



A Review of Christians Participation in Nigerian Politics from 2011-2023

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Abstract. This paper sets to examine the challenges facing Christians Participation in Nigeria's political theatre of Fourth Republic. The study relied on empirical data and documented related materials for qualitative analysis. The study established that politics remains the avenue where societies choose leaders to govern and make policy for the popular majority of the masses in a democratic setting. Nigeria's current Fourth Republic seems to be the longest in the history of the nation having spent over twenty years of steady democratic rule. However, what informed this study is the level of Christian Participation in the politics of Fourth Republic that has been adjudged to be below expectation by the right-thinking citizens in the nation. For example, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections results released by Independent National Electoral Commission indicates voter apathy in a Christian dominated states across the country. While Christians are often first to cry foul of any government policy that is perceived to be anti-Christian, their participation however, remains below expectation. Hence the need to look at the challenges facing Christian Participation with aim of proffering solution to the challenges. Therefore, the study is not an attempt to polarize the nation's politics base on religious line but to encourage active Participation of genuine Christians for better representation and national development. The study concludes that for Nigerian project to succeed, Christians must be involved, not passively but actively. Christians are advised to be on the driving seat in bringing about the desired change in the country. This is because Christians are better equipped, placed and specially endowed by God through Jesus Christ to be different. Recommendations were given among which includes the need for awareness creation and mentorship by those Christians who are already in the theatre of Politics.

Keywords: Christians, Participation, Nigerian and Politics

1. Introduction

In a democratic society, political participation is an important tool for the development or underdevelopment of any nation, community or society in general. The level of political participation of any community in a democratic society determines the community's development. The implication of this is that every community need men and women of integrity in politics for the survival of the community. This brings to bear the assessment of Christian participation in Nigerian politics of fourth republic. Because while many Christians sees politics as legitimate service to God and humanity, other sees politics as deviation from God's divine purpose for a Christian. And the later view to a large extent has held many Christians from active participation in politics. Although Nigeria's fourth republic began with a Christian democratically elected president Olusegun Obasanjo 1999-2007, followed by Umaru Musa Yaradua a non-Christian from 2007-2010, followed by Goodluck Jonathan a Christian from 2010-2015, to Muhammadu Buhari a non-Christian from 2015-2023, now Bola Ahmed Tinubu who is serving as the current president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is important to note that even the Christians that hold power at centre in the fourth republic did so at the mercy of the non-Christians particularly the northerners looking at the indices of political participation. Hence, this work intends to unravel the challenges affecting Christian participation in politics with the aim of proffering solution.

2. Conceptualising Christianity, Politics, Political Participation

A Christian is someone who follows Jesus Christ, the son of the God of heaven. Someone who has resolved on his own conviction to be like Jesus Christ in words, actions and deeds. Christianity is a religion founded on Jesus Christ's teachings. Its followers worship in a

church. The English term "church" comes from the Greek word "ekklesia". This term was in use prior to the formation of the Christian church and essentially means "called out." "Use of the term prior to the emergence of the Christian church is important as two streams of meaning flow from the history of its usage into the New Testament understanding of the church," states the Holman Bible Dictionary (1991:259). Holman (1991:259) aver that the Greek term "called out" has two meanings: first, it refers to "an assembly of citizens of a Greek city" as used in Acts 19:32–39; second, it "was used more than one hundred times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in common use in the time of Jesus." The Hebrew word for this second meaning is "qahal," which means "assembly." It can be used to describe an assembly of soldiers (Numbers 22:4), prophets (I Samuel 19:20), or God's people (Deuteronomy 9:10).

Ayim (2008:204) defines politics as the art of managing public affairs, or more specifically, the art of controlling the destinies of numerous people with their consent. It refers to the art of exercising authority as mandated by the people who will be affected by it. Politics, according to Mark Carl (2022:np), has existed for as long as people have had to distribute limited resources while resolving differences in opinions, beliefs, preferences, and needs. This suggests that politics will always be an essential part of the human condition as long as people exist. In fact, in his article "Aristotle's Political Theory," Fred Miller (2017) cites the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who argued that humans are "political animals" and that only by engaging in politics can each human achieve his or her highest potential and live fully. Politics encompasses all actions taken by the government and those who work for, serve, promote, and challenge it. In a democratic government, the people's vote determines who becomes the leader. The people lead first by electing a leader, and then the elected leaders begin to lead those who elected them. Politics affects everyone, either directly or indirectly. For example, political scientist Lasswell (1950) defined politics as "who gets what, when, and how." This implies that politics exists in everyday life. Politics exists wherever people interact to make decisions that affect them all.

Political participation refers to a citizen's political awareness and involvement in the governance process. Political participation in a democracy can take many forms, including voting for representatives at regular intervals, voting on political issues in referenda, forming political groups, and engaging in legal or illegal protests. Individuals who participated in such activities most likely expected, or hoped, that their actions would have an impact on the content of

government policy. Klein (2005:1) expands on the idea of political participation by stating that "political participation can take many forms, the most notable of which is voting in elections, but also including joining a political party, standing as a candidate in an election, joining a non-governmental advocacy group, or participating in a demonstration." Invoking the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, one can contend that engaging in politics is an essential civic duty that enables individuals to endeavor to impact public affairs. Further still, Klein distinguishes between general and specific forms of participation in public affairs such as "the activities of civic association, neighbourhood groups, social involvements, and social clubs, as well as formal procedures of governments" the specific form involves participation in elections (Klein, 2005:2).

3. INEC Results of (2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023) General Elections and Voters Turn Out in Christian Dominated States

The total number of voters registered for the presidential election on April 16, 2011, was 73,528,040. Total votes (voter turnout) cast 39,469,484 (53.7%). 1,259,506 votes were invalid or blank. Total valid votes 38,209,978. It is crucial to note that, turnout is the most important indicator of popular participation in an election and, by extension, the legitimacy of the government. Even though Nigeria's democracy was seen to be steadily strengthening, an average participation rate of 53.7% may not be considered low; nevertheless, a higher turnout in the 2011 election was anticipated. This election shows that in the South-South and South-East, where President Jonathan is believed to have strong support, the average turnout was 67% of registered voters, compared to 32% in the South-West, where he is thought to have strong opposition. The average turnout of registered voters in the North-West and North-East, which are considered opposition strongholds in the north, was 54%. This voting pattern reveals not only the likelihood of voter turnout inflation, but also its geographical disparity. If Jonathan's candidacy, an Ijaw man from the oil-rich Niger Delta, is taken as a plausible reason for the massive turnout in the South-South, it can be argued that the presence of three presidential candidates from the North, namely General Muhammadu Buhari of the CPC, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu of the ACN, and Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau of the ANPP, should have produced a similar level of turnout in the region (Omotola & Aiyedogbon, 2011:65-66). While it is true that this was one of the most well-attended elections in the

fourth republic's Christian-dominated states, it is also worth noting that Goodluck Jonathan's support in this region was more ethnic than Christian.

In the 2015 general election, only 31,746,490 (47.08%) of Nigeria's 67,422,005 registered voters were accredited for the 2015 presidential elections; 29,432,083 (43%) of votes were cast, with 28,587,564 (97%) being valid. This also shows a lower percentage of voter turnout in the 2015 presidential election compared to previous elections, when turnout was 52% in 1999, 69% in 2003, 57% in 2007, and 54% in 2011. A state-by-state breakdown of low voter turnout revealed that only 13 states had turnout of 50% or higher, and all of these states are in the country's north, including those ravaged by insurgencies. Other states, such as Abia and Anambra, recorded only 33% and 39%, respectively (Center for Public Policy Alternatives, 2015:1-2).

The final straw that broke the camel's back in terms of Christian voter turnout was the 2019 general election. According to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), the percentage represents 28,614,190 voters who participated in the elections. This is 0.91% less than the total number of accredited voters, who account for 35.66% (29,364,209) of all registered voters. The data further showed that just 33.18 per cent (27,324,583) of the 82,344,107 registered voters were valid votes that led to the final decision. According to NAN, President Muhammadu Buhari won with 55.6% of the total votes cast, or 15,191,847 votes, while his rival, Atiku Abubakar, received 41.22 percent or 11,262,978 votes. While Kano State had the highest number of votes cast 1,964,751 and 1,891,134 valid votes, Jigawa had the highest rate of voter turnout with 55.67 per cent (1,171,801) of its registered voters showing up for accreditation, followed by Katsina State with 48.45 per cent (1,555,473) and Sokoto State with 46 per cent or 871,891 valid voters.

But the greatest shock was seen in states dominated by Christians. For example, Lagos State led the states with the lowest voter turnout of 17.25 per cent (1,089,567), followed by Abia with 18 per cent or 323,291 votes and Rivers with 19.97 per cent (642,165) valid voters. With these results of voters turn out in the above states, it is a clear indication that the contribution of these few mentioned Christian dominated states among others is a thin of concern to all lovers of democracy.

The 2023 general election supposed to serve as an eye opener for Christians who deliberately show indifference regarding politics in Nigeria, to wake up from their slumber. The voter register released by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

on January 11,2023, shows that 93.46 million Nigerians were eligible to vote in the 2023 general election, however only 87,209,00 number of PVCs were collected. Sokoto registered 2,172,056 PVCs and 96.6 percent (2,097,798) number of collected PVCs with only 27.9 percent (586,815) valid voters in Sokoto. Sokoto state comprises of 90 percent Muslims and 10 percent Christians. While Enugu which is highly populated by Christians with a percentage of 99 percent Christians and 0.5 Percent Muslims had a total number of 2,112,793 million registered PVCs and 94.4 percent (1,995,389) collected PVCs with only 22.8 percent (456,424) valid voters. In Kano there was 5,921,370 registered voters with a total of 5,594,193 PVCs collected representing 94% with 29.1 percent (1,631,459) voter's turnout. Rivers State had 3,537,190 million registered voters with a total of 3,285,785 PVCs collected representing 92.9. However, only 11.3 percent (369,949) voter's turnout. This analysis revealed that there was more voting participation in Muslim dominated areas than in Christian dominated states. This is a clear indication that areas where Christian are more dominated shows a gross lack of interest regarding politics.

4. Obstacle to Christian Participation in Politics

In Nigeria and other parts of the world today, politics has been associated and described as a game of manipulation, trickery, and deception. Undoubtedly, when described in these negative ways, it becomes challenging for a religious Christian who wants to abstain from the corrupt practices of this world to participate in politics. Nonetheless, wisdom demands that it is better understood from within than by blind judgment, because, poor participation does not change or sanitize the "evil game" as have been described by so many; rather, a good participation from a Christian point of view and Christ-like character can improve the quality of governance and politics in general.

The relationship between Christianity and politics is a historically complex subject that has been a source of contention throughout Christian history, as well as in modern politics between the Christian right and the Christian left. Thinkers have approached the relationship between Christianity and politics in a variety of ways, with many arguing that Christianity directly supports a specific political ideology or philosophy. Along these lines, various thinkers have advocated for Christian communism, Christian socialism, Christian anarchism, Christian libertarianism, and Christian democracy. Others believe that Christians should have little interest in politics or government (Adetoyese, 2019:11).

One of the great tragedies of the Protestant Reformation was the failure of the great Reformers John Calvin and Martin Luther to develop a doctrine of law, politics, and the state based on truly reformed and biblical principles. The Reformers did not make any radical changes in the fields of political science, statecraft, and jurisprudence because, as German scholar August Lang has demonstrated, they were so preoccupied with theological debates, religious controversy, and the struggle for survival that they simply did not have time to develop a reformed and biblical theory of politics and governance. This, among other factors, influences how Christians perceive politics today (Adetoyese, 2019:11).

The Nigerian political system identifies aspects of Nigerian political culture that appear to have discouraged the church from participating in politics. These include:

Do-or-die politics: In the nation, political figures of all stripes have been observed committing violent crimes in an effort to advance their positions of power. Many aspirants are willing to do anything, including murder their perceived political opponents, to advance to positions of leadership. Politically motivated assassinations are therefore common during election campaigns. The first reason according to Osho (2022) is the popular belief which is quite true to an extent that politics in Nigeria is conducted in darkness. The conviction that politicians in Nigeria are deeply rooted in occultism and diabolism. Nevertheless, involvement in occultism is a thing of choice not of force. As a Christian one can choose to be part of a dirty game or become the game changer. This notion of do or die has actually made even well-meaning Christians who go into politics approach it with the mindset of conforming to the evil played in Nigeria politics. As such, majority of the Christians who manage to participate in politics does not even believe in a free and fair conduct of elections.

Politics of bitterness: It is common in the country for politicians to begrudge each other. As a result, many politicians exhibit pseudo-loyalty. The common statement, "I am loyal," is frequently heard even when the person speaking lacks any degree of loyalty.

Money politics: It is widely held that money is the answer to everything. This viewpoint has been misapplied to imply that votes can be purchased with money. As a result, politicians exploit the economic downturn in the country to offer money for votes.

Politics without ideology: Ideologies are supposed to guide political practice. This however, does not appear to apply in the country. It is difficult to distinguish the nation's political parties based solely on their ideologies.

Politics full of corruption, hypocrisy and Deceit: Corruption and deceit exist in politics in Nigeria because corruption and deceit exist in abundance in Nigeria as a whole. Corruption exists in almost if not every sphere of the Nigeria society. Undoubtedly, our politicians don't fall from heaven, as such most of them with a close look in the Nigeria society, engage in corrupt practices in order to make head way in the political setting. Unfulfilled promises litter the streets of Nigeria from the mouths of politicians.

Politics of god-fatherism: Some people have attained the status of quasi-gods in the political sphere. These people choose who gets appointed to positions of power on their own, disregarding democratic principles, and they breach engagement agreements with impunity. When their benefactors rise to positions of authority, they are forced to pay "royals" from the masses' common wealth, jeopardizing development (Falaye, 2016:6-7). God-fatherism in Nigeria Politics is one of the major pollutants. This is because even people who may not be qualified for setting offices are granted the privilege by hook or by crook by god-fathers who are in high positions.

Looking at the antecedents of Nigeria's democratic experience, it is reasonable to conclude that undemocratic practices in the polity are the results of moral decadence in our society. Since these have serious ramifications for the growth of the country, it is the church's duty to work toward changing Nigerian political culture. And in response to this quest, Ogunewu (2014) proposes prayers for political system in the country and leaders as advocated in I Timothy 2: 1-2) displaying integrity and decorum in all facets of life. This country cannot undergo transformation unless Christians in all spheres of endeavour set a godly example. Paul warns Christians in Romans 12:1-2 not to follow the ways of this world but to keep shining. Being exemplary in the conduct of the business of the church. Frequently, Christians lament the violent tendencies in politics, yet show similar tendencies in church denominational meetings. We must, therefore remove the log in our eyes before attempting to remove the speck in the eyes of others (Matthew 7: 3-5). Demonstrating love: Our society is hungry for love – agape love. Those who are Christians, have an obligation to love everyone with sincerity and to lead model Christian lives. The majority of the political space blight in Nigeria can be

eliminated in our country, and those in positions of power will no longer be able to harbor in their minds the sins of arrogance, greed, hatred, hypocrisy, murder, jealousy, lying, and so forth.

5. Biblical Perspective of Politics

The question that often rings in the minds of many Christians is the fact that much has not been cleared on biblical perspective on politics. Particularly the evangelicals in Nigeria grew up with the notion that political participation is not biblical. According to Falaye (2016), most Christians believe that getting involved in politics is very wrong because Jesus refused to be made king by His followers. Many Christians believe that the Christian task is evangelism, not politics, with the belief that being involved in politics will cause a distraction from the Christian task of bringing lost sinners to Christ. Christians who want to enter politics are generally met with criticism: entering politics will be extremely difficult; there will be a great deal of pressure; they will often have to walk a tightrope between upholding their Christian beliefs and dispelling myths brought about by the public's unfavourable opinions of Christianity and so on. Undoubtedly, when Christians submit to such criticism, they arrive at the conclusion that politics is too difficult, which implies that all of leadership and governance have been given over to satan and people who prefer to love power over God. This is nothing less than a catastrophe for the nation.

It is important to note here that the original God's intention for man is not to rule man but to rule over all other creatures that were created by God. (Genesis 1:26-28). However, the need for man to rule man arose as human race increased in numbers and established societies (Genesis 6: 1-5). Falaye (2016) asserts that Genesis 1:26, Psalm 24:1, and II Corinthians 2:10 all support the idea that man is meant to rule and have dominion over creation under heaven. Also, God commands the believers to be involved in Great Commission, which involves discipline nations to observe all that Christ has commanded – (Matthew 28: 19-20). Given the foregoing, it is evident that these two responsibilities cannot be successfully completed outside of this world. Believers should understand that government is of God. Security, a sound legal system, equity, peace, integrity, honesty, and open governance are all desperately needed in Nigeria's fourth republic. This could only happen under a godly government that ensures justice for all. Godly government will suppress evil, stand against abortion, homosexuality, lesbianism, gay-marriage, money laundry, killing, kidnapping, thuggery, and praise the wonderful works of upright citizens and other works. Christians should enter into politics and point to God's righteous laws

that can bring good benefit for the populace and lasting happiness as well.

The book of I Timothy 2: 1-4 and Matthew 22: 15-21 – show mutual relationship of church and state in the normal event of life. The state provides a proper atmosphere in which the churches carry on their work, for example, fire, police, protection, national security, postal services, general stability in society, education, water service and electricity. The church in the other hand has been instructed by God with the spiritual welfare of man by praying, for the governing authorities, pray for tranquility, for peace and preaching the gospel to bring men to faith and change their hearts, teach them to live godly lives. The only means it has to accomplish this is through the word of God. If Christians can partake or involve in politics, it can be of help, with the aim to enable every citizen to enjoy a quiet, undisturbed life. In other words, the government is to enact righteous laws that led to peaceful prosperity. Our society is hungry for love – agape love. Most of the ills of society including those in the political space can be traced to lack of love. John 13: 34-35 describe the Christians' identity as love. It is only with love that we can conquer our nation for Christ (Falaye, 2016).

6. Reasons why Nigerian Christians should actively participate in politics

Foremost Christians are to participate in politics because according to Matthew 5:14-16 Jesus admonished his disciples that they are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. There is a rich tradition of political engagement within the Christian faith and that engagement is rooted in a belief in the importance of bringing God's values and principles to bear on public issues. A thorough comprehension of Light's metaphorical meaning in Matthew 5:14-16 has the potential to completely transform Christians' moral and spiritual lives. The light highlights the disciples' missional identity and way of life (Minghat et al., 2023; Glushchenko, 2022). This identity and lifestyle challenge the status quo. Christ is telling Christians not to flee the world and also not to make any compromise. It is important to note that the world and its system are contrary to that of Christ and the church. However, politics and its effect on the Nation directly or indirectly has an impact on the church. As a matter of fact, certain policies which are inspired by ungodly politicians may directly impact the church. Murmuring and complaining of bad policies does not change the country in anyway. Christians should endeavor to be participatory so as to a fair representation in the government. More so, this paper is not centered on voting a Christian rather it is centered on participating

in politics. Hence, Christians should endeavour to shine the light in Nigeria politics. It is common sense to know that he who bears the light supposed to be at the forefront. One should not be thought of bearing the light and been at the rear. In biblical tradition, light has both literal and symbolic meanings of happiness, protection, orderliness, and exemplary life. One common theme in this literature is the idea that Christians have a responsibility to engage in the political process and to bring their faith to bear on public issues (Daanoy *et al.*, 2021).

In addition, if Christians do not participate actively in politics, they may not have a voice in shaping public policy and government decisions, which could lead to formulation of laws and policies that are not consistent with their values and beliefs. This could lead to a situation where the rights and freedoms of Christians and other minority groups are not protected, and where issues such as equity, fairness, and compassion are not given the consideration they deserve.

More so, if Christians do not participate in politics, they would miss the opportunity of using the divine wisdom of God in shaping the society. Joseph the son of Jacob in the Old Testament was appointed the second in command over Egypt. He did not refute the opportunity. Although, Egypt was a heathen nation that served other gods rather than Yahweh, yet Joseph accepted the divine opportunity to contribute to the preservation of lives during the famine that struck the then world, by solving the problem through the wisdom of God upon his life. So also, Christians can engage the wisdom of God in shaping cultures, ideas and corrupt system to the glory of God and the benefit of humanity. According to Proverbs 29:2 “when the righteous is in authority the people rejoice.” Hence, the good of the nation is dependent on the kind of people leading her.

Christians are to be and participate in politics because Christian doctrine proposes a God who cares and is involved in the universe He created. The command to replenish the earth in Genesis 1:27 is to be put in paramount consideration anytime a Christian wants to imbue the attitude of political apathy.

Christians need to participate in politics to bring about the full purpose of God on the earth. Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy man from Arimathea, Judea. He was a good and righteous man who served on the Sanhedrin council while also secretly supporting Jesus. At the death of Jesus none of his close disciples the “big 12” could go close to Pilate to ask for the release or permission to take the body of Jesus to be buried. Rather they all fled and hid a secret place for fear of their lives. However, Joseph of Arimathea was

wealthy, influential and had access to Pilate. Access to powers that be is crucial for the fulfilment of the will of God on earth. In Nigeria, through politics, one might be privileged to access a certain level of access.

7. Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following are therefore recommended for effective participation of Christians in politics of fourth republic. They are:

- Church leaders are advised to wake up to it responsibility of creating awareness to Christians that political participation is not sin, and in fact approved by God. The only concerns is the need for Christians with integrity to come into the theatre of politics for better representation.
- The church in general need to raise, the standard of the leadership criteria and behavior “as people in the world, but not of this world” who the heads not tails, Priests, Kings, peculiar people, Temple of God and Vessels of honour, ambassadors of Christ, battle axes and one in Christ.
- Christians have to recognize the need to step up sensitization about ethics, righteousness, good character, values particularly the in the politics of Fourth Republic that morality is fast eroding. The church also need to organize seminars on ethics and righteousness and their relevance to the church, politics, leadership, business, investment, partnership and national development.
- Church leaders should invest morally and financially on young Christians who are interested in politics by educating them to uphold their Christian basic beliefs and standards in spite of the temptation to act otherwise.
- Christian scholars should build a doctrine of law, politics, and the state on truly reformed and biblical foundations.
- Christian parents should encourage their children to study politics not just in a conventional manner but to study it personally in order to understand how politics permeates every aspect of the society. By so doing the chances of the future generation Christians participating in politics will become high.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, politics in Nigeria manifest along ethnic and religious lines. Hence, people should not see politics as blight or bad, it should be admitted that politics in any form is not bad but the political players are the ones often exhibit bad character. The paper ends with the observation that, in light of the Fourth Republic, Christian involvement in politics is not encouraging. Also, it is the findings of this paper that politics is biblical and God intention for every believer. It is the will of God for believers to participate in politics. Perhaps, the believer will be able to impart the lifestyle of God over the nation.

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