

# **RELIGION, POLITICS AND 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nigerians have been observed to be more loyal to religion than the state. This is manifested in the growing trend of religiosity, the phenomenal rise in the number of worship centres and influential clergies in Nigeria today. The interdependence of Religion and Politics as social dynamics in fostering the development of Nigeria has become quite a concern across the nation. Nigeria is a highly heterogeneous nation with diversity in terms of multi-tribal, cultural, religious and political spheres. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze the extent to which politicization of religion had affected the political development of Nigeria as a whole and Northern Nigeria in particular. The study made use of primary and secondary sources of data. The data obtained through questionnaire was analysed by descriptive statistics presented in tables and frequency distribution simple percentages. Data on the result of the 2015 presidential election was also obtained from INEC office to buttress our point. The study reveals remote and immediate causes of religious politics included the hunger for power, wealth and independent religious sentiments. To de-emphasize religious politics, the country should de-emphasize religion. Tribe and state of origin should be excluded in the filling of forms for both public and private organisations. Appointments and employments into these organisations should be based on merit and competency.

## **INTRODUCTION**

There is an incontrovertible connection between religion and politics. While the actual role that religion plays in politics has remained debatable, the nexus between the two concepts has been established for long. In Nigeria, Religion does not make people good or bad. On the contrary, it is being used as an instrument of oppression and deceit. It appears that Nigerians have resigned themselves to fate and this is possibly further compounded by poverty, illiteracy, and lack of political education on the part of majority. This position is further aggravated by the general view that politics is a dirty game and that only people who can manipulate, deceive and accumulate wealth in greediness are meant to participate in it (Egbewole and Etudaiye, 2011). The number of religious people in Nigeria count into million, yet the level of destruction of lives and properties, crimes and insecurity committed in God's name is overwhelming. This is against the original intent of the founder of religion, or God himself.

The need for political stability in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. A major variable in the Nigerian polity is the relationship between religion and politics which some consider as inseparable, while some support the notion of the separation of religion from politics, so that the former will not imbibe the corruption inherent in the latter. Generally speaking, there is a

common fallacy that religion and politics are two different fields of social activity.

All over the country, religion plays an important role in the daily lives of people; our choice of dressing, food, and politics and even the way we interact with one other are mostly affected by religion. In other words, politics and religion are intertwined and it empowers man to function in his society by contesting for a political position so as to contribute his ideology. Nigeria's population of over 150 million is divided nearly equally between Christians and Muslims. The importance and as well as evidence of this division has been proven during the Nigerian 2015 General Elections, and is well illustrated by the fact that religion, (though not nationality or in all cases) is the way in which most Nigerians chooses to identify themselves. Thus, the domains of religion, secularism and politics are becoming increasingly intermingled in both overt and covert ways. Invariably, sectarian politics is inherently problematic (Tar and Shettima, 2010). Thus, there is a need to look at the effects of religion on politics in Nigeria since independence. In addition, the study intends to find out how religion can bring sustainable development to our politics. It concludes by agitating for religious tolerance and reorientation.

In a survey conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 2004,

Nigeria stood out as the only country where 100 % of the participants said they believe in God. The result of the survey held in 10 countries (US, UK, Israel, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Nigeria, Mexico and Lebanon) also showed a country like South Korea with just about 7 % of its population declaring that they believe in God. In the same survey Nigeria also stood out as the only country where more than 90 % of her population s are willing to die for their religious convictions. More than 91 % of the people interviewed said they regularly attend religious services while 95 % of them said they pray regularly (Akanmode, 2015).

Politics on the other hand does not have a common definition. Politics is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. As such, it is an essentially social activity, inextricably linked on the one hand to the existence of diversity and conflict, and on the other, to a willingness to cooperate and act collectively. Politics involves ideology, includes criticism (opinion); it requires the public and the state which made up of individuals (Dzurgba, 2008). It is about the acquisition of power and the use of such power. Onyekpe (1998) defines it as: “The struggle for power which itself is the authority to determine or formulate and execute decisions and policies, which must be accepted by the society... it is the struggle for power of governance, especially executive

authority”.

Political scientists believe that man is a political animal, that is, man cannot do without politics as well as religion in his everyday life. Therefore, since we make use of each of them in our daily activities, we tend to politicize religion and *religionize* politics. Thus, Nigerian politics is characterized chiefly by “politicization of religion and religionization of politics” (Adogame, 2006). Mixing the two together makes religion to lose its sanctity and politics to become dirtier. This reality is manifested in the nature of Nigeria's postcolonial state system. For instance, after Nigeria's independence in 1960, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the premier of Northern Nigeria, embarked on an “official” campaign to “Islamize” the north and eventually spread Islam to other regions. This drive generated, particularly among the Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religions (ATRs), the fear of looming religious extinction.

It has been observed that politicians openly espouse religious sectarian sentiments in campaigning for public support. That is why (Kukah, 1993) observed “no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious”. Invariably, religion goes hand-in-hand with politics, and it will be difficult to hold a public office without hold on religion. For this reason, the dominant religious groups; Islam and

Christianity have been locked in a fierce battle for the political control of the country (Bujra, 2006).

The manipulation of religion by some powerful individuals who hide under the guise of religion to pursue selfish interests, and greediness of some religious leaders who patronize corrupt rulers remains part of the negative effects of religion on the polity. Greed has crept into the religious terrain to the extent that some religious leaders now patronize corrupt rulers to meet their lust for money and other material gains. Efforts by Nigerian politicians to gain ascendancy and power have led to situation in which politics have swept away sacred precepts of religion, and in the process, contaminated the hearts of people with bitterness and enmity for the religion of others. Hence, (Falana, 2010) quotes Bala Usman who says that:

“The real basis of the manipulation of religion in Nigeria today is the need to obscure from the people of Nigeria, a fundamental aspect of our reality; that is the domination of our political economy by a class of intermediaries who are being increasingly exposed. And this is to enable this class to cover themselves with religious and ethnic disguises in order to further entrench division among

our people, slow down their awakening at any cost; even the unity of our country for which so much has been sacrificed”.

On the other hand, the positive effect of religion on politics has brought about the reinvigoration of Christian reawakening to politics. In the 1999 elections, Pentecostal Christians openly supported Obasanjo's candidature under the banner of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), viewing him as a symbol of the restoration of Christian control over the government of Nigeria and of the “ending of Muslim political dominance” (Ojo, 2004). Obasanjo's government, like all other was faced with several problems, but he has proven himself to be an outstanding administrator and only during his time, Nigeria as a country had witnessed what many considered as 'the beginning of true democratic regime'. After Obasanjo was elected president, Pentecostal leaders conducted an all-night prayer meeting for him. This gesture was politically endorsed and rewarded with the construction of a chapel in the Presidential Villa, the seat of national politics. Obasanjo's victory at the polls and his eventual swearing-in as president on 29th May, 1999 was heavily steeped in Christian Pentecostal symbolism. A drama that was spectacularly replayed in subsequent elections testifies to this:

After the completion of two four-

year terms and the abortive third term by President Olusegun Obasanjo, political leaders began talking of alternating the Presidency between the largely Christian South and predominately Muslim North. All of the country's major political parties chose Muslims as their candidates and after the controversial election; Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua emerged as the President.

(Eso, 2003) notes some incontrovertible facts to our religion-in-politics dilemma. According to him,

“Religion has a place in the lives of every nation, Nigeria included. Irrespective of the faith or denomination, religion when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit, has been and remains sacred. It plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, community building, social justice, law and order, peacemaking, reconciliation, forgiveness and the healing of wounds, be it political, family or personal”.

This means that if people truly make use of beliefs, values and attitudes inherent in religion into politics, it will bring about focused and resolute political leaders in the country who will be devoid of

sanctimonious hypocritical attitude. It will also help in bringing about fair play into politics. The character of Nigerian Muslims who adopted a religious provision to pursue sanctification, in 2015, yet again justified Eso's claims, a replica of the event of voting President Obasanjo into power in 1999 was repeated. This time, the resilient Muslims of the North conducted a three (3) days Tahajjud (special night prayer) all over the country, by order of Jama'atul Izalatul Bidi'a Wa Ikamatus Sunnah (JIBWIS) with the objective that (i) the elections be conducted free and fair, (ii) that their candidate Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, who is seen as a disciplined personality with zero tolerance for corruption emerge victorious, (iii) that the outcome of the result should not lead to yet another conflict and (iv) whoever emerges victor, let the loser accept defeat. It is commonly and generally believed in Islam that whosoever stands for Tahajjud with the correct and sincere intentions', and then the person will not leave his place of worship except that Allah has accepted his prayer, granted him his wish and forgive him his sins. (Al Bukhari Vol 2 Hadith No. 221-228). It was not surprising to the Muslims when the sitting President, who was also the Presidential aspirant of the Peoples' Democratic Party, called to congratulate Gen. Muhammadu Buhari of APC even before the official declaration of results by the Electoral body.

## CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS POLITICS

### Question 1: What could be the cause of religious politics?

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by what could be the Cause of Religious Politics**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Money/position	48	27
To make Heaven	30	17
To earn more support	68	38
Others	27	15
Don't know	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Work, 2015

Table 1 above shows the causes of religious politics in Nigeria. While 48 of the respondents who are representing 27% attributed the cause to higher taste for money and other things (such as political appointment) by religious clerics as well as aspirants, 30 respondents that are representing 17% said it is caused by religious idiosyncrasy and beliefs. In the Holy Qur'an, for example, the Muslims are instructed to entrust and cast their votes to a believer (Muslims) when contesting against an unbeliever (someone who is not a Muslim), however, the literal meaning of this commandment requires proper interpretation than the ordinary meaning. The attempt to obey God's commandments makes it possible for need to make heaven to be a strong cause of religious politicization. 68 respondents representing 38% agreed that it is the desire and aspiration to earn more popular support that aspirant of various political offices consult to religion

in other to gain unfair advantage. Religion is the simplest means of manipulating the hearts and minds of people from equal believe; it has the power to motivate the highest level of sentiments. 27 respondents, representing 15% feels that there are other reasons beyond the above explained, these factors include favoritism and tribalism and 6 respondents, representing 3% really don't know the cause's of religious politics.

This however facilitates a better understanding of the fact that politicization of religion is therefore caused by the pursuit of earning more support to remove a bad representative or appoint a credible one, to gain popular support by the masses of equal religion, to protect and avoid the possibility of making unwanted or unfair political policies that contradicts the religious morale of a people living in a particular community among others are the remote

causes of politicizing religion rather than the need of money/position or even other reasons. The need to make heaven is solely

an independent aim of a person, aspirant or supporter.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by consideration when voting.**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Religion	34	19
Credibility	141	79
Others	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2015**

Table 2 shows that 34 of the respondents representing 19% consider religion as criteria for voting a representative into political office. This however did not categorize them bigots or fanatics, what they really consider are the level of one's personal religious commitment and sincerity. These respondents believed no religion encourage immorality, they measure one's level of faith and trust him to be their representative whether they are of the same religion or not, they consider an aspirant so long as he/she posses certain religious discipline, they believe all other necessary features should be found in

religious motivated personality. 141 of the respondent representing 79% consider and endorse an aspirant by the credibility of such an aspirant since credibility is necessary for good representation and nation building. While just 4 respondents representing 2% consider other reasons not mentioned above when voting their representatives.

This however connotes or means that the bulk of the majority of the respondents consider credibility as the necessary criteria for electing someone into political office.

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondent by the likeliness of considering someone of equal religion when voting.**

COMMENTS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	106	59
No	73	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2015**

Table 3 above shows the percentage distribution of respondents by their likeliness of considering someone of their religion when voting into political office. While we see in the previous table that 141 of the respondents representing 79% of the research population, a population above 2/3 majority of the population of this research holds that “Credibility” is the necessary criteria for them to give their mandate to a political office aspirant, here we see that 106 of the respondents representing 59% would actually consider and prefer someone of their religion when contesting for similar political position against someone from an alien religious group. 73 of the respondent who are representing 41% however said the differences in religion would not affect their decision in political (voting) arena.

The above two tables (2 & 3) has given us

to understand and conclude about how fast people are involving religion into politics, for example, in table 2, we have a population of 34 respondents representing just 19% who are concerned with Religion as their necessary criteria for given their political mandate, then we witnessed in the second table a drastic improvement from 34 respondents who are representing just 19% to 106 respondents representing 59%.

This helps to understand that religion is hurriedly moving to affect the behavior of people in political decisions. It may not be the cause of all civil unrest and civil commotion in Northern Nigeria, but this research has (again) given us to understand that if politicization of religion is not controlled, soon we will have to be practicing “Religiosity” instead of Democracy.

**Table4: Distribution of respondents by “Northern Nigeria strictly religious politics.”**

COMMENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
5. Strongly agree	56	31
4. Agree	58	32
3. Undecided	17	10
2. Disagree	36	20
1. Strongly disagree	12	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2015**



Table 5 shows the distribution of respondents by whether Northern Nigeria strictly plays religious politics. However, by the virtue of the responses accumulated from this research, it shows a combine population of 114 of the respondents representing a total of 63% of the research population agreeing to the fact that Northern Nigeria strictly plays religious politics, 17 respondents representing just 10% of the population could not decide whether Northern Nigeria strictly politicized religion. While a combine

population of 48, representing a total of 27% argued that Northern Nigeria do not strictly play religious politics as a whole, they argued that religious politics exist even in the other parts of Nigeria. Although they constitute a minority few that responded and ascertain this view, however, the researcher has opt to use the 2015 Nigerian general election results to justify this claim in the later part of this paper. However, this facilitates the understanding that Northern Nigeria largely plays religious politics.

**Table 5: Distribution of respondents on the effects of religion on good governance.**

COMMENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
5. Strongly agree	15	8
4. Agree	34	19
3. Undecided	19	11
2. Disagree	71	40
1. Strongly disagree	40	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2015**

Table 5 shows the distribution of respondents by whether religious politics can bring about good government and as well facilitate social development. A combined population of 49 respondents who are representing 27% of the total population agreed that politicizing religion can actually lead to good governance and also facilitate social development, 11 respondents representing 11% of the total population could not conclude whether involving politics into religion can actually promote good governance and facilitate

social development or not. While a combined population of 90 respondents, representing a total of 51% of the research population argued that involving religion has nothing to do with social development and provision of good governance

This facilitates the understanding that religious politics does not bring about good governance nor facilitate social development in totality, but could be an agent of development if cultivated to advantage.

**Table 6: Distribution of respondents by Politicization of religion in the North.**

<b>COMMENT</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
5. Strongly agree	82	46
4. Agree	47	26
3. Undecided	22	12
2. Disagree	20	11
1. Strongly disagree	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2015**

Table 6 shows the distribution of respondents by whether the politicization of religion in Northern Nigeria is a result of the inability to understand the real parting of the way between various religious. For the purpose of easy conclusion, the researcher has decided to use Islam and Christianity as a case study, since these two constitute the two dominant religions in the country. Before giving the analysis of the data represented in table 25 above, it is worthy to note that the researcher has discovered during the cause of undertaking this research that Islam is the only non-Christian faith which makes it an article of faith for its followers to believe in Jesus (Peace Be Upon Him). No Muslim is a Muslim if he/she does not believe in Jesus (PBUH). What the Muslims are made to believe is (i) the miraculous (Virgin) birth of Jesus (PBUH), meaning He was born without any male intervention, (ii) they believe that Jesus (PBUH) is one of the mightiest messengers of God, (iii) they believe that He is the Messiah (Christ), (iv) they believe that He is the “Word” of God that was bestowed upon Mary (the Mother of Jesus.

Peace Be Upon Them All [PBUTA]), (v) they believe that He gave life to the dead by God's permission and (vi) He healed those born blind and the lepers by God's permission. As such, the Muslims and the Christians are going together. The only real parting of the way between the two (Islam and Christianity) takes place in three dimensions, the “Original Sin”, the “Divinity of Christ” and the “Crucifixion”, the Muslims say He (Jesus PBUH) is not God almighty in human form, meaning He is not “God incarnate”, He's not “crucified for the sins of humanity” and He is not the “Begotten Son” of God.

Haven said all that, 22 respondents representing just 11% of the research population could not conclude whether the differences in religious beliefs and opinion is what prompted to politicizing religion in the North. While a total of 28 respondents, representing 16% of the research population said the politicization of religion that is largely practiced in the North has nothing to do with the differences in religious beliefs, they argued that since Northern region is

largely constituted by a people of certain religious beliefs, it is only natural and normal that they act according to their religious perceptions and sentiments even in the field of politics, they argued that as much as the Northerners has religious sentiments in political affairs, the Southerners also have the same sentiments.

**RELIGIOUS POLITICS AND THE 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

To justify this argument, the researcher has decided to use the 2015 presidential election results from Southern region that were largely constitute by Christians and the

Northern region that were dominated by the Muslims of both APC's Muslim candidate and PDP's Christian presidential candidate as was officially given by the Nigerian electoral body, INEC.

Please note that all substituent were merged to form a single region for easy analysis, e.g. South-East and South-South were merged as single Southern region vis a vis Northern regions with the exception of North central which includes the Federal Capital Territory and the Southwestern Zone

**Table 7: Presidential results from Southeastern and South-South Zones**

States	APC	Votes %	PDP	Votes %
Abia	13,394	3.50%	368,303	96.50%
Akwa Ibom	58,441	6%	953,304	94%
Anambra	17,926	3%	660,762	97%
<b>Bayelsa</b>	<b>5,194</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>377,316</b>	<b>99%</b>
Cross River	19,774	5%	400,000	95%
Ebonyi	71,660	20%	287,804	80%
Edo	185,815	41%	262,114	59%
Delta	67,586	5%	1,200,000	95%
Enugu	14,157	2%	563,003	98%
Imo	133,253	18%	599,185	82%
Rivers	69,238	4%	1,487,075	96%
<b>Total</b>	<b>656,438</b>		<b>7,158,866</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>8%</b>		<b>92%</b>	
<b>Total counted votes</b>	<b>7,815,304</b>			

Source: INEC, 2015

Table 7 gives us the official released INEC results of the 2015 presidential elections as collated from the Southern parts of Nigeria. Out of the total 7,815,304 counted as valid votes, the APC presidential candidate who is a Muslim from the Northern part of the country was able to pull only 656,438 votes, that is just 8% of the total votes cast, while the PDP's candidate who is a Christian from the Southern part of the country bagged an awesome 7,158,866 votes, representing a total of 92% of the total votes cast. We also noticed in Bayelsa state, the Home state of the PDP presidential candidate, the Muslim candidate of the APC recorded 5,194 representing just 1% of the total votes cast in the state, while the Christian candidate of PDP again bagged a whopping 99% of the total votes cast with 377,316 votes. Out of the 11 states that made up the Southern region, the Muslim candidate of the APC had succeeded in getting the required 25%

of the total votes cast in a state only in Edo state, and maintained a control of an average win 3% - 6% of the total votes cast in all the states that made up the Southern region. This ascertain the believe that for as much as there is politicizing of religion in the North, the Southern region is standing with its hands clotted and guilty of politicizing religion according to the records of the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections.

Although, we cannot yet draw conclusions as to whether religious politics is more practice in Northern Nigerian than it is practice Southern parts, vis a vis more in the South than in the North. We are going to run another analysis on the results collated from the Northern regions during the presidential elections. It is worthy to note that the results collated from North-Central, which includes the Federal Capital Territory, were not employed for analysis in table 9.

**Table9: Presidential results from Northeastern & Northwestern Zone**

State	APC	Votes %	PDP	Votes %
Adamawa	374,701	60%	251,664	40%
Bauchi	931,598	91%	86,085	9%
Borno	474,094	95%	26,098	5%
Gombe	361,423	79%	96,873	21%
Jigawa	885,988	86%	142,897	14%
Kaduna	1,127,760	70%	484,085	30%
Kano	1,903,999	90%	215,779	10%
<b>Katsina</b>	<b>1,345,441</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>98,937</b>	<b>7%</b>
Kebbi	567,883	85%	100,972	15%
Sokoto	671,926	81%	152,199	19%
Taraba	261,326	46%	310,800	54%
Yobe	446,265	95%	25,526	5%
Zamfara	612,000	81%	144,000	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,973,404</b>		<b>2,135,915</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>82%</b>		<b>18%</b>	
<b>Total counted votes</b>	<b>12,109,319</b>			

Source: INEC, 2015

Table 9 shows us the collated results from the Northern parts of the country gathered from the 2015 presidential elections. Unlike what we have in the previous table, here we are going to lay emphasis on the number and the percentage of votes the PDP presidential candidate who was a Christian from the Southern area was able to pull in the Muslim's dominated North. Out of the total 12,109,404 votes cast during the elections, the PDP candidate was able to manage a total of 2,135,319 votes representing up to 18% of the total votes cast in the North. While the Northern and Muslim's APC candidate won the total of 9,973,404 votes, representing 82% of the total votes cast within the Northern areas represented in the table.

In Katsina state for instance, the birth home of the APC aspirant; we have in our records a total of 1,444,378 votes collated from that state. The Christian opposition of the PDP was able to win just 98,937 votes, representing 7% of the total votes cast, while the APC candidate claimed in his home state 1,345,441 votes, representing 93% of the total votes cast in the state. Also, the Christian candidate of the PDP was able to control the required 25% of the total votes cast in a state in Adamawa, Kaduna and Taraba states and also earned an average of 10-20% in all the Northern states with the exception of Bauchi, Borno, Katsina and Yobe state.

Judging the Nigerian presidential elections by virtues of religious motivation and seeing how both candidates performed

poorly in their opposite regional and religious counterparts i.e. how APC failed woefully to a total 8% from the votes accumulated from the Southern region and how PDP failed to considerable 18% of the total votes cast in the North, one cannot help but conclude to agree that although religious politics is more outwardly seen in the North, it bites and itches more from the South. This is easy to digest considering the fact that a presidential aspirant of a country was able to pull out only 1% of the total votes cast from a whole region that constitute a State in the Southern part of the country and his opponent was successful enough to only control 7% of the total votes cast in the opposite direction due to their religious differences.

This facilitates the idea, assumption and understanding that both Northern and Southern regions of Nigeria plays religious politics, this is because we have grown to an era where religion decides and dictate in the most important affairs of our lives including politics.

Haven justified the religious sentiments that control the political behavior of a people living in the Northern and Southern part of Nigeria, an attempt is made towards understanding the political culture of the South-West and North central regions. It is worthy of note that these areas have almost what is largely considered as a balance of mixture between both Muslims and Christians in the country.

**Table 10: Presidential results from South-West region**

States	APC	Vote %	PDP	Vote %
Ekiti	120,332	41%	176,414	59%
Lagos	792,460	56%	632,327	44%
Ogun	308,290	60%	207,950	40%
Ondo	299,889	54%	251,368	46%
Osun	383,603	61%	249,929	39%
Oyo	528,620	64%	303,376	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,433,194</b>		<b>1,821,364</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>57%</b>		<b>43%</b>	
<b>Total counted votes</b>	<b>4,254,558</b>			

Source: INEC, 2015

Table 10 above gives us the collated 2015 Presidential election results from the South-West areas, in table 28 above, we can see that although, APC maintained a lead in 5 states with the exception of Ekiti, what is important and interesting to know is that both of the candidates had had the required 25% of the total votes cast across all the states and the highest defeat recorded by the PDP was a considerable defeat by 14% of the votes cast in Oyo state. Out of the 4,254,558 of the total votes count, we noticed that the PDP's Christian candidate won the over total of 1,821,364 votes, representing 43% of the total votes cast and the APC's Muslim aspirant

controlled the majority of the votes with 2,433,194 votes representing 57% of the total votes cast in the South-West region.

In order to draw a general conclusion as to whether religious sentiments is already to a larger degree deciding the political culture of Nigerians, another attempt has been made to study the 2015 presidential election results of the North-Central region with the aim of justifying or denying the already based argument that "religious sentiments determines the political behavior and culture of Nigerians."

**Table 11: Presidential results from North-Central region**

States	APC	Vote %	PDP	Vote %
Benue	373,961	55%	303,737	45%
FCT/Abuja	146,399	49%	157,195	51%
Kogi	264,851	64%	149,987	36%
Kwara	302,146	69.50%	132,602	30.50%
Nassarawa	236,838	46%	273,460	54%
Niger	657,678	81.50%	149,222	18.50%
Plateau	429,140	44%	549,615	56%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,411,013</b>		<b>1,715,818</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>58%</b>		<b>42%</b>	
<b>Total counted votes</b>	<b>4,126,831</b>			

Source: INEC, 2015

Table 11 above shows us the 2015 presidential elections from the North-Central region. In table 29 above, we witnessed yet another balance in the voting culture, out of the 7 states, the PDP candidate has recorded a victory in FCT/Abuja, Nassarawa and Plateau while the APC maintained a clear lead victory in 4 states including Benue, Kogi, Kwara and Niger state. We have also seen that, out of the 4,126,831 of the total votes cast, the PDP candidate Christian candidate had control of 1,715,818 votes, representing 42% of the total votes cast within the region, while the APC Muslim candidate had 2,411,013 votes, representing 58% of the total counted votes in the North-Central region.

If religious belonging is the necessary criteria for voting or electing a candidate into a political office in Nigeria, the analysis and discussion above has given us to understand that Nigerians are religiously sentimental in the execution of political affairs, that is why Hakeem (2012) argued that “Nigerians are more loyal to religion than the state”

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Religion can bring about sustainable political development through the inculcation of high sense of morality, selfless service, public accountability, sense of duty, respect for human lives, sense of humanity, public education, love of one's neighbour, love for peace, contentment with what one can legitimately have, abhorrence

of violence, presence of justice on the citizens as well as the leaders among many others. If a religion fails to inculcate a sense of morality in the people, then it has failed in its creed and is not in a position to help bring about good governance and sustain political development in a country where it has failed to raise the moral standard of the people. (Omoregbe, 2003).

Compliance to religious tenets by the leaders and followers will greatly enrich political activity. Embedded in each religion are the beliefs, practices and ethics that serve as check for excesses in human behaviour. Since religion influences every aspect of human lives and serves as a basis for human existence, values in religion are viable mechanisms for political stability and development. In addition, religion can function as a unifying factor for political development.

The government should give more power to the National Religious Advisory Board and the Nigeria Inter-religious Council in promoting inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance through organizing workshops and seminars for religious adherents, which will help in building sustainable political development. When interfaith dialogue is skillfully organized and pursued, it can encourage those who have personally involved in conflict to work together towards peace accommodation. (Haynes, 2009)

The government should stop using public

fund to sponsor people to pilgrimage. Instead, the fund apportion to it should be diverted to create employment for the teeming youth, improve our educational institution and to alleviate poverty in the society. Thus, making use of religion in Nigerian politics should be geared towards ensuring a harmonious and peaceful co-existence (of Christianity and Islam) and political development. The mixing of both religion and politics is not a problem, but the level of moral standard, patriotism towards the country and proper understanding of religion are the determining factor.

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