



Reexamining the Causes and Implications of Religious Intolerance on Social and Political Development in Nigeria

¹Olaofe, M.A (Ph. D), ²ISHAQ, Rabilu Nuhu

¹Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja, Abuja-Nigeria

¹musa.olaofe@uniabuja.edu.ng, +234 803 320 6483, ²ishaqrabil760@gmail.com, +2348032674585

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.5.0624.1410>

ABSTRACT

Religion is a platform of peaceful co-existence, but when religious beliefs are paired with religious intolerance and people act on that intolerance, religion can take a turn towards violence and destruction of lives and properties. This research has examined and discussed the causes and implications of religious intolerance on social and political development in Nigeria. The research employed qualitative survey method where physical interview is used as the primary sources for data. The findings revealed that there is high level of religious intolerance in Nigeria. The research identified the major factors responsible for the causes of religious intolerance such as poverty and unemployment, tribalism and corruption and lack of good preaching methodology. It also examined the implications of religious intolerance on security, economic growth, social and political stability. It submits that religious intolerance had affected social and political development in Nigeria. It led to insecurity, hardship, crises, hostility and enmity among the adherents of Islam and Christianity in the country. The research recommends that scholars of Islam and Christianity in the country should adopt a good preaching method demonstrated in the real teachings of their scriptures.

Keywords: Religion, Religious Intolerance, Causes, Implications, Crises, Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. As a result, it has suffered many crises right from its amalgamation in 1914 and its independent in 1960 as a result of religious intolerance among its citizens which led to war, insecurity and loss of lives and properties. Religion that is meant to be the platform for peace, stability, development, unity and justice has apparently been used by many to disrupt the well-being of people and the society (Oluwasegun 291). Referring to a country's ability to protect itself from foreign threat or attack, national security is tied closely to national stability. Within that, there is need for religious tolerance among the followers of various faiths. National stability occurs when there is security in a country and without tolerance among the citizens there is no peace, security, stability and development for any country. National stability includes law and order in all sectors of a national institution. For instance, in order to be stable, a country's economic sector must be stable. Moreover, the country must also have political stability, but political stability may be considered a harder issue to address seeing that it deals with human interaction and choices, unlike economic stability which can be addressed always directly (Mariana 1).

Intolerance is the failure to accept views and practices that differs from one person's own. In other words, intolerance is incapability of someone to accommodate other people with their own practices and belief system. Thus, it is inability to handle the words and manners or any type of conduct that is different from oneself. Therefore, in order to have a social and political development in every Nigeria, there is need for religious tolerance and understanding among the adherents of religions. Islam encouraged religious tolerance and discouraged or rejected the concept of inter-faith or harmonized rituals and practices; because you cannot be a Muslim-Christian or Christian-Muslim at the same time. You can only choose where to belong (Muslim or Christian) and everyone is entitled to his religion's belief and will be held responsible for his deeds in the hereafter (Riya 2).

In the Noble Qur'an Allah the Almighty command Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to tell the world that Islam is the religion that he was permitted to embrace and the religion of other people belongs to them and none of them to worship what others are worshipping. This is an interesting fact about Islam because Islam does not force anyone to become Muslim. The fact remains that when somebody was forced in a matter of religion to embrace it out of his will may not be comfortable with that religion, but if it is for his own will he can practice it willingly. That is why Islam allows everyone to practice the religion of his choice without any intimidation. Thus, the verse states:

“...You shall have your religion and I shall have my religion” (Qur'an; 109:6).

Tolerance is the power that is present in our behavior on how we react to something which is quite not acceptable to us as demonstrated in the above verse. If someone says or do something and we dislike because it is different from what we wants or embraced that is intolerance. A person who has the ability to tolerate things which are against his understanding can be regarded as having a will power of tolerance (Riya 2).

Religious intolerance is connected with religious crises which as a result people lose their lives and properties. Nuzhat (15) states that colonial masters played a significance role in creating religious intolerance in Nigeria which fuels the growth of ethno-religious conflicts in the country. These colonial masters brought western culture in the system of Nigerian government, divided the country into regions and introduced their language as national language. This is the major problem that Nigeria is witnessing till date. The British also used their perspective to exploit the traditional culture of Nigerian people and use divide and rule policy to sow the seed of conflicts on the basis of religious, tribes and politics among the citizens. Another illicit achievement on the part of British people was the successful division of North and South parts of the country on the basis of ethnic groups, and this was done under the name of native right ordinance in 1910.

Religious conflict is a child born of religious intolerance among the adherents of different faiths. It is a term that has been variously defined by scholars of different field. These definitions are diverse, but all conveyed a single meaning of disagreement between two or more religious groups. This is a situation in which religious adherents are involved in a serious disagreement or argument with one another; this is a situation in which there are opposition in ideas, opinions, feelings and practices (Ushe 118).

Various provisions emphasized on good human relations and justice in the Noble Qur'an; doing what is good, rendering the trust to who is due as well as loving and tolerating one another. For example, Allah commands that human beings should render back the trust to who is deserved and judge between people with justice:

"Allah commands you to render back your trusts to those whom they are due; and when you judge between man and man that you judge with justice; verily, how excellent is the teaching which He gives you. Allah is He who hears and sees all things" (Qur'an; 4:58).

The principle of adl (justice) demands that human beings should not in any way associate themselves with any form of injustice, neither be unjust to people on the basis of their religion, tribe, color or regional affiliation even if it is against their enemy (Musa and Ismail 15). This means that justice apply to everybody without discrimination even for one's enemy, and everyone is commanded to do justice and avoid injustice and evil acts. It is stated in a verse from the Noble Qur'an that:

"Allah the Almighty enjoins doing of justice and ihsan (good) to others, and he forbids indecency, evil and rebellion. He admonishes you that you may be mindful" (Qur'an; 16:90).

Base on the provisions of the above verses, one would therefore understand that religion's sources are strength for fostering good human relations, justice and fairness. Unfortunately, Nigeria records several crises of religious conflict as a result of intolerance among the adherents, there are many factors generating religious conflict which affected the social and political development in the country. Among these factors are lack of religious education, lack of good preaching method, tribalism, politics and poor religious orientation. As a result, adherents of religions do not understand their religion from their divine scriptures, and religious leaders do not attempt to learn the religion very well before speaking to the public on religious matters; and do not give a good advice to the political leaders as far they have satisfied with their needs. Some of them engaged in so many criminal acts and become agents of instability in their various communities. The political authorities and traditional rulers do not consult intellectuals and experienced persons with sound Islamic knowledge in matters of religion and do not pay attention to religion unless it touches their political interest.

Religious intolerance means when a group of people in the society refuses or denies tolerating the practice, belief or idea of others based on their sentiment and religious bigotry; and it is also when a group of people in a religion neglects or criticizes other religion's practice. Religious intolerance is an act of denying the right of people of another faith to practice and express their beliefs freely. It simply means lack of accommodating other people and discriminating them based on religious sentiment (Riya 3).

Conceptual Framework

Religion has no single universally accepted definition, it is a controversial and complicated subject matter to define religion in a religious studies. Scholars failed to accept or agree on a single definition of religion. Social thinkers such as Daniel Dubuisson have doubted if the term religion has any meaning outside of western cultures. Ernst Feil equally has doubt if religion has any specific or universal meaning. Religion is a modern western concept, and there is no equivalent term for religion in many languages (Josephson 256). Therefore, scholars have found it difficult to develop a consistent definition to religion. With this difficulty, some have given up on the possibility of defining religion while others argue that regardless of its definition, it is not appropriate to apply it to non-western culture. Despite the fact that scholars have failed to agree on a single definition of religion, there are two general concepts that are more acceptable to define religion, and these are the sociological concept and the philosophical concept (Josephson 257).

Durkheim (40), who is a sociologist defines religion as; "unified system of belief and practice related to sacred things". From his definition, it is understood that religion is to believe or attach oneself to a system which requires practice. Thus, from the definition also, religion is a platform for peace and unity which unites people into one single moral community. Max Lynn Stackhouse (9), defined religion as:

A comprehensive worldview or metaphysical moral vision that was accepted as binding because it is held to be in itself basically true and just, even if all dimensions of it cannot be either fully confirmed or refuted.

Perhaps, religion has been variously defined by scholars of different fields and these definitions provide different meaning for the term religion, and other definitions make an attempt in providing a specific or a single description of the word religion. In view of other scholars, religion is a set of beliefs, submission, feelings and practices that define the relationship between human being and sacred or divinity (Olabimtan 324). A religion is also being defined by a specific element or its symbol such as moon, dogmas, sacred things, star and cross or a belief in spiritual beings (Tylor 424).

The term “religion” has its roots in Latin, specifically in the words *Ligare*, *Relegere*, and *Religio*. These words respectively connote the concepts of binding, uniting or linking, and relationship. The aforementioned definitions of the term “Religion” indicate that it primarily denotes a connection or bond that is formed between humanity and a divine entity. This concept pertains to the connection or cohesion between humanity and the perceived divine entity that is deemed worthy of veneration. The concept of religion has been formulated as an established and unchanging connection between humanity and a transcendent entity, commonly referred to as the sacred or supernatural being, (Chikodi 27).

Characteristics and Similarities in Religions

Scholars of religion have outlined some standards characteristics and similarities that connect religions together, and these characteristics are applicable to all religions either directly or indirectly. It is difficult to find a religion that does not practice one or two of these characteristics. According to Ishaq and Yusuf (91), these characteristics and similarities of religion include: Believe in a Supreme Being, Sacred Objects, Ritual Acts, Moral Code, Religious Feelings, Prayers and Other Forms of Communication to God, Social Groups, Ceremonies, Existing of Evil, Reward and Punishment, Various Teachings, Prophets and Prophecy, Medication and Healing, Respect for Parents and Believe in Life after Death.

Religion in Islamic Perspective

Islamic scholars have undertaken an examination of the term “religion” and have delved into the notion of religion as it pertains to the Qur’an and the Islamic system of beliefs. Religion is a sacred decree that empowers individuals with intellect to achieve benevolence and felicity in both the present life and the afterlife, in accordance with their volition (Fatima 4).

The salient feature of the aforementioned definition is that each term included therein bears significant import, and every aspect of the definition is crucial in providing guidance for the management of one’s religious beliefs. The definition comprises of several key expressions, namely individuals possessing intellectual capacity, individuals with autonomous volition, religion serving as a fount of well-being and joy, and religion being a divine decree. According to Islamic perspective, the sole religion accepted by Allah is Islam, which entails submission to the will of Allah. This religion has been acknowledged by Allah, and even those who have been given the book did not express any opposition except out of envy among themselves. Allah says in the Noble Qur’an:

“Surely, the true religion with Allah is Islam, and those to whom the book had been given did not show opposition but after knowledge had come to them out of envy among themselves; and whoever disbelieves in the communications of Allah then surely Allah is quick in reckoning” (Qur’an; 3:19).

Religion of Islam discusses not only afterlife, but also worldly life with goodness and happiness as well, unlike other religions that only promise either worldly or heavenly happiness. Islam gives importance and significance attention to peace, which is the absence of war, conflict, intolerance and happiness in this world and in the hereafter. It shows that this as a goal which can only be achieved by those who have sincere believe and practice the religion of Allah (Jibrin 33). Religion as a divine law, consequently if the rules, beliefs and practices adopted as a religion by people are not based on divine revelation that comes from the Almighty Allah, it will not be accepted from them. Accordingly, only the system of worship sent down by the Almighty Allah via Prophets is the true religion that will be absolutely accepted by Him. Therefore, any other things that are not from Allah will absolutely be rejected. Allah says:

“And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers” (Qur’an; 3:85).

From the above verse, it is clear understood that man bowing down to man or any other object has been prevented and does not be accepted as religion. So only Islam was regarded as religion by Allah, and Islam does not show any discrimination. This has been established in the Noble Qur’an that all people are one and equal before the Almighty, superiority lies only in piety. Allah says:

“O you people! Surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware” (Qur’an; 49:13).

The above verse explained how people would interact with one another in this world. It indicates that religion of Islam is about Iman (piety). From the definition of Islam made by the Islamic scholars, we understand that Islam is submission, and once you have submitted yourself to Almighty Allah, religion’s principles must be implemented in your life. Our weakness as humans will be taken into consideration at divine judgment by Allah. Religion is not just an idea to present or words to say, rather it is a believe system and practice whose results are to be seen in every aspect of our life in a positive ways. As a result, religion is the general name for the law, order and the right path (Chikodi 28).

Major Factors Responsible for the Causes of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria

Jegede (149), in his paper “Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria” submitted that the root cause of religious intolerance in every part of Nigeria is attributed to colonial masters who saw the seed of tribalism and regional sentiments in the hearts of Nigerians since its amalgamation in 1914 and its independent in 1960 respectively.

Based on the findings of this research, people (respondents) who were physically interviewed indicated their opinions on the major causes of religious intolerance in the country. 18 respondents representing 18.3% stated that poverty and unemployment is one of the major causes of religious intolerance

in Nigeria. 25 representing 25.5% respondents agreed that the major causes of religious intolerance among the people of Nigeria are ignorance and selfishness. However, 20 respondents representing 20.4% respondents shows that religion and political differences is the major cause of intolerance between the adherents of the two major religions practice in the country (Islam and Christianity), while a lower number of 10 respondents representing 10.2% have a view that corruption and tribalism are the major causes of religious intolerance. 25 respondents representing 25.5% have testified that lack of good preaching methodology among scholars is one the major causes of religious intolerance in the country.

From the findings and analysis of the research, the following were outlined as the major factors responsible for the causes of religious intolerance in Nigeria:

1. **Poverty and Unemployment:** This is one of the major causes of religious intolerance in Nigeria. People are poor which as a result of unemployment and the poor condition led some people have a bad intention to others because they always sit at home or in various streets doing nothing. These habits are usually around the youths of 18-30 years. Therefore, poverty is a disease that can cause hatred, hostility and enmity between people in the society generally. This is to say that the influence of poverty in the life of human beings can make them to do otherwise and misbehave which may lead them to violence and killings.
2. **Ignorance and Selfishness:** The research reveals that ignorance and selfishness are among the major cause of religious intolerance in Nigeria. 25 respondents presenting 25.5% agreed with that submission. As a result, people are so quick to speak on a religious matter to support their argument without considering the outcomes of their words or having a scriptural evidence available to back up their words. This led to the extent that some people are judging Islam with the activities of some Muslims, and judging Christianity with the activities of some Christians without knowing what is in the scriptures of these religions. If you go through the scriptures of these religions and study them very well you may understand the reality from the established words of the Almighty. But if the person speaking on that matter of religion is knowledgeable and fully aware of the cleared message from the religious scriptures and still hide the truth and followed his heart desires that is sentiment and selfishness. According to Imam Hassan and Pastor Rufus in an interview, they states that if scholars from both religions would preach the real words of Almighty that are in the Qur'an and Bible and the followers embrace those teachings there would no be room for religious intolerance.
3. **Tribalism and Corruption:** Based on the findings of the research, 10 respondents representing 10.2% agreed that tribalism and corruption are among the major causes of religious intolerance in Nigeria. This is because the country comprises of different religions and tribes. As a result, people were unjust to other tribe or religion which led to the creation of religious intolerance among the adherents of different faiths, Islam and Christianity precisely.
4. **Religious and Political Differences:** Religious and political differences are among the major causes of religious intolerance in Nigeria. According to the findings of the research, 20.4% respondents agreed that differences that exist in religions and politics were also involved in the forefront for the causes and fueling of religious intolerance between the adherents of the two major religions practice in the country. It is believe that the differences which exist in the two religions contributed to the rise of intolerance because some of the adherents of these religions, some of them have no knowledge about the teachings of their scriptures or their sentiment prevent them from seeing the truth about the goodness of other people's religion and practices. They failed to accommodate and respect others who are not in their way, in other word people who are not practicing the same religion with them.
5. **Preaching Methodology:** The research reveals that poor level of religious knowledge, and lack of good preaching method amongst scholars of Islam and Christianity is one of the major factors responsible for the causes of religious intolerance in Nigeria. 25.5% respondents said that the preaching methods used by some preachers from both Islam and Christianity need to be adjusted. Many people who are preaching today have a little bit knowledge about the religion or don't even have the knowledge completely. Others have the knowledge but lack the method and wisdom of preaching. Pastor Rufus Idowu Timothy said: "I strongly believe that there is lack of love and preaching methodology among the scholars of both Muslims and Christians. Some Pastors and Imams are biased, and they are not following the real teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible. Also there is ignorance, because many preachers are not well educated religiously. As a result, some pastors and imams are promoting religious intolerance in their preaching out of ignorance and lack of methodology".

During an interview with Adamu Haruna he said: "Many preachers today are preaching hate and violence, most especially during election period. As a result, religious intolerance is getting to the high level in Nigeria. It is believe that lack of knowledge and wisdom in preaching methodology by some preachers or leaders contributed a lot to the rise of religious intolerance between the followers of Islam and Christianity in the country. For example, during the last 2023 Presidential election, majority of Islamic scholars were campaigning for APC candidate (Bola Ahmed Tinubu), who is a Muslim from the southwestern part of the country. While majority of Christian scholars were campaigning for Labour Party's candidate (Mr. Peter Obi), who is a Christian from the southeastern part of the country. So this is a good example of religious intolerance in Nigeria".

Another interview was conducted with Okologo Emmanuel who said: "I believe that when there is enough religious orientation programs, it will help our pastors and Imams to preach the right teachings in our mosques and churches respectively". His statement indicates that there is need for some scholars (Muslims and Christians) to adjust their preaching methodology.

Malam Hassan Hussain (Imam Jumu'ah Masjid in Masaka, Karu local government of Nasarawa State), said: "Mostly, what lead scholars to preach intolerance to their followers is lack of methodology on how to conduct their admonition. This is one of the major problems among the scholars today both Muslims and Christians; and the reason why some scholars are doing so is because they understand that when a leader is a Muslim he concern more about Muslims; equally, Christian leaders' are more concern about Christians. As a result, scholars and religious leaders are not being fair to both parties

in their speeches and preaching. They both lack good methodology of preaching which as a result, the level of religious intolerance is becoming high in every day life in the country”.

Implications of Religious Intolerance on Social and Political Development in Nigeria

In every country in the world, if there is no adequate security to protect the lives and properties of the citizens, the economy of that country will be absolutely affected negatively. In another word, every country that found itself in a religious or political crises and violence, the economy of that country will collapse. Respondents representing 53% stated that the following are the most implications of religious intolerance on social and political development in Nigeria:

1. **Hardship Condition:** The major implication on security and economic growth is the hardship condition that people might found themselves in as a result of religious disputes. Respondents presenting 53% agreed that the major implication of religious intolerance on social and political stability is the hardship condition which occurs as a result of crises and social instability.
2. **Destruction of Lives and Properties:** Another implication of religious intolerance is the cause of serious disputes between the adherents which sometimes led to the destruction of lives and properties. It is believe that if people failed to accommodate and respect one another, there will be crises among them and if people turn into religious crises, lives and properties will be destroyed. In this aspect, respondents presenting 25.5% agreed with this submission that destruction of lives and properties is one of the implications of religious intolerance in Nigeria.
3. **Prevention of Social Activities:** It is believed that crises prevent people to do their normal activities. Thus, prevention of social activities is one of the implications of religious intolerance on social and political development in Nigeria. Respondents representing 4.5% are agreed upon this. Because when there is violence people will not be comfortable to go to their social activities out of anxiety and fair on not knowing what they can found themselves in when they opened their business.
4. **Living in Fear and Anxiety:** Religious intolerance that associated with conflicts makes people to live in anxiety and fear. If the environment is not safe and secure, people within that particular place would always have no rest of mind. They will be there out of anxiety thinking about what would happen with them. Based on the research findings, respondents representing 17% are on the opinion that when there is no adequate security to protect the lives and properties of people, they will remains in fear and anxiety.

Conclusion

Religious intolerance affected the social and political development of Nigeria. It led to insecurity, hardship, religious and political crises, hostility and enmity among the adherents of Islam and Christianity in the country. This research reveals that many scholars in the country are promoting religious intolerance due to the lack of good preaching method in their da'awah (admonition) activities. As a result, the adherents neglected the real teachings of their scriptures, despite the fact that these scriptures of the two major religions practice in the country (Islam and Christianity) teaches love, tolerance and respect for one another. It shows that ignorance and selfishness led some scholars deviated from the good preaching method taught in the Noble Qur'an and the Bible. Religious intolerance also brought hatred and disunity among the Muslims and Christians in the country. Although these challenges are still not out of control if all stakeholders join hands together and work in synergy.

Recommendations

The research made the following recommendations:

1. Scholars in the country should adopt a good preaching method demonstrated in the real teachings of their scriptures.
2. Nigerian government should create a legal body to monitor and checkmate the activities of preachers in order to restore and maintain peaceful-coexistence among their followers.
3. Federal government should create a ministry of religious affairs with different departments, such as dialogue and orientation, integration and development, quality, policy and strategy among others.

Works Cited

- Abdullahi, Y.A. Roman Transliteration of the Holy Qur'an with full Arabic text and English Translation Lahore, 4th April, 1934. Print.
- AbdulQadir, S.M. Islamic Perspective of Religious Tolerance Base on Tafsir Bir-Ra'y. Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Religions, vol. 3, 2015
- AbdurRahman Ibn Nasir As-Sa'adi, Taiseerul-Kareemur-Rahman Fi TafseeruKalamul-Mannan (Arabic text), Daru Ibn Haisami, Jamhureeyatu Misrah al-Qahirah, 1430/2010. Print.
- Chikodi, J.W. Religion and Religious Organizations Initiatives Through the Decades of Nigerian Independence Towards Nation Building. Journal of University Scholars in Religions (JUSREL), Issue 10, vol. 1, 2022. Print.

- Ishaq R.N, Yusuf M.P. Tolerance and Understanding in Multi-Religious Society for National Security and Development: Islam and Christianity Perspectives. *Journal of University Scholars in Religions (JUSREL)*, Issue 10, vol. 1, 2022. P. 91. Print.
- Jibrin, Ubale Yahya. Dynamics of Religious conflicts and its peaceful resolution in Nigeria: Islamic Perspective. *Journal of University Scholars in Religions (JUSREL)*, Issue 10, vol. 2, 2022. P. 33. Print.
- Mariana, Colmenares. Research Report: National Assembly First Committee Issue. "The question of threats to national stability caused by religious intolerance". The Hague International Model United Nations, 26th – 31st January, 2020. P. 1. Print
- Nuzhat, Fatima. Religious Conflicts in Nigeria and their Impacts on Social Life. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* vol. 2, no. 4: Published by European Center for Research Training and Development UK, June 2014. Pp. 9-15. Print.
- Olabimtan, Oladele E. Apuwabi. The Effects of Religious Crisis on Economic Development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(6), ISSN 2222-6990, 2018. P. 324. Print.
- Oluwasegun, Peter Aluko. Tolerance in Multi-Religious Society for National Security: The Nigerian Experience. *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies* vol. 13, 2017. P. 291. Print.
- Riya, Mishra. Intolerance-Everything from religion and art of personal choices. Coleman and Co. Ltd, 18th September, 2019
- Taylor, E.B. Primitive culture: A research into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art and custom. Vol. 1, John Murray London, 1871. Web. 1st September, 2022. Web.
- Ushe, Mike Ushe. Religious Conflicts and Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Security. *Journal of Education and Practice: ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online)*, vol. 6, no. 2 (www.iiste.org) 2015. P. 118. Print.