

Adopting An Islamic Political System In Nigeria: A Vital Means For Addressing The Challenges of Western Democracy

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the complex relationship between Islam and Western democracy, examining the challenges and opportunities that arise when these two systems intersect. The research delves into the historical, philosophical, and theological underpinnings of both Islam and Western democracy, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence. It focuses on unique dilemma faced by the Muslim population in a diverse and pluralistic society particularly Nigeria. This article into look at the concepts of Islamic government and western democracy and to see whether a Muslim could participate in today's form of western political system or not. The study identifies the challenges of the western system of governance and reconciling Islamic values and principles with the demands of Western-style democracy. The study concludes that adopting an Islamic political system in Nigeria can help address the challenges posed by Western democracy, such as corruption, inequality, and social injustice. However, the research also highlights the need for careful consideration of the potential risks and challenges associated with such a transition.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 30

September 2024

Revised: 15 November
2024

Accepted: 28

November 2024

KEYWORDS

Islamic Political
System; Western
Democracy; Nigeria,
Challenges; Muslims;
Islamic Principles.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a nation characterized by its vast ethnic and religious diversity, has long adopted the Western democratic model as its system of governance since independence. However, over the past decades, this system has faced serious challenges such as widespread corruption, political instability, social inequality, and weak public accountability. As liberal democracy continues to struggle in delivering sustainable political order and social justice, an alternative discourse has emerged—one that considers adopting an Islamic political system as a more contextual and ethically grounded solution [1]. Academically, there has been growing interest in the study of Islamic political systems, particularly in countries with significant Muslim populations. Previous studies have examined the relative success of Islamic governance in enhancing public participation and promoting morally anchored governance based on Shariah law in countries such as Iran, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia. Several researchers argue that Islamic political principles—emphasizing justice, consultation (*shura*), and social responsibility—could address the shortcomings of liberal democratic institutions, especially in Muslim-majority societies.

Nevertheless, a critical gap remains in the existing literature. Most of the research has focused on the Middle East or South Asia, with limited exploration of the potential for implementing an Islamic political system within the Nigerian context. Moreover, there has been little in-depth comparative analysis between the failures of Western democracy and the alternative solutions offered by Islamic governance in the specific sociopolitical

realities of Nigeria [2]. Against this backdrop, the main research question this paper seeks to answer is: *Can adopting an Islamic political system serve as a vital means to address the failures of Western democracy in Nigeria?* This study aims to fill the academic void by critically analyzing the potential of Islamic political structures as a relevant, ethical, and effective alternative for Nigeria.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to comparative political theory and contemporary Islamic studies. By exploring the contextual feasibility of an Islamic political system in Nigeria, this study hopes to inform future political frameworks that are more inclusive, value-driven, and aligned with the religious aspirations of the country's predominantly Muslim population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The debate about the compatibility of Islam and democracy has been ongoing for decades. While some argue that Islam and democracy are inherently incompatible, others contend that Islamic principles can provide a foundation for democratic governance. This literature review examines the existing research on adopting an Islamic political system in Nigeria, with a focus on addressing the challenges of Western democracy.

Promoting democracy has been a major global concern of the Western world culminated in the recent Jasmine revolution and the ensuing Arab Spring. Consequently, the Islamic awakening and uprising has rekindled the debate on the relationship between religion and democracy. Considerable attention has been paid to the issue of whether Islam is the reason for the absence of democracy or the low level of democracy in Islamic countries. However, the issue of whether Islamic countries that recently experienced [2].

Islamic political systems are based on the principles of justice, equality, and compassion, as outlined in the Quran and the Hadith [3]. These systems emphasize the importance of consultation (*shura*) and the protection of individual rights [4]. Western democracy was introduced in Nigeria during the colonial era, and has since been adopted as the country's system of government [5]. However, the implementation of Western democracy in Nigeria has been marred by challenges such as corruption, inequality, and social injustice [6].

Several studies have explored the possibility of adopting an Islamic political system in Nigeria. For example, a study by Abdulkadir (2013) argues that an Islamic political system can provide a viable alternative to Western democracy in Nigeria [7]. Another study by Olaniyi (2015) contends that Islamic principles can be used to address the challenges of corruption and inequality in Nigeria [8]. While adopting an Islamic political system in Nigeria may offer several benefits, it also poses significant challenges. For example, a study by Oyeboode (2017) highlights the risk of Islamic extremism and the potential for human rights abuses [9]. On the other hand, a study by Yusuf (2019) argues that an Islamic political system can provide a framework for promoting social justice and human rights in Nigeria [10].

The literature review highlights the ongoing debate about the compatibility of Islam and democracy. While some studies argue that an Islamic political system can provide a viable alternative to Western democracy in Nigeria, others highlight the potential challenges and risks. Further research is needed to explore the possibilities and limitations of adopting an Islamic political system in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted in this paper is a literature study approach. The study of literature is the same as research in general, but the data obtained by the researcher is secondary data using the literature study method. Some steps that the researcher will take in preparing this article include: first, the researchers search for and collect reference sources that are relevant to the theme of this research. Second, several scientific papers that have been collected are then processed and elaborated, to comprehensively explain the

inter-sections of this article. Third, adopting an Islamic political system in Nigeria: a vital means for addressing the challenges of Western Democracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualizing the Terms

Democracy: This word originated from the two Greek words “Demo” and “Kratien”. Demo means “the people” while “Kratien” means government or to rule. Democracy as a concept has no universally acceptable definition. Sartori conceived it as ‘the power of the people and the rule of the people’ [11]. Appadorai defined it as ‘a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves’ [12]. But the popular definition is that of Abraham Lincoln, a onetime president of United State of America who said that it is a ‘government of the people, by the people and for the people’ [13].

Arnold Lyphart described democracy as a “system of government that hardly embodies all democratic ideals, but one that approximates them to a reasonable degree” [14]. Lypart’s definition falls in line with what Robert A. Dahl calls ‘Polyarchy’; a system of having more than one definition [15]. Lypart’s conception of democracy notwithstanding, his acceptance of Dahl’s Polyarchy, which falls short of democracy shows that there is democracy, which lies out there which is incapable of definition.

Democracy is that form of government that must of necessity seek and act in accordance with the “will” and “consent” of the citizen as to who should rule and how. The implication of this is that, no man or ruler can impose himself on the people. The people must approve of such ruler’s capability and ability to rule democratically. This is usually done through election. This view tallies with Manegold’s popular liberties in the middle age, which sought to resist the claim of rulers to an absolute dominion: Schallschneider opined that democracy is: *“the competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that, the public can participate in the decision making process . . . and the ingredients of working definitions of democracy are conflict, competition, organization, leadership and responsibility”* [16].

Western democracy is a form of governance identified with the western countries though there are attempts by some people from other parts of the world to adopt it. In the western democracy, sovereignty has been rested on people and the exercise of such power to elect their representatives, who on their behalf promulgated laws and decrees [17]. But in Islam, absolute sovereignty and power belong to Allah (SWT). Allah says: *“How can You disbelieve in Allah? Seeing that you were dead and He gave you life. Then He will give you death, then again will bring you to life (on the Day of Resurrection) and then unto Him you will return. He it is who created for you All that is on earth. Then He Istawa (rose over) towards the heaven and made them seven heavens and He is the All-Knower of everything”* [18].

Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then He *Istawa* (rose over) the Throne (really in a manner that suits his Majesty). He brings the night as a cover over the day, seeking it rapidly, and (He created) the sun, the moon, the stars subjected to his Command. surely, his is the creation and Commandment. blessed be Allah, the Lord of the ‘*Alamîn* (mankind, *jinn*s and All that exists)! [19].

Definition of Shari’ah: *Shari’ah* is an Arabic word meaning ‘the path to be followed’. According to Muslims it is the only path that leads to Allah, the Most High, which came through His Prophet Muhammad (SAW) [20]. It also refers to the laws which were revealed to Prophet Muhammad and which are contained in the Qur’an as well as the Prophetic Sunnah [21]. Islam has urged Muslims to strive hard to follow and implement *Shari’ah*. Allah says: *“Then we have put you (O Muhammad Sal-Allaahu ‘alayhe Wa Sallam) on a plain Way of (Our)*

Commandment [like the one which we commanded Our Messengers before you (i.e. legal ways and laws of the Islamic Monotheism)]. so follow you that (Islamic Monotheism and its laws), and follow not the desires of those who know not” [22]. From this verse it is clear that Allah (SWT) is the Lawgiver and the whole Muslim nation is simply His trustee. It is this principle that makes Muslim community a derivative rule-making power and not an absolute law creating prerogative as it is in Nigerian constitution [23].

Definition of Constitution: Constitution is defined as whole body of fundamental values written or unwritten, legal or extra-legal according to which a particular government operates [24]. It is also defined as the fundamental law of the state and principles of government [25]. Other school of thought saw it as a collection of norms or standards according to which a country is governed [26]. Many political thinkers are of the view that constitution is supreme law, but other scholars have objected to such title. This is because it is a man-made law that is subject to change by its makers unlike the Divine Law of Allah [27].

Shari’ah and the Nigerian Constitution

The constitution on which any democratic society derives its fundamental laws in many cases is different from what Muslims believed in. this is because Muslims are commanded to believe only in Allah who has the sole right to make laws, as He says: *“Do they Then seek the judgement of (the days of) Ignorance? and who is better In judgement than Allah for a people who have firm faith?” [28].* This verse indicates that if a Muslim believes that there is any human being who has the right to make laws other than such one has deviated from the path of Islam, for it is accepting that secularism is superior to the laws of Allah.

The Nigerian Constitution: Section 1 sub-section 1 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from which the Nigerian democrats derive their law says: *“This constitution is supreme and its provision shall have a binding force on all authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria” [29].* This section of the 1999 constitution claims supremacy over all authorities including the Glorious Qur’an which contains nothing in it but the words of Allah who created everything in the heavens and earth, animate or inanimate. Allah has commanded mankind to follow what He has provided in the Qur’an. He says:

Verily, this is my way leading straight; follow it; follow not other (paths): they will scatter you about from the great (path) [30]. But the Nigerian constitution says: *“The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall not be governed nor shall any person or group of persons take control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof, except in accordance with the provisions of this constitution” [31].* This section is opposed to Islamic teachings. Furthermore, sub-section three of the Nigerian constitution says that in a situation where any law contradicts any of the laws or provisions of the constitution that of the constitution shall prevail. The sub-section reads: *“If any other law is inconsistent with the provision of this constitution, this constitution shall prevail, and that other law shall to the extent of the inconsistency be void” [32].* This section by implication intends to say that there is no judgement better than the judgement of the constitution whereas Allah says: *“Who is better than Allah in judgement for people who are certain (in faith)?” [33].*

The above verse has made it clear that there is no judgement better and wiser than that of Allah and every believer must so believe. Similarly, the features or principles of western democracy such as freedom of association, freedom of religion etc. [34] and section 14, sub-section 1 of the constitution that say that the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principles of democracy and social justice, show that one has the right to practice any religion one chooses. This again negates Allah’s statement: *“The only religion in the sight of Allah is Islam” [35].*

Section 38, sub-section 1 of the Nigerian constitution which allows one to practice whatever religion one desires reads: *“Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom*

to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance” [36]. Many points that are clearly against some of the teachings of Islam in this section includes:

- a. Permission to choose any religion
- b. Right to apostasy
- c. Right to create and practice any form of religion (s) and propagate such anywhere in Nigeria. This by implication carries along with it constitutional guarantee and protection.

In Islam, only Allah (SWT) has the absolute power to legislate. Anyone who claims such power or right is by implication claiming to be Allah (SWT) and whosoever gives him that right in any form is therefore accepting him as a deity. Allah says: “*And He shares not His Rule and Legislation with anyone*” [37]. The features of democracy that arrogate sovereignty to people is absolutely antithesis to Islam, because it assigns what is for Allah to His creatures-mankind. Allah says: “*Say: whose is the earth and whosoever is therein? If you know! They will say: it is Allah’s. say: ‘will you not then remember?... say in whose Hand is the sovereignty of everything? And He protects (all), while against whom there is no protector, if you know. They will say: (All that belongs) to Allah. Say: How then are you deceived and turn away from the truth?’*” [38].

Muslims’ Participation in Western Based Democracy

Here two things are to be borne in mind viz participation and non-participation in western based democratic system in Nigeria. The participation of Muslims in the democratic system could be regarded as something permissible when one takes into consideration the benefits that Muslims could gain from it and what they would lose if they do not participate. This could be based on *Fiqh* principle such as necessity (*Darurah*) and public interest (*Maslahah*). Islam encourages one to weigh the benefit and harm in whatever one does. In case there is a benefit to be gotten from it but there are two harms, the one with lesser degree of harm is recommended in Islam. If Muslims’ participation in today’s Nigerian political system is harmful their non-participation is more harmful to them and to Islam as well.

Some historical events that took place in the past can serve as lessons to Muslims in this respect and such might stand as reason (s) for Muslims’ participation in the contemporary politics. One of such historical events is the case of Prophet Yusuf (AS) who happened to be a secretary of Agriculture under a country whose system of government was not Islamic. No one to the best of our knowledge had ever challenged or accused Prophet Yusuf (AS) for asking the leadership of *Misr* to appoint him under a system which was not Islamic. Therefore, it is not proper to accuse any righteous Muslim who takes appointment from a government whose leader is an evil doer or an infidel.

Muslims have no right to complain for the wrong done to them by political leaders, if they fail to exercise their right to participate. Refusing to take part in political processes and administration because of some of its principles that are inconsistent with the teachings of Islam is likely to do more harms to Muslims and Islam today than good. Muslim numerical strength in today’s Nigeria, if properly used will impact on the political process of the country; hence the need to use it positively. Muslims should not stay aside allowing others to make laws and decisions for them. Electorates can also participate by electing someone who will do less harm to Muslims if the contestants are unbelievers and all of them might do harm to Muslims. This is much better than sitting on the side-lines and criticizing all candidates. The second view is that participation in any system that is un-Islamic is not permissible. This is because the system is the creation of the unbelievers and its principles contradict those of Islam such as power of people to make laws, supremacy of constitution over the Qur’an etc.

Another point as regard to this view is that politics is an aspect of Islam hence it must be played according to its rules and that is something the present day politics which is guided by the constitution do not recognize. It is believed that there is no better system than the one sent to man by Allah. For this, Muslims should not partake in western based political system with the aim of changing it.

The Prophet (SAW) and his Companions found themselves in a similar situation when they were in Makkah and they had all chances to partake in it and they were even invited to it but they didn't. Participation they maintain constitutes tacit approval of the system which is un-Islamic. The participation cannot change the system because many had done so but nothing has changed. Likewise, there is also the fear that as time goes on some parts of the laws would be approved by them if their involvement is with the intent of changing the polity or system.

Appraisal

Actually, the non-participation of Muslims in today's politics might cause great harm to the Muslims in Nigeria. Hence the need for them to participate so as to reduce the likely repercussions of non-participation. There are also features of western democracy which Muslims in the present day Nigeria could adopt because of the circumstances under which they found themselves. In Islam, seeking for leadership for selfish interest is not allowed, but the fact is that in Nigeria today no one could ascend to any political office without seeking for it, this makes it obligatory for Muslims to do so on the basis of the principle of *Al-Darurah*. Allah (SWT) says: *"He has only forbidden you dead meat, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and any (food) over which the name of others than Allah has been invoked. But if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience nor transgressing due limits then Allah is oft forgiving most merciful"* [39]. Governor Ahmad Sani of Zamfara state and others in the Northern Nigeria reintroduced Islamic law in their states during their tenure as civilian governors, though it was not fully implemented, but they would not have been able to do so if they had not participated in politics.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examines the viability of adopting an Islamic political system as a solution to the systemic failures of Western democracy in Nigeria. Drawing from historical, philosophical, and theological foundations, the paper reveals that the Western democratic model—despite its widespread adoption—has failed to address key issues such as endemic corruption, social inequality, political instability, and moral decline. The Islamic political framework, grounded in divine sovereignty, justice, shura (consultation), and moral responsibility, offers an alternative that aligns more closely with the values and aspirations of Nigeria's substantial Muslim population.

The paper recognizes the significant tension between the secular principles enshrined in Nigeria's constitution and the divine authority emphasized in Islamic law (Shari'ah). However, it also identifies a pragmatic path forward by proposing a contextual and gradual integration of Islamic principles into governance, particularly in Muslim-majority regions. The research supports the idea that Muslim participation in existing political processes, though fraught with ideological contradictions, can be justified through Islamic legal principles like necessity (Darurah) and public interest (Maslahah). Active engagement in governance could allow Muslims to influence legislation, protect their rights, and promote justice within the current system. Nevertheless, the study also highlights the potential risks of adopting an Islamic political model, including the misuse of religious authority, threats to pluralism, and fears of extremism. It calls for a cautious, inclusive, and informed approach that balances religious values with democratic participation and human rights.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, for providing an academic environment conducive to research. Special thanks to colleagues and mentors who offered valuable insights during the preparation of this paper. Their support and guidance were instrumental in shaping the final version of this work.

Author Contribution

Muhammad Dahiru Shuni Ph.D.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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