



# **Islam, Justice and Religion Extremism in Nigeria: An Anatomy of The Impact of Religious Crises on Nigeria Development**

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## **Abstract**

Islam is a religion of Allah, a doctrine of peace that preaches peace and justice. Adam, the first human being created by Allah was ordained to maintain peace with himself and his environment and the generation and generation after him have been enjoined by the two holy books - Quran and Bible to follow suit in the path of peace and justice. Prophet Isa (ASW) and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) were for peace and justice. However, in this modern period, justice has eluded and continue to elude the present generation of human kind due the absence of justice in our daily activities. This paper attempts an analysis of nexus between justice and religious extremism with a view to assess the impact of this on development of Nigeria, using North East Nigeria as a case study. Adopting descriptive method of analysis, the paper sourced data from secondary source. Findings revealed that there is strong connection between injustice and religion extremism in Nigeria and it had impacted negatively on Nigeria development. That Nigeria political class has not only perpetuated injustice in social, economic and political distribution of the national resources, but they have also failed to mitigate in the religious injustice and thus unconsciously breeds religious extremism. The paper avers among others that necessary machineries needs to be put place to address this trend in other to allow for unmitigated development in the country.

Keywords: Justice, Development, Fairness, Political class, Religious Extremism

## **1. Introduction**

Islam is not only a religion of Allah but a way of life ordained by God in the two holy books – the Quran and the Bible. It is a way of life that preaches peace, justice, and restraints human beings from extremism, God Himself is the God of peace. Right from the creation of the earliest generation of human beings, led by Adam, and to the present generation, peace and fairness have been made as part and parcel of daily life. And its transgression always leads to a chaotic situation for human existence – Noah’s generations were clear examples. However, Islam has been generally misconstrued as an individual and muhammedism religion that promote the selfish interest of the acclaimed originator of the religion source. Far from this, Islam is not a personalized religion but rather the creation of Almighty Himself who through various divine revelations through His noble and pious messenger, Moses, Solomon, and many others whom He has sent to reveal His messages of peace and Fairness to human kinds.

Globally, there were serious misconceptions and misinterpretations of what Islam connotes. Apart from a lack of informed knowledge of what is Islam to nonadherent, grievous misinterpretation stems from most adherents of Islam who claimed to be highly educated and informed and who were spreading consciously and unconsciously negative and non-Quranic provisions through misinterpretation and falsehood Islam is not a religion of force nor a religion of compulsion. It is a religion of willingness and moderation. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has been enjoined by God not to compel His religion on his uncle because nobody can make anybody accept Islam except Himself. Extremism in the decoy of jihad is also highly prohibited by Allah and He has warned of the consequences of such on the development of humankind in all ramifications. God “s disdain for the lack of respect violent and extreme steps were abundant in both Quran and Bible. Love your neighbor as you love yourself was Prophet Muhammad’s



directive on many occasions and where intentional killing, slaughtering, and maiming in the name of religion or Jihad now before the order of the day was not known anywhere in Islam be it Quran or Injeena. Unfortunately, some veiled Islam jihadists such as Al- Qaeda, ISIS, and ISWAP have wreaked havoc on the entire world including Muslim communities.

In Nigeria, Mai Tatsine (the cursed one) was the religious extremist to have reversed the wind of development in the country during the 1980's with over three thousand deaths and the attendant destruction of huge human and material resources. In the current trend, Boko Haram and now ISWAP have not only dwindled the economy of Nigeria through the unprepared diversion of more than half of the National revenue for the counter-insurgency operation thus Nigeria's global debt outlook raised serious concern for any meaningful development for the country either now or in the nearest future. Besides this, more than a quarter of the North East Nigeria (Bornu, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, and Taraba State) has been displaced, with many leaving in Internally Displaced Camps that are also prone to attack by these elements. Economy activities have not only been paralyzed in this region of the country but also the Nation's capital city was not immune to the activities of these religious extreme and violent people their agents such as bandits have stalled the railway transportation in the country with ruined consequences on the economy. The paper is therefore, sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine what is Islamic Religion
2. To interrogate the position of Islam on Justice and Religion Extremism
3. To extricate the connectivity between Religion Extremism and National Development in Nigeria

And thus, the following Research Questions were raised:

4. What is the Islamic Religion?
5. What is the position of Islam on Justice and Extremism?
6. What is the nexus between Religion Extremism and National Development in Nigeria?

## **2. Methodology**

The research work is exploratory in nature and therefore the paper relies mainly on secondary sources of data collection. Available and relevant literature on the topic was accessed both online and manually. Data gathered were analyzed qualitatively.

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopts two theories - Frustration – Aggression theory and Social Needs Theory. While Frustration – Aggression theory sees the violent act of human beings from the perspective of being frustrated and denied certain fundamental rights of justice such as the right to social, economic political, and religious justice, thus individuals and groups of individuals may result in extremism and self-help. This particular theory is very relevant to the analysis of the violent situation experienced in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria and North East Region of the country. Of particular interest is the denial of religious and legal justice to the late head of *Jamā'atu Anṣārīl Muslimīna fī Bilādis Sūdān* ("Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa", Muhammed Yusuf was killed by Nigeria Government in an extra-judicial manner. In another vein, the social Needs theory that was championed by Moslow and others sees deprivations of certain social needs as brewing grounds for extremism and violent act. This theory is also apt in discussing the genesis and aiding factors of religious extremism. While the theory may not in holistic manner avail itself for the genesis of religious extremism, it can adequately fit into the explanation of why it is easy to perpetuate this act in a poverty-driven environment of North East Nigeria and also capture the easiness at which Jihadists was been indoctrinated and recruited into folds of terrorists. Deprivation of social needs to these communities was an act of injustice and God Himself has averred in many of His



verses in both the Quran and Bible that injustice will also bring destruction to the human world and thus enjoined all to refrain from injustice.

### **3. Islam and Justice**

In Islam Justice is considered to be the supreme virtue. In Holy Quran, Allah Almighty mentioned Justice many times. Allah Almighty said in (Quran 16:90). “God commands justice and fair dealing...” From this verse, we can deduce that Allah commanded us to do justice and fair dealings in all aspects of life whether it’s a small or big matter. In another verse of the Quran related to Justice, Allah Almighty says: “O you, who believe, be upright for God, and (be) bearers of witness with justice!” (Quran 5:8). Therefore, justice is an obligation of Islam and injustice is forbidden. The place or importance of justice to the Quranic value system is displayed by the following verse: “We sent Our Messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Measure in order to establish justice among the people...” (Quran 57:25)

The one and only purpose of sending the prophets were to establish Justice in the world and end injustice. By doing justice means giving everyone his right. But this simple statement covers all the complexities of life in their endless and ever-changing relations; all the allurements; all the conflicts and problems. To guide the people, Allah sent down the Prophets with clear signs, the Book, and the Balance. The Book contains the revelations that spell out what’s fair and unfair or right and wrong. From Holy Book, we can understand what is right or wrong and what Allah has commanded us. In another verse of Holy Quran Allah says: “... Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.” (Quran 60:8). From this verse, we can conclude that Quran spells out the distinction between good and bad through vivid commandments regarding justice. Allah has asked His worshippers to maintain the system of justice even if the conditions and circumstances are against family and kinship. Quran narrated it as: “O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both...” (Quran 4:135). Sahdaab,(2017: 146) observes : O you who believe! Let not any people deride another people: it may be that they are better than they are; nor let women (deride) other women: it may be that they are better than they are ... O humankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another.

While dealing with one’s enemy one is not strong enough to do justice because the hatred surpasses the sublime feelings of justice. Despite this, Quran has asked to fear Allah and establish justice with an enemy as well. Allah is All-Watchful, observes everything, and will hold a person accountable for an inch of injustice if happened. In other words, you cannot do injustice even when you are dealing with the enemy.

The Prophet (SAW) asked to be just and kind. He (SAW) always had to deal with people and their affairs as a supreme judge, reformer, apostle, and leader of Muslims. In conducting Justice our beloved Prophet (SAW) made no distinction between believers and non-believers, friends and foes, high and low.

There are so many examples of Justice from the life of the Prophet (SAW) from which we can get inspiration and can-do justice in our all aspects of life.

*A woman of the Makhzoom family with good connections was found guilty of theft. For the prestige of the Quraish, some prominent people including Usaamah Ibn Zayd, may Allah be pleased with him, interceded to save her from punishment. The Prophet (SAW) refused to forgive the crime and expressed displeasure saying: “Many a community ruined itself in the past as they only punished the poor and ignored the offenses of the exalted. By Allah, if Muhammad’s (My) daughter Fatimah would have committed*



*theft, her hand would have been severed.” (Bukhari). Allah has commanded his messengers to establish justice and spoke to them in affirmative tone as quoted in Hadith: “O My slaves, I have forbidden injustice for Myself and forbade it also for you. So, avoid being unjust to one another. (Sahih Muslim)*

Allah detests a ruler who has bestowed supremacy yet is ignorant of justice. Allah will deprive him of His shade in His territory on the Day of estimation as Hadith narrates: “There are seven categories of people whom God will shelter under the shade of His throne on the Day when there will be no shade except this. [One is] the just leader.” (Sahih Muslim)

In another hadith Holy Prophet (SAW) stated that: “People, beware of injustice, for injustice shall be darkness on the Day of Judgment.” (Musnad Ahmed). So, we can say we have to know about justice and injustice, if we know about it then we can act according to that. Justice has broad meanings that include unfair dealings, uttering words that can hurt sentiments and biased feelings towards fellow being.

Furthermore, it was relayed on the authority of Abu Dhar al-Ghifari, radiyallahu ‘anhu, that the Prophet, Sallallahu alayhi Wasallam, said, of what he related from his Lord, magnified and exalted be He, Who said: “O My servants, I have made oppression unlawful for Me and unlawful for you, so do not commit oppression against one another.

This hadith stresses on the prohibition of all forms of injustice and oppression in Islam. It commands its followers to practice justice which is one of the main objectives of the Shariah. It also encourages Muslims to seek guidance from Allah by means of supplication (du’a) and relying on Allah alone (Tawakul).

Even though we are commanded to do our best efforts in carrying out our daily activities, one should not be materialistic and rely on his efforts alone. It is only with Allah’s permission and support and His tawfiq that our efforts become successful. Hence, this hadith confirms certain aspects of al-qadar which have been pointed out before and the choice is Allah’s Glory, the all-Gracious and Powerful.

In conclusion, Justice is an essential part of Islamic teachings and should be part of every faith messenger. The foundation of a territory is justice that Allah has loved for His worshipper and commanded His messenger to those who will neglect justice will be in the lowest steep of hell and the oppressed get their due rights. Psalms 89:14 justice and judgement (are) The habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face Quran 6:8. He hath showed thee, O man, what (is good, and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.

#### **4. Islam and Religion Extremism**

Islam is a religion of high culture and civilization based on universal values. Islamic culture and civilization throughout the past fifteen centuries have summoned all mankind, regardless of nationality and descent, toward kindness, mercy, generosity, and justice. For centuries, around the world Islam has proven that it is a source of science, education, and civilization. Islam is against violence and evil, and, conversely, promotes the idea of goodness and mercy. The Holy Quran chapter 16 verse 125, says: “Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way.”.

Also, the last prophet of the Almighty Creator, Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), was sent down to the Earth in order to establish peace and harmony on the Earth. This is said in the Holy Quran 21: 170 Oh, Muhammad!) We have sent you only as a mercy to the worlds». These values of Islam today have a special role and have become an integral part of global cultures. Recently, Muslims around the world are all



alarmed by the issues of extremism and terrorism. Extremism and terrorism do not further any religious or human values. Extremism and terrorism, in their scale, speed of spreading, and threatening violence have become one of the most serious problems of modern society. The saddest thing is that the religion of Islam, which calls for amiability, peace, and harmony, as well as tolerance for other beliefs, is portrayed by extremists in a negative light, creating an image of a hostile, threatening, and dangerous religion. In this way, not only does interreligious harmony collapse, but discord is sown among Muslims. These false believers, who hide behind Islam in order to achieve their goals, corrupt the meaning of the Koranic verses and the Hadith to fit their evil ideology. Also, they associate their sinful actions with "jihad," which has its own sacred meaning in Islam. However, there are absolutely no links between extremism, terrorism and Islam. This is demonstrated by the fact that when greeting each other Muslims wish for peace. Upon greeting somebody, Muslims pronounce the words "Assalamu alaikum," which means "Peace be with you!" Today's extremism which is foisted upon Islam, threatens international security. The members of terrorist groups are religiously ignorant people who do not even know the basic tenets of Islam. The terrorist actions of these extremists completely conflicts with Sharia. Almighty Allah commanded the Muslims not to go beyond the legal limits. Allah has forbidden bloodshed, injustice, and ignobility. In the Holy Quran chapter 5 : 32 , the Almighty Allah commands: "Whoever kills a person not for murder or for spreading mischief in the land, this is as if he had killed all the people, and whoever saves the life of a man, this is as if he saves the life of all people....." Also, in the next verse, it is sternly said: "Do not spread ungodliness on the earth; after it is put in order." Those who fall out of grace for violating the peace of society are described as follows: "Their effort is for corruption in the land, and Allah loveth not corrupters. . In the same manner, Jessica, (2019) observes:

*Religious terrorism arises from pain and loss and from impatience with a God who is slow to respond to our plight, and who doesn't answer. Its converts often long for a simpler time, when right and wrong were clear, when there were heroes and martyrs, when the story was simple, when the neighborhood was small, when we knew one another. When the outside world, with its vulgar cosmopolitanism, didn't humiliate us or threaten our children. When we did not envy these others or even know about them. It is about finding a clear purpose in a confusing world with too many choices. It is about purifying the world. The way forward is clear: kill or be killed. Kill and be rewarded in heaven.*

Suicide bombers, who kill innocent people, consider themselves to be "shahids" or "jihadists." In fact, suicide is considered to be a major sin in Islam. This is what Almighty Allah says: "Do not kill yourself (each other), as Allah is ever Merciful onto you". The Holy Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him), which are considered to be the sources of Islamic values, strictly prohibit suicide and the murder of innocent people.

According to Sharia, killing people not involved in a war during a war is considered to be haram. Islam promotes peace and tranquility in the world. Terrorist actions are completely contrary to these principles of Islam. Extremist actions that are cloaked in Islam are deliberate acts against Islam. Stay away from extremity as indeed what destroyed those before was extremism in religion. Quran 21: 171.

## **5. Religion Extremism and National Development in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a country of multireligious society, a secular entity with over 200 (Worldometers, 2022) million population. The country is always referred to as a crossroads of global religion because it housed not only Islam and Christianity but also traditional religions such as Ifa adherents, Ogun, and Osun adherents. However, religious extremism from almost all the religions present in the country has led to the



violence and destruction of properties and lives. The Masquerade festival from the traditional worshipers sometimes leads to violent clashes between the adherent and nonadherent due to intolerance and extreme behavior from both sides. Likewise, too, there have been cases of violent clashes during christen possession in the country also due to the display of religious extremism and intolerance. This notwithstanding, Islamic extremism is more pronounced in the country than in any other country and since the advent of the Maitatsine group in the early 1980s has witnessed both mid-level and high-level Islamic extremism. Though, it was averring by many scholars that this religious violence was mostly poverty and injustice driven. (Kukah 2012; Agbibo and Maiangwa 2013; HRW 2012). Kwaja cited in Agbibo and Maiangwa (2013) for example, argues that ‘religious dimensions of the conflict have been misconstrued as the primary driver of violence when, in fact, disenfranchisement and inequality are the root causes also Mustapha 2012; Kukah 2012). Some of the poor and marginalized population of northern Nigeria – the talakawa (‘commoners’)– were attracted to Maitatsine because ‘he condemned the hypocrisy and ostentation of the nouveau riche and promised redemption and salvation to God’s righteous people (Hickey 1984:253) Olusola, (2015) further observes “Therefore, the prolonged insurgency of the Boko Haram group is becoming an economic threat to Nigeria. This country must provide a solution to this problem so that socially, economically, and politically Nigeria will not only stay together but also prosper as a people, indivisible despite the diversity in ethnic and social affinity. The earlier we achieve this as a people, the better for the North and Nigeria in general.

The extent of relative poverty and inequality in the north has led several analysts and organizations to argue that socio-economic deprivation is the main factor behind religious extremism and terrorism in the country. In the magnitude of destruction of infrastructural development *Jamā’atu Anṣārīl Muslimīna fī Bilādis Sūdān* otherwise known as Boko Haram continued to carry out an attack and abate any process of developmental strides not only in the North East of the country but in the country at large. Development is any process of improving the standard of living of the citizens either through infrastructural development or human capital development. These two aspects of development have been inhibited through the act of intimidation, incessant attacks on state and private infrastructure, killings and disruption of academic activities. No nation can develop in an atmosphere of hostility and violence. Samson & Robinson (2015) opined:

*there is no nation that does not require national development which is self-reliant in many aspects. It includes development in the economic, political and social life of a nation. The absence of cohesion does not ensure or guarantee national development of progress or prosperity in all aspects of a nation-state.*

In the same vein, Oshio (2009) interrogates the nexus between Insecurity and National Development in Nigeria therefore avers:

*Unfortunately, Nigeria is, today plagued with social disorder, insecurity, poverty, illiteracy, balance the payment deficit, poor health statistics, ethnic and religious conflicts, corruption, crime and criminality, and political crisis and all these mean that we are very insecure in terms of human well-being. In this state of things, development is elusive like a mirage!*

*Apart from creating an unfriendly environment for foreign investors, those that energy – both capital and human resources, will be channeled to counterinsurgency instead of developmental strides In recent times,*



*Nigeria's budgetary allocation for security is at the top and surpassed capital voting for education, health, and infrastructural development.*

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

No doubt, there is serious controversy and misconception of what is Islam and its position on religious extremism most especially from non-adherents of the religion. Though, this misconception was generally fueled by certain adherents of the religion who see most of the interpretation of the verses of the Quran from an extreme perspective to either to achieve their myopic interest or to consciously mislead the general public. Islam is peace thus Salam Aleakun Waramutulai Wabarrakatu. May the peace be on to you and your entire house. In advancing the cause for peace, it is averred that no development can take place in the absence of peace and Almighty Allah has enjoined everyone to embrace peace. However, it is observed that while Islam promotes peace, it also enjoins all to ensure justice is done in our daily activities. God, Himself is God of justice and He has promised that He will be fair to all according to our deeds and that is why there is judgment day. God did not overlook justice in a small way even when a generation shortchanged themselves in the act of selling food, He brought His wrath on them. Justice in all ramifications – social, economic political, and religious justice. While Islam frown at extremism in whatever guise, it enjoins all to ensure there is justice in all our dealings. In Nigeria, it has been discovered that most of the crises bedeviling the country stem from injustice including religious extremism. Frustration and needs deprivation ginger extremism, they are fertile land at violent position is been taken in the country. The Niger Delta crisis, the Ogoni Crisis, the End SAR crisis, The Mai Taisine crisis of the 1980s, and the current Boko Haram Crisis, all in one way or the other were caused by injustice. Except there is justice and peace, no development, no meaningful development can occur. Various crises in the country have not only stagnated the economy but have also retarded it. The counter-insurgency operation against Boko Haram has cost the country heavily in the last ten years and made the county shift focus from a development drive to an insurgency operation. In the last Budget presentation, country's budget for internal military operation took the lion share while other critical sectors of development suffer. Infrastructural Development such as Roads, Health, Education, Health and Energy provisions took extreme back seats. Therefore, it in this light that the paper recommends among others that frantic effort should be put in place to educate and continue to educations citizens on the values of Islam as related to Justice, peace and extremism. The principal responsibilities of this must not be left alone with Muslim organization but rather government should to take bull by the horn to champion the cause for the propagation of moderate teaching in Islam, after all the burden lie heavily with the head that carry the load of development. Social, religion and economic justice are a precursor for any meaningful development, it is, therefore behooves of the government to weigh the balance between the provision of these justices and the attendant implications on the stagnation of development in the country through the diversion of the huge sum to an avoidable, unnecessary and undevelopmental channel.

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