

FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR SECURITY

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Abstract

Religious freedom, enshrined in Section 38 of the Nigerian Constitution, is a fundamental right alongside other provisions that support its full expression. However, in northern Nigeria, persistent violations of Christian religious rights have been documented since 1999. This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze patterns of religious freedom violations and their impact on national security. Findings reveal that the introduction of Sharia law instigated widespread discrimination and violence, culminating in large-scale attacks against Christians. The emergence of Boko Haram further intensified this crisis, leading to mass killings, displacement, and destruction of property. The resulting humanitarian and socio-economic challenges highlight the severe implications of religious freedom violations on national security and social stability.

Keywords: Religious freedom, Christian persecution, Sharia law, Boko Haram

Introduction

Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right that plays a crucial role in shaping societal dynamics, governance, and national security. In contemporary Nigeria, the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom coexists with persistent inter-religious tensions, sectarian conflicts, and extremist activities, raising concerns about its implications for national security. As a multi-religious nation with a population exceeding 180 million, Nigeria is characterized by the dominance of Islam in the northeastern and northwestern regions, Christianity in the southeastern and South-South zones, and a relatively balanced distribution of both religions in the Southwest and North Central regions. Traditional Religion also maintains a significant presence in parts of the North Central and Southern regions (Agberemi, 2005; Sampson, 2012). Despite constitutional provisions that safeguard religious freedom, Nigeria has witnessed recurrent religious crises fueled by ethno-religious politics, radical ideologies, and socio-economic disparities. Violent conflicts between religious groups, insurgency driven by extremist factions, and government policies perceived as biased have contributed to national instability. The intersection between religious freedom and security concerns highlights the need to assess how religious tolerance, state policies, and interfaith relations influence national peace and development.

This study examines the relationship between religious freedom and security in Nigeria, exploring the extent to which religious plurality contributes to conflict or coexistence. By analyzing the underlying factors driving religious unrest and evaluating government responses to religious crises, the study aims to provide insights into policy measures that can enhance religious harmony and national stability. Strengthening religious tolerance and implementing effective security strategies are essential for fostering sustainable peace in Nigeria. Nigeria's religious landscape has served as a double edged sword. It has brought to the fore potentials for forging a strong and democratic nation united in diversity exemplified in the adoption of Nigeria as a secular federal state with a constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion and prohibiting state religion. At the same time, it has exposed the perennial tendencies of religion to be used as an instrument of abuse and violence. The enshrinement of right to freedom of religion in the constitution has not translated to respect for the freedom of religion in the country, especially that of Christians in the northern part of the country. Instances abound of killing of Christians, vandalization of residential houses and churches, discrimination and the use of regulations on zoning and title registration to stop or slow down establishment of places of worship, limitation of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, pressurizing

Christians to file cases in sharia courts where they will receive unfavourable judgments, etc (USCIRF, 2016).

Open Doors, a charity organization that documents religious motivated violence identified Nigeria as the second country with the largest number of Christians killed after North Korea. Between 2009 and 2014, according to its report, 11,500 Christians were killed and 13,000 churches destroyed. In 2015 alone, there were 4,028 killings and 198 attacks on churches with about 1.3 million Christians fleeing their homes in fear of death (Punch, 2016). These statistics reveal the gravity of the problem of violations of religious freedom which threatens Nigeria's stability. More worrisome are instances where the state and federal governments as well as security agencies are accused of failing to investigate, prosecute or punish those who are responsible for infractions on religious rights. The security dimension to the protection of the right to freedom of religion is perhaps the most crucial because of the increasing call for victim groups to defend themselves violently and further engage in retributive justice. The caution of the Board Chairman of International Society of Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law, Umeagbalasi, is noteworthy here: *The capacities and abilities Christian populations in Nigeria, likewise victim-groups to adopt radical approaches for the purpose of defending themselves and preserving their faith and ethnic identities must not be underestimated...if nothing is done to arrest the deteriorating social and group insecurity and violent situations in Nigeria, the country may end up having dozens of violent armed opposition groups across the country, leading to further deteriorating situation where everyone will go about armed (Punch, 2016).*

The above scenario is better imagined than experienced, but it goes buttress the fact, as affirmed by Sampson (2012), that religious violence is a critical security challenge to Nigeria as a country. This paper, therefore, focuses on how the right to freedom of religion has fared with its spotlight on the experience in northern Nigeria between 1999 and 2016. Two factors inform the scope of this paper – Sampson's (2012) observation that "the incidence of religious violence has grown exponentially since the return to democratic rule in 1999"; and Ezeanokwasa's (2009) assertion that no fewer than 95% of religious crises in Nigeria occurred in the northern part of the country within the period. The thrust of this paper is that the problem of violations of Christians' right to freedom of religion in the northern part of the country should be of paramount concern to all Nigerians on the one hand, and the Nigerian government (which embodies security agencies and institutions such as the judiciary). This is predicated on the reality that any democratic country that does not place premium on the rights of her citizens and harmonious of divergent religious groups with fear or favour by enhancing national security has failed in its primary duty.

Concept of Religious Freedom

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right that allows individuals and groups to practice, express, and propagate their religious beliefs without undue interference, discrimination, or coercion. It is enshrined in various international human rights instruments, including Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966), which emphasize the right to adopt, change, or manifest religion or belief freely. However, the interpretation and implementation of religious freedom vary across societies, often leading to conflicts over its scope and limitations. For the purpose of this study, religious freedom is operationally defined as the ability of individuals and religious groups in Nigeria to practice their faith without legal, social, or institutional restrictions while also being protected from discrimination, coercion, or violence. This includes freedom of worship, the right to establish religious institutions, and the ability to publicly express religious beliefs without fear of persecution. However, religious freedom is not absolute, as it must be balanced with national security, public order, and the rights of others.

Scholars have debated religious freedom from different perspectives. Two dominant schools of thought emerge in this discourse. The first school of thought defines religious freedom as the free exercise of religion, meaning individuals and religious institutions should

have the unrestricted right to worship, practice, and organize their affairs without governmental or societal constraints. This perspective aligns with liberal democratic principles that emphasize minimal state interference in religious matters. According to Fox (2014), ensuring the free exercise of religion is not merely about preventing government restrictions but also about actively protecting religious groups from societal persecution. However, this approach raises significant concerns in pluralistic societies. Grim and Finke (2011) highlight a paradox: if the government takes no action against religiously motivated violence or discrimination, does it still uphold religious freedom? They argue that while the state may not directly suppress religious practice, its failure to protect vulnerable religious groups can lead to de facto violations of religious freedom. This dilemma underscores the complexity of maintaining religious rights while ensuring societal stability. The second school of thought, known as the Equality and Level Playing Field (ELPF) approach, argues that religious freedom can only be realized when all religions receive equal treatment under the law. Starke and Finke (2000) emphasize that governments must ensure fairness by not granting privileges to certain religious groups while disadvantaging others. State favoritism, which includes official state religions, preferential funding, or laws that disproportionately benefit a dominant faith, creates systemic inequalities that undermine religious freedom.

Religious freedom is deeply connected to national security, particularly in multi-religious societies like Nigeria. When religious freedom is upheld, it fosters social harmony, reduces religious extremism, and promotes peaceful coexistence. However, when religious freedom is restricted, it can lead to religious persecution, radicalization, and violent conflicts, threatening national security. Nigeria has witnessed numerous conflicts arising from religious intolerance, including sectarian violence in the Middle Belt, insurgencies in the Northeast, and clashes over religious laws in different states. Sampson (2012) argues that perceived discrimination against certain religious groups often fuels social unrest, making religious freedom a critical variable in discussions on national security. Moreover, government policies on religious freedom can either mitigate or exacerbate security challenges. Bowen (2010) asserts that when states favor one religion over others, marginalized religious groups may resort to resistance, sometimes in the form of violent extremism. Conversely, when religious freedom is protected through inclusive policies, interfaith dialogue, and equitable legal frameworks, it enhances national cohesion and reduces the likelihood of religiously motivated conflicts.

The relationship between religious freedom and national security in Nigeria highlights the need for a balanced approach one that ensures individuals and religious groups can freely practice their faith while maintaining public order and protecting national interests. This requires legal safeguards, institutional mechanisms, and proactive governance to prevent religious discrimination and extremism. Achieving a stable and peaceful society depends on how well religious freedom is integrated into broader security and policy frameworks. The ELPF position is not without its own share of complications. Scholars have debated whether is possible for governments to treat religions equally in a multi-religious society. Dermerath (2001), Rawls (1993) and to an extent Fox (2015) are of the view that it is difficult for a government to treat religions equally and proffered a separation of the two entities. Other scholars like Stepan (2012), Mazie (2006), Casanova (2009) and Driessen (2010) assert that governments can show support for one or more religions without necessarily placing restrictions on other religions by such support. Merging the two conceptions of religious freedom, religious freedom is defined in this paper as the inalienable right of persons of a particular religion to exercise their religious beliefs and practices without discrimination and persecution in a way that ensures that the right of people who hold differing religious views are equally maintained.

National Security

Due to its importance in the society, the concept of security has attracted the attention of men from time immemorial. This attention has been expressed in varying definitions of the term. One of the characteristics of most definitions is the presence of what Schafer (2013)

called the “survival plus” element which presupposes some form of threat to cherished values or a particular referent object’s survival in the near future (Williams 2008). Since security is a concept that concerns individual or societal value systems, it has been seen by the realist theory of international relations as a state of existence achieved once threats are contained or eliminated. Force, therefore, becomes the instrument by which governments preserve unity and ensure security. The social constructivist theory perceives security as a subjective process of interaction aimed at driving the perception of social values and identities away from fear (Nye, 1988; Fox, 2015). Comparing these two theories, Wolfers (1962) opined that the distinction between them is that the former focuses on the “objective sense” of security (i.e. the absence of threat) while the latter focuses on the “subjective sense” of security (i.e. the absence of fear). In his view, security is achieved when both elements exist in a society. Another theory used to explain security is the “common security” approach which emphasizes that security is a joint survival strategy employed to counter the threat of mutual destruction. Security, therefore, cannot be achieved at the expense of others but by combined efforts (Palme, 1982; Booth, 1999). These state-centered theories informed the security perspectives of the Cold War era (Moller, 2003) and shaped the interpretation of security as the defense of national sovereignty in terms of territory, people and systems of government.

However, with time, there was a shift to a more human-centered conceptualization of security and this led to the emergence of human security. Coined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), human security prioritizes human rights, safety from violence and sustainable development (Paris, 2001). The UN’s concept of human security stands on four pillars: freedom from fear (protection of the physical integrity of human beings), freedom from want (provision of access to goods, services needed to satisfy material and non-material needs), freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy environment, and freedom from hazard impact (Annan, 2000, Owen, 2004, UN/ISDR, 2002). From the foregoing, it could be gleaned that there are linkages between human security and national security. National security can then be described as the sum of the efforts, energy, intelligence, commitment and the use of institutions (and their products) to enforce and ensure adequate protection of interests, people and properties of a nation (Aregbemi, 2005). It also involves the overall protection of a nation’s integrity and sovereignty. National security encompasses the sum of what a nation does in order to safeguard itself as a sovereign entity and this includes every aspect of a nation’s life and existence. It then means that national security of a nation can extend to the well-being of its citizens, institutions, interests, development plans, economy etc. National security signifies the status of a nation in relation to its standing among other countries, encompassing aspects such as citizen protection, freedom, well-being, property and intelligence safety, national integrity, sovereignty protection, and the safeguarding of international interests. These factors collectively contribute to the stability and peaceful coexistence of citizens within the nation and ensure the country’s relevance on a global scale. When a nation fails to prioritize its national security, it risks becoming a failed state.

One of the most pressing national security challenges in Nigeria is the persistent violation of freedom of religion, particularly in the northern part of the country, which has been on the rise since 1999. The right to freedom of religion is explicitly protected under Section 38 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 38(1) provides that every individual has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the right to change their religion or belief and to manifest and propagate it in worship, teaching, practice, and observance, whether alone or in a community, and in public or private settings. A closer examination of Section 38 indicates that religion is construed in the Nigerian Constitution as a fundamental attribute of an individual rather than a privilege granted by the state (Ezeanokwasa, 2016). Furthermore, it imposes a legal duty on other individuals or entities to respect each person’s right to freedom of religion. According to Ezeanokwasa (2016), citing Imhanobe (2002), the use of the word “shall” in the provision signifies a legal obligation. Additionally, freedom of religion under Section 38 is a compound right, encompassing freedom

of thought and conscience both of which recognize religion as a rational process and a social reality. It is presumed that adherents of any religion have thoughtfully considered its principles, benefits, and associated responsibilities before making their choice of faith.

The enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion is reinforced by several secondary rights enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution. These include the right to private and family life (Section 32), the right to freedom of expression (Section 39), the right to freedom of association (Section 40), and the right to freedom of movement (Section 41). Additionally, other constitutional provisions provide the legal framework for the protection of religious freedom. Section 42 safeguards individuals from religious discrimination, while Section 10 explicitly prohibits the government of the federation or any state from adopting any religion as a state religion (Nwauche, 2008). Commenting on the significance of Section 38, Nwauche (2008) asserts that while this provision ensures that individuals freely embrace any religion of their choice, it also underscores the principle of equality among all religions. The right to religious freedom, therefore, must be exercised in a manner that does not elevate one religion above others. However, it is crucial to note that religious freedom is not absolute, as it is subject to limitations provided under Section 45(6). According to Ayoola (2001), this right may be restricted in situations where it infringes on the rights of others, threatens societal welfare, or endangers public health. These legal provisions highlight the necessity of balancing religious liberty with broader social responsibilities, ensuring that the exercise of religious freedom does not compromise national cohesion or public safety.

Violations of the right to religious freedom in Nigeria

Notwithstanding, the constitutional provisions regarding the freedom of religion, Nigeria, has over the years, acquired a reputation for being a country where this right is violated. Of the 25 most populous countries ranked in the Pew Forum Religious Restriction Index (which rates countries based on the degrees of Social Hostilities and Government Restrictions), Nigeria is among those with a very high degree of Social Hostilities (SH) and a high level of Government Restrictions (GR). Between 2007 and 2010, the GR increased from moderate to high. The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) uses four indices to assess Nigeria's religious freedom rating, namely, Government Regulation of Religion (4.7), Government Favouritism of Religion (7.2), Social Regulation of Religion (5.8) and Religious Persecution (6) (ARDA,n.d). The indices are based on a scale of 0-10; the higher the value, the greater the prevalence or severity. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in 2017 moved Nigeria to tier one group thereby recognizing the country as one of the leading countries where rights to religious freedom is increasingly threatened. The World Watch List, a ranking of the 50 countries with the greatest persecution of Christians, ranks Nigeria as number 14 (World Watch List,2018).

How did Nigeria get to this position? A review of infractions on the freedom of religion in Nigeria shows that the adoption of Sharia by 12 northern states, the Boko Haram insurgency and mob actions against Christians have contributed to the deplorable state of religious freedom in the country. To these we now turn.

Sharia and Violations of the Right to Freedom of Religion

In spite of the constitutional provisions designed to guarantee religious freedom and uphold the multi-religious character of the country, the reality shows that the case is different in the northern part of the country. Right from the inception of the democratic dispensation in 1999, the right was put to the test with the introduction of Sharia in twelve states in the north. The controversies that trailed this adoption heightened religious fault lines as proponents of Sharia argued that its introduction did not amount to adopting a state religion. Christians, on the other hand, opposed Sharia on the grounds that it would infringe their rights and accord Muslims undue advantages, since, in practice, Islam integrates both religion and politics. These fears, with time, proved well-founded. Christians experienced discrimination in education as reports revealed that Christians were denied admission into government-run universities and

technical schools in several northern states. In other cases, Christian graduates experienced unnecessary delay in the issuance of their degrees and licenses. Discrimination of Christians in employment also became the order of the day in states like Borno.

State governments in Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Niger, and Zamfara established and funded sharia law enforcement commissions known as Hisbah, which enforced sharia law, sometimes targeting Christians. Christians were affected by the enforcement of separation of sexes in public schools and in health and transportation facilities, and voting. Hisbah, in the enforcement of Sharia, targeted Christian areas and churches when arresting people for alcohol consumption. Some Muslims or Christians who converted to another religion reportedly faced threats and ostracism by adherents of their former religion. In some northern states, those wishing to convert to Islam were strongly encouraged to apply to the Sharia council for a letter of conversion to be sent to their families, which served to dissolve marriages to Christians and to request Hisbah protection from reprisals by relatives. Similar procedures did not exist for Muslims converting to Christianity or renouncing their faith. These violations extended beyond individuals to religious institutions, particularly churches. Kendhammer (2013) observed that Christian organizations encountered significant challenges in obtaining land allocations for places of worship or securing access to state-owned media for advertisements. Reports of these restrictions, especially from Sharia-implementing states, underscored the growing concern over religious discrimination. More alarming was the persistent fear that general insecurity, compounded by encounters with religious enforcement groups, economic marginalization, or even minor misunderstandings, could escalate into targeted violence against Christian communities.

The 2016 International Religious Freedom Report further substantiated these claims, documenting cases where churches were denied permits for new construction, expansion, renovation, or even the rebuilding of demolished structures. Allegations that local government officials manipulated zoning laws and title registration requirements to hinder the establishment of churches reinforced the perception of systemic religious bias. These restrictions not only curtailed the physical presence of Christianity in certain regions but also signaled broader patterns of exclusion. Beyond discrimination and institutional marginalization, the adoption of Sharia law intensified hostilities, leading to violent confrontations and significant loss of life. Christian-led peaceful protests against the enforcement of Sharia were often met with violent reprisals, resulting in widespread casualties. For instance, the 2001 riots in Kaduna, triggered by tensions over Sharia law, led to approximately 2,000 deaths and displaced over 63,000 people (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2009). Notably, since these early Sharia-related conflicts, a decline in such violence has been observed, possibly due to shifts in political dynamics, as some key initiators assumed federal government positions, and the emergence of more radical extremist groups that have reshaped the religious and security landscape of Northern Nigeria.

Boko Haram and Violations of the Right to Freedom of Religion

Building on the existing religious tensions in northern Nigeria, among other factors, the Islamist sect, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad ("People committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), popularly known as Boko Haram, has elevated the perception of religion and religious freedom to a more violent dimension. The agenda of Boko Haram ranges from stricter enforcement of Sharia across the predominantly Muslim north and the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria to the total destruction of the Nigerian state and its government (CNN, 2017; Olomjobi, 2013). On 23rd August, 2012, a spokesman of Boko Haram, Abu Qa Qa said, "we are telling the government to understand that if it is not ready to embrace Sharia and the Quran as the guiding book from which the laws of the land derive, there shall be no peace." This agenda has manifested in attacks against Christians, churches, businesses and homes, even moderate Muslims from other traditions as well as attacks law enforcement and security agencies. Suicide bombings, targeted assassinations, mass kidnappings and forced conversions have all been employed by the sect

over the years. Timelines reveals that initial attacks of Boko Haram focused on Nigerian security agencies and gradually encroached on Christians. Cook (2014) affirms that the attacks on Christians such as the Christmas Day series of attacks in 2010 and 2011 and the 4th November, 2011 attacks in Damaturu in Yobe state coupled with attacks in other areas like Adamawa, Jos, Suleja in 2012, “is a departure from its previous operation, which target Christians at random and did not appear to be a priority for the group.” The suicide attacks, bombings and targeted murders in Damaturu which killed at least 100 people “were clearly designed to expel Christians from northern and mid-range towns” (Cook, 2014).

In June 2013, Boko Haram was reported to have targeted churches in various northern states on three Sundays in a row leaving more than 50 people dead. In February, 2014, the sect attacked the Christian village of Izghe in Borno state killing 106 people. It could be recalled that on 4th April, 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped about 276 teenage girls from a boarding school in a predominantly Christian community of Chibok, Borno state. In its 2015 report, USCIRF observed that Boko Haram targeted Christians in some areas that it controlled, killing fighting-age men, committing sexual violence against women, and destroying or occupying churches. The group also burned down five churches in the Hawul local government area of Borno State in late July, for example, targeting only those buildings in its attack. The Catholic bishop of Maiduguri was reported as saying that in September that 2,500 people in his diocese had died in the conflict with Boko Haram, and many thousands more were displaced. According to an estimate by Nigeria Watch, Boko Haram’s activities in 2016 resulted in the death of 2,900 people as against 4,780 deaths recorded in 2015. The change of leadership in Boko Haram in 2016 which recognized Abu Musab al-Barnawi as the “wali” (i.e. governor) of Islamic State’s West Africa Province indicated a shift in strategy for Boko Haram, as the group have killed significant number of Muslims in its attacks on mosques. The new strategy which was to focus on bombing churches and killing Christians while ending attacks on mosques and markets used by Muslims was based on the perception that international aid agencies were using aid to Christianize the society.

A research by BBC Monitoring, which monitored reporting from 48 different media sources in different languages, puts the aftermath in perspective. It reported that Boko Haram made 150 attacks in 2017 as against 127 attacks in 2016. There was also a rise in suicide attacks from 19 in 2016 to 38 in 2017. The death toll increased from 910 in 2016 to 967 in 2017 while most of the targets in both years were villages, militaries, mosques and internally displaced persons (BBC, 2018). The fact remains that violations of religious freedom by Boko Haram has created a humanitarian and security crisis of gigantic proportions. Assessing the impact of Boko Haram, the Governor of Borno state, Kashim Shettima, revealed that since its inception, Boko Haram’s activities have resulted in almost 100,000 deaths (based on estimates from community leaders) and over 2.1 million internally displaced persons (Premium Times, 2016).

Implications of violations of religious freedom on security in Nigeria

The relationship between religion and security is evident both in theoretical discourse and practical societal experiences. Drawing from the Functionalist theories of religion, religion serves as a mechanism that fulfills the human need for belonging and security. In performing this role, religion strengthens the “collective conscience of the society,” which is essential for maintaining social order, stability, harmonious coexistence, and overall human security (Keenan, 2007). By offering protection from both natural and supernatural threats, religion alleviates fear and provides a means of coping with uncertainties and challenges associated with societal existence. Egbefo (2016) highlights this connection by emphasizing that freedom from fear is a fundamental link between religion and security. The functionalist perspective, also known as the meaning/comfort theory, posits that religion grants meaning to life and offers comfort in times of frustration, pain, and loss. Through this function, religion provides security by helping individuals navigate life's uncertainties and adversities. The theory further suggests that freedom from pain constitutes a core security function of religion, reinforcing the notion

that religion plays a protective role in all human societies. Given this understanding, the protection of religious freedom is crucial for ensuring national security and stability. Any infringement on religious freedom disrupts societal security, as it poses a threat to public order and safety. Violations of this fundamental right not only endanger individual freedoms but also have broader implications for national security. It is, therefore, necessary to examine how breaches of religious freedom impact various aspects of security in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Federal Government's responsibility to ensure security is explicitly stated in Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution, which declares that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government." The protection and enjoyment of religious freedom are rooted in this constitutional provision. Consequently, security agencies are obligated to safeguard all Nigerian citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations. However, in practice, this duty has not always been effectively upheld. Over the years, there have been significant concerns regarding the security of Nigerians in general and Christians in particular. The persistent and violent attacks carried out by Boko Haram, recurrent religious riots, and instances of discrimination against Christians in northern Nigeria have raised serious questions about the government's commitment and the effectiveness of security agencies in protecting lives and property. Addressing this issue, the Secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), in an address on January 16, 2018, emphasized that Nigeria's security system had become dysfunctional. The inability of various security agencies to subdue threats against Christians and other innocent citizens underscored the weaknesses in the country's security framework.

The security challenge in Nigeria has greatly affected the exercise and enjoyment of the right to religious freedom. Religious freedom, it could be recalled is a compound right encompassing other rights like those of life; dignity of human persons; personal liberty; fair hearing; private and family life; freedom of thought and conscience; freedom of expression; peaceful assembly and association; freedom of movement; and freedom from discrimination etc. These rights are fundamental to the social contract between government and the citizens, and failure to guarantee them not only violates the "agreement," but also constitutes a threat to the security of a nation. Violation of religious freedom through the introduction of Sharia fostered disrespect and alienation of members of differing faiths (mainly Christians in this context). The introduction of Sharia in the 12 northern states of Nigeria elevated Islam to a state religion. The governments of those states were reported to have sponsored the building of mosques, paid clerics with tax-payers money, established Hisbah Commission (with the exception of Kaduna state), all in the bid to popularize Sharia. Olomjobi (2013) observed the former Governor of Zamfara State, Ahmed Sani Yerima offered over \$800 million as a gift to any state adopting Sharia legal code as practised by Arab countries. These activities alienated Christians in these northern states as they felt that they neither had equal rights with the Muslims nor equal opportunities to have a voice in the North. Recognizing the security implications of the alienation caused by the introduction of Sharia, the Catholic Bishops Conference in 1999 and 2000 called the attention of the Federal Government to the likelihood of breakdown of law and order. This fear materialized in the Sharia riots experienced in 2000, continued attacks on Christians by irate mobs and Boko Haram's targeting of Christian communities (Ehusani, 2002). The statistics paint a grim picture of the situation - over 2 million people have been displaced because of Boko Haram insurgency as at December, 2016. Out of the 537,815 IDPs in separate camps across Borno state, 52, 3111 are unaccompanied orphans and 54, 911 are widows who have lost their husbands to the insurgency (Premium Times, 2016).

Violations of religious freedom in the northern part of the country created an economic meltdown in the region. Religious hostilities and restrictions create climates that drive away local and foreign investment, undermine sustainable development and disrupt different sectors of the economy. Since the start of the Boko Haram insurgency, the economic landscape of the affected states has been altered as banks, companies, business owners and customers were

constantly were constantly attacked, markets were bombed or raided. The insecurity of such a state of affairs has resulted in human and capital flight, worsening the plight of those left behind. Related to the above is the impact of violations on food security, shelter and clothing. The Boko Haram insurgency has ravaged the affected states to such an extent that there is widespread starvation (especially among the IDPs), food scarcity (as the insurgents loot markets and individual storage facilities), lack of shelter (due to the sacking of villages and constant attack on settlements) (Egbefo, 2016). The insurgency has also depleted the scarce health facilities thereby exposing people to diseases.

Conclusion

Without doubt, the Nigerian constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion and prohibits state religion. This is predicated on the multi-religious nature of the country which is contrary to being a blessing, become a hindrance to the attainment of a stable and secure society. The study found out that the enshrinement of the right to freedom of religion has not translated to respect for the freedom of religion in the country, especially that of Christians in the northern part of the country. The adoption of Sharia upon transition to democracy in 1999 proved to be a watershed for religious freedom as its implementation was marred by violations of religious freedom of Christians. Instances abound of the killing of Christians and destruction of churches during riots, discrimination and the use of regulations to stop or slow down the establishment of churches, limitation of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly etc. The emergence of Boko Haram exacerbated an already charged religious atmosphere in the North. Its antichristian ideology meant that Christians lived under constant threat to their lives, property, and their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Incessant suicide bombings, destruction of church buildings, abductions and assassinations made the north unsafe for Christians as those who survived these ordeals either sought for refuge in IDP camps or fled to other parts of the country. This state of affairs was worsened in part by the inability of the security agencies to effectively respond to crisis and violence, and safeguard the lives and property of people. The study established the relationship between religion and security on the basis of which it presented the security implications of the violations of religious freedom in the country. The alienation of Christians, it was observed, fostered disrespect for their religion and created a tensed religious terrain that gave way to violence. Not only did the violence which erupted make the northern part of the country insecure for minority religions like Christianity, it led to the mass relocation of Christians and an ever increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in abject poverty and ravaged by diseases.

Recommendations

Having examined the nexus between violations of religious freedom and insecurity, as well as the implications of such violations on the security of Christians in Northern Nigeria, the following recommendations should be implemented to address the root causes of these violations and promote peaceful coexistence:

1. The Nigerian Constitution should be upheld and enforced to guarantee the right to religious freedom for all citizens.
2. The government should create awareness of the interconnectedness of fundamental human rights, including freedom of religion, expression, and assembly.
3. Judicial independence should be strengthened through comprehensive reforms to ensure fairness and impartiality.
4. Security agencies should be reformed and adequately equipped to protect citizens, regardless of religious affiliation.
5. Law enforcement agencies should ensure equality before the law and demonstrate respect for human rights.
6. Border security should be reinforced to prevent the illegal entry of arms and insurgents that threaten national security.

7. Community policing should be implemented to foster collaboration between security agencies and local communities.
8. Religious leaders should promote messages of peace and discourage extremism in their teachings.
9. Inter-religious dialogue should be encouraged to foster understanding and cooperation among different religious groups.
10. The government should ensure transparency, accountability, and adherence to democratic principles in governance.

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