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## Religion and Political Conflict in Nigeria: A Reflective Review of the April 2011 Polls

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### **Abstract**

*The pervasiveness of religion as a source of communal and political conflict has become a constant preoccupation in Nigeria. The 2011 presidential polls and the post-election violence that followed in a number of states appear to show the influence of religious polarisation in the country's politics. In this article, we examine the intersection of religion and politics as sites for the violent contestation of identity of the Nigerian State. The choice of the 2011 presidential polls for this article is based on the assumption that every case study has valuable contributions to make to a discourse and so deserves to be studied. While we currently look forward to the 2019 polls, we can still learn from the past. We argue also that Nigeria is fast developing an extremist branch of Islam that is creating a religiously intolerant society.*

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**Key words:** Religion, Politics, Electoral Violence, National Identity, Nigeria

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### **1. Introduction**

One of the key factors that have largely shaped the perception of scholars about the subject of religion in relation to the state is the idea of the Westphalian state system (Singh et al, 2007:5). As Haynes (2005:246) succinctly points out, the interaction of religion and politics is often viewed through the prism of state-church relationship. Furthermore, the issue of democratisation and the contributions of religious organisations to its process remains a core theme in the discussions regarding the role of religion in developing countries (Huntington, 1991). Within the context of democratisation, Nyuot (2005) argues rightly that religion has several functions given that it can be a source of legitimizing the status quo, source of change, a source of resistance or social transformation, or a source/agent of political socialisation and participation. Although these roles appear positive, they play out differently in different contexts. And as Candland (2000) correctly observes, the most crucial variable in determining the role that religion will play in any state - society relations is the degree of religious diversity. In this regard, extant literature identifies the failure of governance and fragility of the institutions of the state in terms of their ability and capacity to manage diversity, as one of the underlying causes of violent conflicts in Nigeria since the return to democratic rule in 1999 (Kwaja, 2009:107).

Extant literature suggests a focus on the underlying socio-political, economic and governance factors that produce violent religious conflicts in Nigeria generally (Sampson, 2012). Researchers in the field stress government neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimisation, discrimination, marginalisation, nepotism and bigotry as some of the remote socio-political, economic and governance factors that drive religious violence in Nigeria (Salawu 2010:348). Many argue that critical literature/publications by both Christian and Muslim elites have been said to be one of the major cause of religious violence in the country (Omotosho, 2003).

Religion and religious organisations are usually viewed as one of the contributing factors of societal conflicts (Singh et al, 2007:32). While religious and faith communities have contributed greatly to post-conflict peace building (Appleby, 2000), Fox (2001) correctly observes it would be an error to ignore the influence of religious ideologies in conflicts in regions such as Africa and Asia. Theoretically, Hasenclever and Rittberger (2000) identify primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism as the main approaches to analysing the influence of religion on politics, particularly political conflicts. From the primordial point of view, “the embeddedness of nations in civilisations will be the most important determinant of world politics in the twenty-first century” (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000:643). From the perspective of instrumentalists, “the relationship between religion and conflict is a spurious correlation that is the result of growing economic, social and political inequalities in and between nations” (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000: 645). Finally from the perspective of constructivists, “social conflicts are embedded in cognitive structures such as ideology, nationalism, ethnicity and religion; where religion acts as an intervening variable between a given conflict and the choices of conflict behaviour” (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000:648-649).

Achunike (2008:287) argues that the faulty perception or orientation of other religions or faith (which results in fundamentalism, extremism and intolerance), the low literacy level of religious adherents, parochialism of religious personalities, pervasive poverty and government interference in religious matters, are among the major causes of conflict in Nigeria. Religious intolerance is unfriendliness, antagonism and opposition towards other religions, as well as the inability of religious adherents to harmonize between the theoretical and the practical aspect of their religion (Balogun 1988:166). For religious extremists emphasis is placed on correct doctrine and the necessity of violent opposition against the forces of modernism (Komonchak et al, 1996:411). A survey carried out in 2010 on the dimensions in the construction of national identity in Nigeria (Williams, 2010), revealed that the belief structure dimension (religion) had the highest percentage suggesting that, for Nigerians, religion is the most defining influence in the construction of national identity and simply the most influential. Unfortunately, religious fundamentalism has been poorly managed and monitored over the years even in the face of obvious evidence, mainly due to the naive perception that national identity was not constructed on religious basis but on ethnic basis. Recent events however have brought the issue of religion and political conflict to the front burner. Although there are several contributing factors involved one of the key factors, as far as Nigeria is concerned is the manipulation of political elites. While we acknowledge the salient role of religion in conflict as a whole, this paper argues from an instrumentalist point of view that it is important to acknowledge the manipulation of religion by political elites in Nigerian politics as one of the factor escalating political conflict in the country.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Religion has been acknowledged as one of the factors that interact with modern political institutions to produce conflict in many forms (Pew Forum, 2006). Marc Gopin (2002), like Appleby (2000), acknowledges that religion is both a basis for respect and coexistence on the one hand; and a basis for violence and war on the other. Gopin (2002) argues rightly that religious psychology is important in understanding violent trends in religious cultures. He acknowledges also that response to the status quo may express itself in religious terms. He also takes into account the influence of religious texts, myths, metaphors, laws, values and traditions which promote trends that engender conflict and in some cases also provide inroads to peacemaking. Religion is for him embedded in the inner life and social behaviour of millions of people around the world. Gopin also argues that in some cases the religious card

is exploited to promote a political cause and this effectively encourages radical behaviour. His debate on the importance of understanding religious sub-cultures and conflict also takes into account the role elite's play in using religious metaphors, myths and symbolism to legitimize their agenda. The relevance of Gopin's ideas to this article lays in the fact that it provides a theoretical framework within which we can analyse the Nigerian situation which is indicative of how socio-economic and political factors have resulted in the formulation of a religious identity and also how it has been manipulated to promote political causes. Religion in Nigeria has served as a uniting factor in a lot of communities but has also, especially in recent times, been a site for the violent contestation of identity in the country.

### **3. Methodology**

A qualitative, historical-descriptive method is adopted in presenting data and discussion. The qualitative research method is a combination of research principles using unstructured forms of data collection, verbal or written description and explanations rather than quantitative measurement and statistical analysis (Hammersley, 1989). Explanation in this context involves understanding and interpreting actions rather than drawing conclusions about relationships and regularities between statistical variables (Fielding, 1993). This method is well equipped to examine diverse group of human relations and problems and also provides for the understanding of the various strands of social interactions. It is also sufficient to study the process of social life at all levels (Ndiyo, 2005). Much of the information used here is based on the observation of events within the period under evaluation and structured interviews. However to reduce the element of bias and increase objectivity we have relied also on credible secondary sources such as books, academic journals and articles on the subject matter as well as interviews conducted by other researchers to cross examine our data. We consider only events prior to the 2011 presidential elections.

### **4. Overview of the Contemporary Nigerian State**

Nigeria is a religiously heterogeneous nation with principal religions as Islam, Christianity and African Traditional religion that operates a federal system of government. With over 374 ethnic groups (Mustapha, 2006: iv), the identities of Nigeria's three majority groups (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) were consolidated in the context of the creation of the three (3) regions in 1946 resulting in each majority ethnic group consolidating and constituting a 'core' ethno-political group in their respective regions with strong political holds: the Hausa-Fulani in the Northern Region, the Yoruba in the West and the Igbo in the East (Mustapha, 2003). As Burkhalter (1993) argued, Nigerians are often forced to make ethnic identity the primary identity in making political choices and unfortunately ethnic identity is intertwined with religious identity.

Nigeria has been plagued with political instability since its independence in 1960 (Onyeonoro, 1973:86, Ogundiya, 2009:129). Regardless of its transformation from being a colonial state to being an independent state, Nigeria retained the character of not being a popular national state that represented the interest of the people (Ibeanu, 1997:8). Nigeria has suffered coups and countercoups, crisis of revenue allocation, state creation, power-sharing, civil war, politics of bitterness and intolerance, marginalization of minority ethnic groups, separatist agitations, struggles for resource control, inter-communal conflicts, incompetent leadership, corruption, terrorism and insurgency (Ibeanu, 1997). Emphasis on ethnic origin has been considered one of the dilemmas of leadership in Nigeria (Ojukwu, 1989). Unfortunately religion has become an even more defining feature of Nigerian politics.

Political leadership in Nigeria has, historically, been skewed in favour of the North as over 90

per cent of the individuals that have occupied the position of Head of State or Head of Government have been from the Northern region (Williams, 2010). (see Table 1 below)

**Table 1**  
**Overview of Political leadership in Nigeria from 1960-2011**

Ministers of Defence/Heads of Government	Period	Geographical Region	Religion
Alhaji Tafawa Balewa	1960	North	Islam
Alhaji Inuwa Wada	1960-1964	North	Islam
Alhaji Muhammadu Ribadu	1965	North	Islam
Alhaji Inuwa Wada	1966	North	Islam
Col. Yakubu Gowon	1968-1975	North	Islam
Col. I.D Bisala	1976	North	Islam
Col. Olusegun Obasanjo	1977-1979	South	Christianity
Prof. Iya Abubakar	1980-1981	North	Islam
Alhaji Akanbi Oniyangi	1982-1983	North	Islam
Alhaji Shehu Shagari	1983	North	Islam
General Domkat Bali	1983-1984	North	Islam
General Mohamadu Buhari	1983-1985	North	Islam
General Ibrahim Babangida	1985-1993	North	Islam
General Sani Abacha	1993-1998	North	Islam
General Abdulsalami Abubakar	1998-1999	North	Islam
Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	1999-2007	South	Christianity
Alhaji Shehu Musa Yar'adua	2007-2010	North	Islam
Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (Ag. President)	2010-2011	South	Christianity
Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (Elected President)	2011-2015	South	Christianity

*Source: Adapted from Williams (2010) with a few modifications by the author*

Religious conflicts in Nigeria though not new phenomena have intensified and have attracted a lot of publicity. (See Table 2 below)

**Table 2**  
**Overview of Religious Conflicts in Nigeria 1999-2012**

S/N	Date	State(s)	Nature	Remarks
1.	1 July, 1999	Ogun	Violent clashes between Yoruba traditional worshippers and Hausa groups in Sagamu, Ondo state.	The crisis originated from the killing of a Hausa woman by the Oro Masquerades for violating traditional rites.
2.	22 July, 1999	Kano	Reprisal to the Sagamu crisis above.	Casualty figures not reported
3.	20 Dec. 1999	Kwara	Muslim fundamentalists attacked and destroyed over 14 churches in Ilorin.	Properties worth several millions of naira were destroyed and an unspecified casualty reported.
4.	21-22 Feb. 2000	Kaduna	Riots over the introduction of Sharia.	An estimated 3 000 people died.

5.	28 Feb. 2000	Abia	Religious riots in Aba, and minor disturbances in Umuahia.	Over 450 persons killed in Aba, Abia state, as reprisal for the Kaduna crisis.
6.	8 Sept. 2000	Gombe	The Kaltungo religious crisis.	The crisis erupted over the implementation of Sharia in the state
7.	12 Oct. 2001	Kano	Religious riot in Kano in protest to US invasion of Afghanistan over Osama bin Laden.	Over 150 persons were killed.
8.	7-17 Sept. 2001	Jos	A religious riot between Muslims and Christians in Jos. Mosques, churches and several properties were damaged or torched. The clashes started on September 7 and lasted nearly two weeks, ending on September 17.	The riot broke out when the Islamic Brigade attacked a Christian woman who attempted to cross a public high-way barricaded by Muslim worshippers on Friday. Over 300 people were killed.
9.	16 Nov. 2002	Kaduna	The Miss World crisis in which Muslims attacked Christians and churches. The crisis was triggered by an article authored by Isioma Daniel in This Day newspaper, alleging that Prophet Mohammed would have loved to have the girls.	Over 250 people were killed and several churches destroyed.
10.	8 June, 2004	Adamawa	Adamawa Religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Numan town. Caused by the location of the town's Central Mosque close to Bachama paramount ruler's palace.	Over 17 persons killed
11.	18 Feb. 2006	Borno	Religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Maiduguri. The riot was caused by the Danish cartoon on Prophet Mohammed, in Jyllands-Posten newspaper.	Over 50 persons killed and 30 churches destroyed; over 200 shops, 50 houses and 100 vehicles vandalised

12.	22 March 2007	Gombe	Muslim pupils killed their Christian teacher, Mrs Oluwatoyin Olusesan. The pupils claimed that their teacher desecrated the Qur'an while attempting to stop a student from cheating in an examination hall.	
13.	28 Nov 2008	Plateau	Religious violence between Muslims and Christians in the city of Jos. The crisis which was triggered by the controversial results of a local election later turned religious.	Over 700 people killed and thousands internally displaced.
14.	21 Feb. 2009	Bauchi	Ethno-religious conflict at the Makama New Extension.	Over 11 people were killed, more than 400 houses burnt, and over 1 600 families displaced.
15.	26-30 July, 2009	Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Yobe	Religious violence unleashed by the radical Boko Haram sect on Christians.	Over 700 persons killed, 3 500 persons internally displaced, 1 264 children orphaned, over 392 women widowed, and several properties destroyed.
16.	29 Dec. 2009	Bauchi	Religious violence unleashed by the KalaKato sect on Christians.	Over 38 persons killed; about 20 suspected members of the sect arrested; and over 1000 people internally Displaced
17.	17-20 Jan. 2009	Plateau	Resurgence of religious crisis in Jos	Police announced at least 320 killed, but aid workers and local leaders place death toll at over 550. Over 40000 persons displaced.
18.	7 March 2010	Plateau	Attacks by Fulani Moslems on Christian dominated villages of Dogo Nahawa, Shen and Fan in Jos.	Over 500 people – mainly women and children – were killed

19.	17 March 2010	Plateau	Suspected Fulani militia men attacked residents of Biye and Batem in Jos.	13 persons killed.
20.	11 April 2010	Plateau	Attack on a Christian village of Berom stock, some 30 kilometres south of Jos, by suspected Fulani herdsmen. The attackers targeted the homes of some officials in Kura Jenta, in reprisal to the killing of about 150 Fulani Muslims, who were allegedly killed and dumped in wells on 19 January 2010.	No life was lost but 3 houses and 6 vehicles were torched. This violence was ethno-religious
21.	22 May 2010	Plateau	Murder of three (Muslim) Fulani herdsmen at Tusung Village in Barkin Ladi Local Government, Plateau state. The attackers were alleged to be Berom Christian youths.	It was ethno-religious.
22.	22 May 2010	Plateau	Attack on some Christians, who were returning from their place of worship along Bauchi road in Jos. Reprisal attack by Muslims over the killing of 3 Fulani Muslims.	At least 1 person died while many were injured.
23.	17 July 2010	Plateau	Muslim Fulani herdsmen launched an overnight attack on a Christian village, Mazah, north of the city of Jos. About eight people were reportedly killed, including the wife, two children and a grandson of a Pastor.	Seven houses and a church were also burned during the attack.
24.	29 August 2011	Plateau	Clashes between Muslims and Christians at Rukuba road and Farin Gada in Jos during the Ramadan prayers.	No less than 20 persons were killed, 50 injured, over 50 motor vehicles and 100 motor cycles were torched.

25.	16 June 2011	Abuja	Police Headquarters, Abuja Suicide bomb attack at the Police Headquarters, Abuja by suspected Boko Haram Islamists whose ideology is framed around religion.	Authorities said 6 persons were killed and 73 vehicles destroyed.
26.	26 August 2011	Abuja	UN House, Abuja Suicide bombing at the UN House, Abuja by suspected Boko Haram Islamists.	23 persons (11 UN personnel and 12 non-UN personnel) were killed
27.	5 Nov. 2011	Potiskum, Damaturu and Maiduguri	Coordinated attacks on churches and police stations by suspected Boko Haram Islamists	More than 90 persons were reportedly killed, several churches and police stations torched
28.	25 Dec. 2011	Niger	Bombs in Madala alleged to have been planted at the Church's parking lot.	At the last count, 45 persons were killed. Some died instantly, others from injuries sustained from the explosion. Over 80 others were receiving treatment for various degrees of injuries.

Source: Adapted from Sampson (2012). The data are by no means exhaustive.

## 5. Background to the 2011 Elections

Nigeria is often said to have a very vibrant civil society, an independent press and a trusted judiciary, but it has not really been able to forge an acceptable political settlement that can bring about open and fair elections, free of violence before, during and after elections (Gberie, 2011). However, by the end of military rule in 1999, social tension was very high in the country, particularly in the South-South Niger Delta region. Since 1999, Nigeria has witnessed many religious, ethnic and cultural conflicts with devastating consequences on lives and property especially in the North. Ethnic and religious identities have been very salient in this conflictual situation and not less than 40 violent conflicts were reported between 1999 and 2011 (Sampson, 2012). Several events characterised this period and are worthy of mention to create a clear picture of why the post-election violence of 2011 had a definite religious coloration.

**a. Introduction of Sharia Law:** Sharia law is an Islamic system of law based on the Koran, the Muslims holy book. It is a strict Islamic code embracing medieval punishments like amputation of limbs, stoning, beheading etc for breaches of the Koranic code. In 2000 the Governor of one of the Northern states, Zamfara State, introduced Sharia as the new State law. He and many other northern Governors believed that the Islamic code would help solve many social problems given what they considered ‘the growing levels of immorality and corruption’ in the country. Several riots greeted the introduction of Sharia but the Federal Government remained silent and several other States in the North went ahead to introduce Sharia (Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kebbi, Yobe). States like Kaduna, Niger and Gombe have introduced the Islamic code only in parts of the State with large



Muslim populations. These Muslim governors blame the rot in the country on the Secular state and are convinced that Islamic law provides the antidote. This situation produced severe tensions between the Christian south and the Muslim north broadly speaking and between Christians and Muslims within the northern States operating the Sharia Law. The 1980 Maitatsine riots and violent attacks on civilians and the current Boko Haram sectarian violence are both products of dogmatic adherence to the Sharia legal code, which inspires Islamic Jihad and the eradication of Western civilisation (Onuoha 2012).

**b. Failing Institutions of Government:** Since 1999, the rate of corruption in the country has risen significantly giving rise to economic stagnation, poverty, unemployment and many other social vices. With the return to civil rule, the very vocal media began reporting high levels of corruption in the executive and legislative arms of government. The disgruntled population of the country many of which were youths began to show their discontent especially in the South –South. The demand for more control of the oil resources taken from the Niger-delta communities to enrich a few politicians gained momentum and created a lot of tension in the country giving rise to several militant groups in the region. Many began to question the political will of the government to do something about the situation. A few more began to nurse the feeling that if a South-South president emerged he would be more sympathetic to the plight of the Niger-delta communities.

**c. The Zoning Debate within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP):** In the build up to the 2011 elections, the zoning debate came to the fore. Zoning is essentially a power-sharing agreement among members of Nigeria’s ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Zoning is an administrative and political arrangement agreed upon to ensure inclusivity and political stability among the major ethnic groups in the country (Gberie, 2011). The zoning controversy which started as merely an internal PDP affair soon turned into an ethno-religious contest in the country particularly in the northern states. Within the zoning structure, six (6) zones had been created (See Table 3 below).

**Table 3: Zoning Structure in Nigeria**

<i>North West</i>	<i>North Central</i>	<i>North East</i>	<i>South West</i>	<i>South South</i>	<i>South East</i>
Sokoto	Kwara	Yobe	Oyo	Edo	Enugu
Kebbi	Niger	Borno	Osun	Delta	Anambra
Zamfara	Kogi	Gombe	Ekiti	Bayelsa	Ebonyi
Katsina	Benue	Bauchi	Ondo	Rivers	Abia
Kano	Nassarawa	Adamawa	Ogun	Akwa Ibom	Imo
Jigawa	Plateau	Taraba	Lagos	Cross River	
Kaduna					

*Source: Mustapha. 2003*

These zones became unofficial geopolitical zones from which candidates rotationally aspired to the presidency and other top leadership positions in the country. Since former President Olusegun Obasanjo was from the south-west zone, having ruled for eight (8) years, it followed from the zoning arrangement that the next president would be from the North. Indeed, this wish was granted as late President Umaru Musa Yar’adua emerged President in the very controversial 2007 elections, with a South-South Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, although the joys of the north was not to last very long as the structure was abandoned.

**d. The life and death of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua Yar'Adua:** The positive result of the zoning agreement was to be short lived as the newly elected president took ill and was often flown out of the country for treatment leaving the Vice-President, from the South, to take care of the day to day running of the country. Many northern politicians became apprehensive when it became apparent that the President could die given that the constitution had some provisions, though not very clear, that in such an event the Vice-President would take his place. This meant that a South-south candidate would become president in a tenure that had originally been zoned to the North. Their fears played out as imagined, President Yar'adua died in 2009, and after a lot of 'political drama', South-South Vice-president Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as President of Nigeria and a Southerner became President for the first time in Nigeria's history! Tensions mounted in the North as the situation was unacceptable to many. Violence erupted in some northern states but jubilation was the face of the states in the Christian south to them it was a "breath of fresh air".

**e. The Decision of President Goodluck Jonathan to run for President in 2011:** Fate had given the presidency to the South-south and they would not let go, zoning or no zoning, without taking a chance at another term. Many Northern leaders many of whom had been past presidents were not in support of the decision of President Jonathan to run for another term. The Presidents' argument was simply that he was only filling in for the Late President and wanted a shot at his own term. Given the power of incumbency in Nigeria's politics as in many other countries, the northern politicians knew it was not a joke that if he ran for president he would win, 'cheating' the north of their 'zoned' right. Many of the comments, threats of intolerance and exclusiveness made in reaction to these developments by respected politicians have been said to be responsible for the spate of religious violence which began before and shortly after the 2011 elections that produced a fresh term for President Goodluck Jonathan. Several comments by Northern political elite reflected the position of the political north on the issue of Jonathan coming back as President contrary to the zoning plan. Some warned that they would make the country 'ungovernable' should Goodluck Jonathan win the elections. A lot of the campaigns by the northern candidates appealed to religious sentiments although ethnic issues would not be completely ruled out. A geographical picture of the voting pattern in the presidential election indicates how the 2011 elections threw up primordial, ethnic, and chiefly, religious identity questions. 16 Northern states voted Muhammadu Buhari of the CPC, a Muslim candidate, while Goodluck Jonathan recorded high votes from the South-South, South-East, South-West and from Christians in the North. Violence broke out shortly after results were announced. Angry youths took to the streets chanting "mu ke so, ba muso hanni" meaning 'it is Buhari we want, we don't want an unbeliever'. It is at this point the country began to witness the worst 'religious terror' ever recorded in its history – the activities of Boko Haram.

**f. Boko Haram, the Northern Agenda and the 2011 Post-Election Violence**

In 2002, a group called Boko Haram was formed by a charismatic Muslim cleric, Mohammed Yusuf, in Maiduguri, Borno State. He set up a religious complex, which was made up of a mosque and an Islamic school that catered for many of the poor families from Nigeria and other neighbouring countries. This school was not interested in education alone but had a political goal of creating an Islamic State. It was simply a recruiting centre for training Jihadis to fight the state. Yusuf was killed in 2009 by Security forces and since then Abubakar Shekau has been leader of the group. Boko Haram is an extremist Islamic group that forbids Muslims from taking part in any political or social activity associated with western society, including receiving secular education (Walker, 2012). It regards the Nigerian State as being run by unbelievers. Its official name is 'Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati

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wal-Jihad' which in Arabic means "people committed to the propagation of the Prophets Teachings and Jihad" (Walker, 2012). Its immediate agenda is to overthrow the government and create an Islamic State. They consider that the past Muslim heads of state have been weak and have failed in achieving this goal and have ceded power to the South for two terms in a row. The introduction of Sharia in many parts of the country since 2000 appeared to be just a phase in this broad agenda. Some Muslim clerics have made it clear that the ideas and methods of the Boko Haram group are outside the beliefs of Islam. For instance a Muslim Imam in Calabar, Nigeria had this to say when asked what his thoughts were on the group:

"the growth and progress of this group cannot be unconnected with serious negligence on the part of the government, as well as, the improper manner of handling issues of serious nature like this. And that was how they were able to grow and become a serious threat to the Nation. You see, the most ridiculous aspect of this movement is that they don't have any substantial textual backing from either the Quran or the Hadith to support their claim or movement. So my simple understanding of this group is that it is just a conglomeration of some youth who were being fanatically misled by ignorant or half baked scholars who want to achieve their self-aggrandisement or they are being sponsored by some external agents to cause commotion and chaos in the country or a political machinery to delude and embezzle the country's wealth in the name of security allocation. The North was used basically at this moment, because it has a large number of ignorant youth, a high rate of poverty, and as such they present a fertile land to promote this agenda. In fact, as far as I am concerned, Boko Haram is another form of northern militancy that is politically manoeuvred under a hidden identity or agenda" (Mr. Adamu in an interview with the author, 2012).

The thoughts of this Muslim cleric are a fair summary of the debates about the agenda of the group from the perspective of outsiders even within the Muslim faith. What is consistent however is that they have both a political and a religious agenda: the plan to restore power to the North, and a plan to make Sharia the Law of the 'Land'. Since April 2011, they have killed dozens in Maiduguri, Kano and Jos, bombed several states after the inauguration of President Jonathan (May, 2011), bombed the Police headquarters in Abuja (June, 2011), bombed the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in Abuja (August, 2011), coordinated bomb and gun attacks in Yobe and Borno States (November, 2011), multiple bomb attacks on Christmas day killing dozens of Christians (December, 2011), Bombing of churches in the North (January – June, 2012) (Chothia. 2012). Spokesman for the group, Abu Qaqa, had said in an interview with the Guardian, Friday January, 2012 that they "will not stop the deadly attacks until the country is ruled according to the dictates of Allah."

As at 2011 over 1000 people had been killed in Boko Haram's deadly attacks. It does not appear to be coincidence that the group decided to intensify their activities shortly after the 2011 elections. The attacks carried out particularly on churches have been perceived as a clear indication of the plan to purge the north of 'infidels' meaning non-Muslim adherents. Whether the group is carrying out their own agenda or merely playing out the wishes of disgruntled northern political elite, some scholars have argued that we are witnessing a grand scheme to make Islamic Law the dominant law in a country that has a high population of Christians, not to mention the significant population of followers of African Traditional

religion (ATR). Nigerian leaders have, unfortunately, provided a fertile ground for the aggression that has triggered this form of religious militancy that has created instability, insecurity and restiveness in the country.

## 6. Conclusion

In broad terms, the 2011 presidential elections were considered free, fair and credible however there were flaws (Orji and Uzodi, 2012); and these flaws can be traced to all the incidents discussed above. Religion has been central to most violent conflicts around the world, and so cannot be ignored as one of the factors responsible for the security challenges confronting the world in the wake of the Cold War (Juergensmeyer 2003, Abu-Nimer 2000). While many may still believe that religion has a lesser role to play in shaping Nigeria's political landscape than ethnicity, we have argued that it is no longer safe to wallow in the deception that political violence is due to ethnic differences alone, doing this will only lead to treating symptoms of a disease that is not really there while the main disease spreads to fatal dimensions. Again, it may be safe for some to localise this terror, but events in Nigeria must be understood as part of a global agenda of violent extremism that has found easy inroad and expression in the failure of the North to hold on to political leadership since 1999. As Reynal-Querol (2002:465) rightly argues, "societies that are divided along religious lines are more prone to intense and prolonged conflict than those divided by political, territorial and ethnic differences". For this reason, a clear understanding of the interaction between religion and political violence in Nigeria should inform the policy choices needed to counter, in particular, the terror the country is facing. Nigerian politicians may be naively using the situation for their own personal gains but we must continue to hope that it is not the politicians being used to carry out an agenda that is way beyond what they could possibly imagine.

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