim Youth Organisation (NACOMYO) recently circulated a pamphlet where it accused president Obasanjo of marginalizing Muslims in his appointments.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the 2003 election represents a crucial one in Nigeria. First, unlike the 1999 election tele-guided by military, this is purely a civilian affair. Second, unlike the 1999 elections which reflects a kind of compromise among the various ethno-religious groups resulting in down-playing of religious sentiments, the 2003 election was preceded by a tense religious atmosphere and third, though not too significant, the presidential election was essentially a contest between two retired army generals. The outcomes therefore have ominous implications for the Nigerian state.

First, religious politics have implications for the legitimacy of the government in power. The point here is that, political elites in Nigeria see religion as a cheap platform of political mobilization. This coupled with the fact that religious groups in Nigeria often take glory from state

patronage of their activities, consequently gives the politicians good leverage in mobilizing religious supports. But the resultant effect however is that a government formed in this process enjoys a low degree of legitimacy. This is because, the party or religious group that fail in the bid to have its adherent capture power perceives the government so formed as not representative enough of its interests. This perhaps explains the dominant mood of the average northerner that the Obasanjo administration is essentially pursuing a Christian agenda. Similarly, Christians also view any attempt to criticise the administration or its policy as a ploy to bring down the government for the reason that it is led by a Christian. In other words, the religious background of the president and the religious cacophony prelude to the 2003 elections, have produced a situation where people view issues from a religious angle rather than objectively from the angle of politics. Antagonisms that greeted composition of the recently concluded National Political Reform Conference and several other issues attest to this assertion. Thus, as International IDEA (2000:

40) noted, when the state is perceived as serving some particularistic interests of one group, it begins to lose its legitimacy and authority.

Without fear of contradiction, we may assert that religious affinity of the president is considered more important among Nigerians than his personal abilities and policy orientation. Politics is thus still conceived as zero-sum game in terms of religious or other basis of affinity. Religious undertone of the 2003 presidential election therefore shows, to a large extent, the degree of politicisation of social life and the extent to which religious sentiment has eaten deep into the subliminal consciousness of Nigerians. It therefore nullifies the crystallising notion that Nigeria may gradually be transcending the borders of religious politics. This notion is against the backdrop of previous experiences in party politics such as 1993 aborted transition and the 1999 elections that ushered in the fourth republic in which ethno-religious issues were not really prominent. Whereas religion has been recognised to be a positive tool for development and progress (Suleiman 2004: 117; Ogunji, 2005),

the 2003 experience shows that for a long time to come its bastardization for political gains may remain an important influence in Nigeria politics.

Although the 2003 elections has been adjudged as the most successful civilian to civilian transition programme in Nigeria, the rise of religious considerations raised questions bothering on the ability of the state to conduct credible civilian to civilian election that is devoid of ethnic and/ or religious sentiments. This assertion derives from the fact that previous civilian to civilian transitions (1966 and 1983) have been characterised by emotive sentiments whereas the only two periods when such were greatly down played were under military guided transitions (truncated 1992/93 and 1999 transitions). While explanation for this may not necessarily be embarked on here, it nonetheless shows enormity of challenges which such emotive sentiments pose to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. There is therefore, need for the government of whatever religious inclination to grapple with reality of the country's multi-cultural environment in the process of public policy formulation and

implementation in order to ensure an enduring democracy in Nigeria.

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