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Research Article

Is Democracy Halal or Haram? A Critical Examination of the Democracy Debate in Nigeria

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Abstract. Is democracy halal or haram and can Muslims participate? There are three major perspectives. At one end of the spectrum is a school of thought that argues democracy is disbelief—both in its specific and general sense. At the other extreme end is another jurisprudential school that views democracy to be at par with Islam. This school argues that like other typologies of democracy, there exists Islamic democracy. In the middle of the spectrum is the third perspective. It argues that democracy is a necessity in a multi-religious country with no state religion (like Nigeria) where the Sharia is entirely not applicable or only applicable to personal statues issues like marriage and inheritance. Evidences marshalled by advocates of each of these scholarly perspectives are worthy of

discussion. Without questioning the scholarship of advocates of other perspectives, this paper takes the middle course. It argues, focusing on Nigeria, that democracy is a necessity that should not be blindly rejected. Conceptually, it finds that democracy is not intrinsically *kufr* (disbelief). It concludes with a caveat that democracy does not, in any case, substitute the Sharia. For some overriding public interests, it recommends that Muslims in Nigeria should participate in their country's politics.

Keywords: Democracy, Halal, Haram, Muslims, Participation

INTRODUCTION

No system of government has been perfect. This is an undisputable fact. The basic reason is because all known systems of government are brain child of some individual philosophers whose thoughts are not also perfect because they are humans. Imperfection is obviously one of the most defining characteristics of human. It is a truism that humans are not perfect. Thus, their thoughts and philosophies cannot be free from imperfections. It is in this light that Islam remains a perfect and complete way of life—which includes politics. In other words, Islam is the perfect and complete way of politics. This is so because its codes of conduct are derived from the revealed book (the Qur'an) which author is Allah. Allah's thought, wisdom, knowledge, and system are essentially perfect since He is Perfect and the source of perfection. So, the question is not if Muslims can participate in politics. It is if Muslims can participate in politics when the rules of engagement are not based on, or derived from, the Qur'an.

This leads to the question of democracy. Is democracy halal or haram? If it is halal, why do some Islamic scholars and jurists frown at it and anathematise it? If it is haram, why do some Islamic scholars/jurists embrace it? To answer these questions, it is important to conceptualise the concept "democracy." How do we identify it? What are its features? What purpose does democracy serve? Since the focus of this paper is Nigeria (particularly Muslims in Nigeria), it will be interesting to ask how democratic is democracy in Nigeria. It is within this context that this paper discusses the permissibility or otherwise of Muslims' participation in Nigerian politics as it is. After narrating the evidences of the divergent perspectives on democracy in Islam, it argues why participation in politics in Nigeria by Nigerian Muslims serves Muslims' religious interests. Total rejection of democracy as *kufr* (disbelief) is majorly pioneered by some hardline sunni/salafi clerics. While the debate on democracy (being a system of disbelief) within the Islamic context is not new, much attention has not been paid to what Muslims stand to benefit when they participate and what their absence in politics would cost them. To this end, and focusing on Nigeria specifically, this paper cites *fatwas* (juristic legal opinions) of some prominent globally recognized sunni/salafi scholars to emphasize the

necessity of Muslims' participation in democratic system of government when it serves useful purposes.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts qualitative approach in its analysis. It examines the evidences that argue for, and argue against, Muslims participation in politics—i.e. democracy. It cites the *fatwas* (juristic opinions) of modern Sunni scholars on forbiddance and permissibility. Using Nigeria as a case study, it analyses Muslims participation in democracy with the lens of the lived reality of Muslims in Nigeria where politics is exceedingly religiously competitive. Data are secondarily sourced from books, journals, newspapers, and Internet materials.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The Concept of Halal and Haram in Islam

This is in the domain of the Divine in Islam. Nobody, no matter how learned and righteous, can declare what is permissible impermissible and vice versa in Islam. "Halal and "haram", though Arabic words, have been incorporated into the English dictionaries probably because of their centrality to the discourse of the lawful and the prohibited in Islam. Halal is simply defined as permissible according to Muslim religious law while haram is defined simply as unlawful, sinful, and forbidden by Islam. This is true but the concept is far deeper than that in Islamic literature. The jurist, Qaradawi (1960), in an attempt to define halal, ends up defining haram which he defines "as what is prohibited by the *nass* (text) from the Law-Giver, Allah (Glory be to him). If the *nass* is not sound...or if it is not explicit in stating the prohibition, the original principle of permissibility applies." This implies that everything is halal/lawful in Islam until there is a clear textual proof that prohibits it. Therefore, is democracy halal or haram? This is not even the question. The question is: "Is democracy known in Islam?" Definitely, no. Though, democracy exists before Islam, there is not a single expression of it in the Qur'an or in the corpus of Hadith. However, this does not make it lawful or unlawful until we know it (democracy). Hence, we conceptualise politics and turn to democracy.

Politics as a Concept

The common notion that is generally held about politics is that it is a dirty game. This notion gains traction day by day especially in Nigeria. But is politics really a dirty game? This is a Western conception and it is far away from Islam. Moten (1996: 19) argues: "The pejorative image of politics resulting from Western conceptualization has no relevance to politics as conceptualized in Islam." Can we then say politics means different thing to different people and according to context?

Yes. Politics is always context specific and context defined. This brings to prominence the view of those who say politics is what the political scientists say it is. Or, as summarized by Crick (1964: 16), 'politics is politics.'

Yet, politics has been variedly defined. Plato and Aristotle view it primarily in terms of the moral purposes that the decision-makers ought to pursue. The polis—that is 'state', they thought, existed to seek its common good, civic virtue and moral perfection. Aristotle (1953:44) considers the major end of politics as achieving 'the highest good.' Easton (1960:113) defines it "as authoritative allocations of values for a society." Dyke (1960) sees politics as a struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues. In a show of approval, Winter and Bellows (1981:8) give a definition that combines Easton's and Dyke's in which they say "politics is a struggle between actors pursuing conflicting desires on issues that may result in an authoritative allocation of values." Ranny (1975: 35) sees it as a process of resolution of conflict in society. To Merki (1967: 13), "it is the quest for power, order, and justice".

What is apparent from the definitions above is that the essence of politics is striving for the good life in a competitive environment. Construing politics within this perspective, Moten (1996) avers that politics is central to Islam. He explains that four of the five fundamental pillars of Islam, i.e., prayer, fasting, alms-giving and pilgrimage are, quoting Enayat (1982: 2), "perfectly suited to promoting *esprit de corps* and group solidarity among its followers". He continues, "These pillars of Islam are not meant for pure spiritual upliftment, but have socio-economic and political significance as well. They are closely related to human behavior and activity." (Moten, 1996: 19). If politics is defined as an endeavor to strive for good life, it means it is in tandem with the Qur'anic injunction which commands enjoining what is good, forbidding the evil, and upholding justice, (Q3: 110; Q4: 135). If politics is considered as a process of conflict resolution, it is still Islam; for Islam condemns disorder and anarchy (Q2:205; Q49: 9). One of the best ways Muslims can obey these injunctions is to participate in the affairs of the state.

From the above, Ghazali rightly points that religion and temporal powers are twins. To him, politics aims at "man's welfare in this world and bliss in the next" (Rosenthal, 1958: 39). Politics in Islam provides opportunities for all to:

Live the 'good life'—a life 'as would fit them for participation in the future life, by due performance of their religious and ethical duties, by mutual cooperation in their respective functions according to the ordinances of the Shari'ah, and by the development of their moral personalities on the lines ordained by God (Moten, 1996: 24).

Therefore, politics in Islam can be defined as the use of authoritative power to ensure that religion and temporal affairs of the people are coordinated to

promote man's welfare in this world and happiness in the Hereafter (Salaudeen & Dukawa 2025). The above highlights the fact and necessity of politics. There is no much controversy about Muslims' participation in it. The controversy arises when the politics is based on democracy; not based on Sharia. It is instructive therefore to dissect democracy as a concept.

What is Democracy?

Democracy is a system of government which had been in existence hundreds of years before the Prophet (PBUH) and, of course, before the revelation of the Qur'an. Practiced in Athens (an ancient Greek city state) in what is generally known as direct democracy, it has come to be known as indirect or representative democracy in the modern day (Heater, 1964). This, in part, because of population explosion; and also, because the modern states are territorial states with vast expanse of land inhabited by millions of people. This makes direct democracy impossible. This is a brief origin of democracy.

But what is democracy itself? It may be described as a system of government through which governing power is exercised—directly or indirectly—by the people. These people are periodically elected by themselves to represent themselves (Appodorai, 1974). Central to democracy is the supremacy of the popular will on the overall policies and directions of government. Abraham Lincoln even simplifies democracy as "a government of the people, by the people, and for the people." This is very simplistic but it has some implications as will be explained in due course. It should be noted that people are distinguished from people in the same polity. Thus, among the people, there are majority and minority. In democracy, practically speaking, the majority rules; not just people. Democracy is therefore the submission of the minority to the decision of the majority.

What are the Elements of Democracy?

Democracy has some cluster of elements by which it is identified. Without being exhaustive, it includes among others:

1. Rigorous competition among individuals and organized groups for major positions of government
2. Popular participation in the electoral process
3. Mutual respect for civic and political rights of all people irrespective of gender, religion or race
4. Right to vote and to be voted for (political representation)
5. Rule of law
6. Freedom of religion and association
7. Right to form and join political parties

8. Periodic elections
9. Right to criticize government or its policies (accountability and transparency)
10. Free and fair elections (Diamond, 1988; Harrison & Boyd, 2003)

From the above, it is evident that democracy intends to place people at the centre of their own affairs through representation. It promotes, primarily, freedom and equality and right of political participation. These are the ideals of democracy. But has democracy been what it claims to be in practice? This is why some, or rather many, scholars argued against democracy. This is not limited to Islamic scholars who argue from the perspective of the Sharia. It includes secular and non-Muslim scholars in the field of Political Science. Even Western politicians who are progenitors of modern democracy have their grudges against it. What follows is a glimpse of what has been said as drawbacks to democracy despite global advocacy for democratization.

Democracy: The most Popular or the Best System of Government?

Popularity of a system does not make it the best. This is the case with democracy. It is the most popular system of government in the world today but it is not necessarily the best. This is evident in the submission of those who are at the forefront of the advocacy for democracy. Expressing his disappointment in democracy, Winston Churchill, speaking in the House of Lord in 1947, averred that: "Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time..." (International Churchill Society, 2016). Like Churchill, Bukowski (1972) explains that "the difference between a Democracy and a Dictatorship is that in a Democracy you vote first and take orders later; in a Dictatorship you don't have to waste your time voting."

Before then, Aristotle had described democracy as the rule by the whole people which corrupt form is mob rule. To most thinkers, 'Democracy' and 'mob rule' were seen as similar concepts (Harrison & Boyd 2003). The third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, also made an unkind remark about democracy. He asserted that "democracy is nothing more than mob rule, where fifty-one percent of the people may take away the rights of the other forty-nine percent." (Bowden, 211: 236). Appadorai (1974: 141) also contends that "In practice democracy is the rule of ignorance. It pays attention to quantity, not quality; votes are counted, not weighed." This is what has been said about democracy which the world hegemony do not want

us to know. Thus, great Islamic scholars who problematize democracy as disbelief arguably have their points to which we turn.

Democracy is Haram; it is even Kufr (disbelief)

Scholars within this school of thought like Maududi, (1955); Qutb, (1978); Nuri, (1982); Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (2012) hold that sovereignty belongs to Allah and only Him rules. Verse 57 of Chapter six of the Qur'an, "Surely, judgment is only for Allah," is one of their strongest evidences against democracy. They echo that democracy—in addition to being a Western imperialist ploy—is a Judaeo-Christian concept which amounts to *kufr* (disbelief). They add that Westerners are followers of the Cross who intend to colonize other people's lands and exploit its resources to sustain their own growth. They (Westerners) and their democracy should be viewed with suspicion (Farzaneh, 2015).

Thus, Islam is the very antithesis of secular Western democracy. They argue that the concept of majority rule is objectionable because issues of right and justice cannot be quantified; the greater number of votes does not equate greater moral position. They also aver that it is preposterous to think of or talk about Islamic democracy. The concept of gender equality which is rigorously promoted under democracy makes it depart from Islam because it is a direct affront to some certain passages of the Qur'an. To disagree with any verse of the Qur'an is an established act of disbelief, they argue.

In his rejection of democracy, Muhammad Yusuf (2009) advocated a hardline conception of the doctrine of *alwala'wa-l-bara'*. In Salafi-jihadis' thought, *al-wala'wa-l-bara'* means exclusive loyalty (*al-wala'*) to those whom they consider true Muslims, and complete disavowal (*al-bara'*) of all others. Arguing that democracy is disbelief, Yusuf asserts that freedom of religion enshrined in democracy encourages apostasy from Islam. It is obligatory for a true Muslim to oppose democracy which to him is the system of the infidels. Thus, following it, dealing in it, or utilizing it as system of government is unbelief (Thurston, 2016). Like Yusuf, Shekau also declared that everyone knows democracy is unbelief, and everyone knows the Constitution is unbelief, and everyone knows that there are things Allah has forbidden in the Qur'an. He continued "Know, people of Nigeria and other places, a person is not a Muslim unless he disavows democracy and other forms of polytheistic unbelief (*shirk*)."

(SaharaTV, 2014; Thurston 2016: 16). In another video, Shekau juxtaposed his faith in God with the National Pledge recited by students in government schools. "You are worshipping the nation," he said (SaharaTV, 2014; Thurston 2016: 16).

Democracy is Halal (lawful); it is Compatible with Islam

That Democracy is the reality of the present age and it is compatible with Islam is the summary of the arguments of scholars like Asad, (1980); Qaradawi, (2004); Turabi, (1987); Soroush, (2000). They identify many areas of convergence between Islam and democracy. They argue that democracy overlaps with Islam in many aspects. To them, concepts like consultation (*shura*), accountability (*hisab*), Justice (*adl*), and consent of the people to be ruled, among others are central to Islam and democracy. According to them, democracy does not require believers to jettison their convictions, secularize their faith, or lose faith in divine protection and in Allah. They premised this argument on the freedom of religion and thought which is well entrenched in democracy. That democracy is disbelief was specifically dismissed by Qaradawi (2004: 192) as concoction of "rash superficialists."

The debate of compatibility of democracy with Islam is not limited to circle of Islamic scholars. Even in Western scholarship, there exists sharp disagreements in respect to the compatibility of Islam with democracy. Huntington (1996) and Fukuyama (1992), for instance, find no compatibility; while others, such as Halliday (1996), Esposito and Voll (1996), Entelis (1997) assert that compatibility exists. The focus of this paper is not to debate the compatibility per se. Its major concern (and emphasis) is on the necessity of Muslims' participation due to some benefits that will be gotten and harms that will be prevented and averted. What follows are some juristic opinions of some modern renowned scholars who, from the perspective of public interests, permit Muslims' participation.

Scholars' Fatwas on Permissibility

Ashkar (2009) discusses this topic extensively by analyzing the evidences of rejecters of democracy as disbelief and those who approve of it. He then quotes views of many leading modern Sunni scholars who permit participation in electoral democracy. Among those from whose fatwas Shakir (2009) quotes permissibility are Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, Abdul 'Aziz bn Baaz, Muhammad Salih Uthaymin, and Nasiruddeen al-Albani. They all agreed that Muslims should participate if that serves Muslims' interests and there are benefits in participation. Uthaymin went further to say Muslims participation in electoral democracy is not only permissible but obligatory.

Before Uthaymin, Abubakar Gumi proclaimed publicly that politics is more important than the five daily prayers. This sounds very strange and outrageous but it was not a slip of the tongue. Gumi said it time and again: "politics is more important than prayer" to highlight the importance of Nigerian Muslims' participation in elections (Ousmane 2003 p. 209; Loimeier 1997 p.17). These scholars established their support for participation on the famous hadith which says "Actions

are judged according to intention" (Bukhari & Muslim). Though some of them acknowledged that there are dangers in participation; however, they urged that the intention of participants must be to uphold the truth and spread justice (Shakir, 2009).

Prophets who Participated in Political System that is not Divine

Prophet Yusuf (AS) became what can be roughly referred to as Minister of Finance in a polity which system is far away from Allah. If participation in a system that is *kufir* (disbelief) amounts to disbelief, Allah in His Wisdom would have shielded His prophet from that. He (Allah) would not have allowed Prophet Yusuf (AS) to get soiled in a system of *kufir* to attain such high ministerial position to rule over them. Also, it was reported by Ibn Hisham that shortly after the Messenger of Allah (SAW) had been honored with Prophethood, he witnessed the Al-Fudoul Confederacy. This Confederacy was formed by the Meccan unbelievers with the aim to suppress injustice and violence, restore the rights of the destitute and the weak. Recounting his participation in the league, the Prophet (SAW) said: "I witnessed a confederacy in the house of 'Abdullah bin Jada'an. It was more appealing to me than herds of cattle. Even now in the period of Islam I would respond positively to attending such a meeting if I were invited." (Mubarakpuri, 1996: 61). Muslims in Nigeria are not by any means holier than the Prophet (SAW) to dissociate themselves from democratic politics because some scholars hold that it is *kufir* (disbelief).

Democracy in Nigeria

For all that has been said about the drawbacks of democracy, it has thrived, to an appreciable extent, in some countries—especially in the Western world. Put differently, some of the dividends of democracy are visible. However, Nigeria has not recorded a milestone achievement in its democratic experience. What appears to be dividends of democracy in Nigeria is unhealthy rivalries among ethnic groups, politics of identity, favoritism, parochialism, selective justice, and religious bigotry—expressed through politics. What best describes Nigerian politics is "prebendalism". This is a concept introduced by Max Weber to explain a patrimonial system which is historically rooted in feudal or primitive society. A "prebend" is a public office procured by an individual in return for loyal service to a lord (in Nigeria, godfather) and retained for his personal use and for the benefit of his own supporters (Joseph, 1987).

Nigerian politics is essentially prebendalized. When a group is not represented it is as best as not existing. It is a politics that satisfies the appetite of the majority and silences the minority. This paper does not use the words "majority" and "minority" in the quantitative terms. They are used in the qualitative terms. For

instance, if religion 'A' or group 'A' has a population of a million and religion 'B' or group 'B' has a population of some thousands, apparently religion 'A' or group 'A' is in the majority quantitatively. But if 'A'—though in the majority—is hardly represented in public office while 'B'—though in minority—is adequately represented, then the words "majority" and "minority" swap meanings. "Majority" becomes "minority" and "minority" becomes "majority" in qualitative terms.

In Nigerian democracy, rule of law, right to worship or freedom of religion, fairness and justice—which are all elements of democracy—are discriminatorily upheld by those in power. In Nigeria, what exists is the rule of majority; not the rule of law. The rule of law, in theory, is to protect rights of individuals—irrespective of affiliations and statuses—and ensure justice. It will be suicidal for a religious and ethnic group to stand aloof from the reality of its existence. That is what it means not to participate in politics with "prebendal" arrangement, behavior, and orientation. What exactly is the word "prebendal"?

The term prebendal refers to patterns of political behavior which reflect as their justifying principle that the offices of the existing state may be competed for and then utilized for the benefit of office-holders as well as that of their reference or support group. To a significant extent, the "state" in such a context is perceived as a congeries of offices susceptible to individual *cum* communal appropriation. The statutory purposes of such offices become a matter of secondary concern, however much that purpose might have been codified in law or other regulations or even periodically cited during competitions to fill them (Joseph, 1983: 30-31)

From the above, it can be unequivocally said that democracy is anything but perfect in Nigeria. The minority does not have a voice. The majority oppresses at will. "Realism" as a political concept has reached its zenith in Nigeria where politics is what it is; not what it should be. "Idealism" which emphasizes what ought to be and foregrounds ethics is confined to religious books and philosophical discourses. How should Muslims in Nigeria relate with this reality? How should they react to this politics? And what should be their attitudes towards this democracy? These are difficult questions indeed. Yet, answers to them will be attempted in the subsequent rubrics.

The lived Reality of Nigerian Muslims

The lived reality of Muslims in Nigeria is different from the idealistic scriptural prescriptions. Yet this reality can be lived without acting against the scripture (Sharia) and the spirit of Islam. Islam remains a practical religion. It is not a utopian concept or a collection religious dogma entirely meant for academic discourse. Its book (the Qur'an) is practicable till the end of time. The Qur'an itself prescribes gradual processes and means in achieving goals. It forbids evils, immorality, and corruption

but yet prescribes determination with patience towards eradicating evils. Islam understands context, thus Islamic jurists and scholars contextualize text to arrive at rulings. It is the lived reality of Muslims in the modern world that scholars put into context to approve participation in democracy. It is not that democracy is Islam. Yet it is not a clear-cut *kufr* (disbelief). It is a system of government; it is not a system of religion.

Muslims' rejection of politics will not stop politics in Nigeria and government will continue to exist. The Muslims, willy-nilly, shall continue to be subjected to the law of the Constitution which is not Sharia without their input. In that case, hardly will they achieve any purpose of their religion. Practically, that will be a humiliation. However, the Christians since in the 1980s in Nigeria were ready to utilize religion, by fully participating in politics, to promote their socio-economic wellbeing. Kukah (1993: x) without mincing a word asserts that:

Many Christians would seem to have come to the conclusion that since religion has been a major factor in determining the staying power of the Muslims, it has become imperative for Christians now to use religion for achieving their socio-political activity and the place of religion in the political process is being redefined as a means of dealing with these new realities.

Islam, and even democracy, is not a monolithic concept. It has different interpretations and the differentials in its interpretation is not a novelty. It has always been the case beginning from the prophetic era. So, democracy has typologies. Which of the typologies is disbelief? What we practice in Nigeria is representative democracy. As it is, if Muslims deny themselves representation, they deny themselves many things including freedom to worship, freedom to don the hijab, freedom to keep beard, freedom to identify as Muslims, and even freedom to education. Muslims in the Southwest of Nigeria had, in the past, had a real experience of what it means to be denied freedom of worship and access to education. They had to change their Muslim names if they must go to school. Not because they are in the minority, but because their majority does not count due to deficit or zero representation in government.

In reaction to some Islamic clerics in the Southwest who, through their public lectures, discouraged Muslims from voting or having anything to do with democracy which they described as *kufr* (disbelief), Salaudeen (2022: para 5) wrote:

If the spread of this Vote Haram pernicious doctrine is not curtailed...a time is coming when Nigerian Muslims will have to hide their Muslim names to be treated in hospitals or admitted into schools. This had happened before in the South West and that history should not be allowed to repeat itself. It is very unfortunate that the 'intellectual' vanguards of this ghetto ideology—such that should sound primitive even to the people of the Stone Age—are from the South West of Nigeria.

Allah counsels us and He knows better, "If they gain dominance over you, they would be [i.e., behave] to you as enemies and extend against you their hands and their tongues with evil, and they wish you would disbelieve" (Q 60: 2).

Muslim in Nigeria cannot stay away from politics just because the system is democratic. Rejecting democracy and staying away from politics within the context of Nigeria is tantamount to marginalizing the entire Muslim community. It is clear from the Qur'an that "...never will Allah give the disbelievers over the believers a way [to overcome them]." (Q 4: 141). Muslims' apathy to politics will give the non-Muslims a way over them. This is not hypothetical; it is what has been witnessed.

What Muslims have Achieved in Nigeria through Democracy

First and foremost is Sharia in twelve northern states. This was achieved through the window provided by the Constitution which allows freedom of religion. It could not be achieved under military regime despite the fact that most of the military heads of state are Muslims. Sharia was implemented in these states under the presidency of a Christian (Olusegun Obasanjo). It was not because Obasanjo wanted it, it was because the Muslims participated in politics and demanded for it as a right.

Hijab has never been part of school uniform from colonial time in the entire South of Nigeria. In fact, Muslims had to change their Islamic names to be admitted into schools in those days. One of the landmark victories was the case of hijab which was won in the law court in 2022 after many years of litigation. The victory of hijab is not to be celebrated only in the Muslim majority states of the Southwest. It is a nationwide victory for the Muslims and lovers of justice. Even in Kwara (a northern state), donning hijab by female Muslim students has always been an issue (Salaudeen, 2022).

Subsequent to that judgment and acting upon it, the Federal Ministry of Education on the 1st of February, 2023 released a circular informing school principals of the approval of the use of what it termed "corporate/cape size hijab" as part of the school uniform for any willing female Muslim Students in all of its one-hundred and twelve (112) Federal Unity Colleges and Federal Science and Technical Colleges in the country. These colleges have national spread as every state of the Federation has one or more federal college. This implies that female Muslim students are now free to don their hijabs even in states where Muslims are in absolute majority, say, Bayelsa, Abia, or Akwa Ibom State.

We should not also forget the celebrated case of Firdaus Amosa who, in 2017, was denied the honor of being called to the bar in Nigeria for her refusal to put off her hijab. The case, as stated by Adekola (2019), was settled out of court through

alternative dispute resolution. Amasa triumphed in the end and that marked a watershed in the use of hijab when called to bar in Nigeria for willing Muslimah

Added to Muslims' many achievements through political participation is the case usury. Usury is not only dangerous; it is one of the greatest sins in Islam. Decades ago, Muslims in Nigeria did not have a single alternative to conventional banks that are interest based. But with politics, there exists now a number of banks. It was only Jaiz bank a decade ago, today we have Taj Bank, Lotus Bank and Alternative Bank Ltd. There is high prospect that other Islamic financial institutions—like Islamic insurance—will soon spring up especially as the existing ones have proven that the continuance of Islamic banking in Nigeria is both feasible and sustainable.

There are many other benefits that Muslims can count on when they participate in politics. The provision of federal character in appointments is another instance. Also, the politics of Muslim-Muslim, Muslim-Christian tickets to vie for elective positions is, in one way and the other, beneficial to the Muslim *Ummah* (community). In light of these benefits, Salaudeen (2022: para 2) argues that "It will be foolhardiness, for Muslims in country like Nigeria, to reject a system which allows such flexibility and adaptability under which we must live in the absence of a better implementable alternative."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Democracy is said to be government of the people, for the people and by the people. If this is democracy, is the Sharia not also government of the people, for the people and by the people? The difference is the characters and ideologies of the people that rule. If the people are conscious Muslims, even in Nigeria as it is, laws shall always be made in consonance with the spirit of Islam. From the foregoing, the necessity of Muslims' participation cannot be over emphasized. Lack of representation will deny the Muslims many things—which might include observing some basic religious rituals like five daily prayers. Abou El Fadl (2022: 131) rightly observed

Muslims have become the most targeted religious group in the world. The only reason this does not strike us is because Muslims neither control nor are well-represented in human rights discourses. If we were, it would be public knowledge that no group today is as vilified and targeted as Muslims. Instead, we have a global propaganda machine that, for the most part, ignores the persecution of Muslims

If Muslims can achieve the aforementioned benefits through democracy, why should they not participate in it? There is an axiom in Islamic Jurisprudence which says "If an obligation cannot be fulfilled except by performing another related act, then that act also becomes obligatory." If we relate Gumi's assertion to al-Ghazali's

and Uthaymin's positions on the obligatoriness of Muslims' participation in elections, we will come to the realization that there is more to the understanding of the workings of modern democracy than the halal and haram debate. While this paper is positive towards Muslims' participation in democratic politics, it is important to note that democracy should be seen as a means to an end; not an end itself.

It therefore concludes, with a caveat, that democracy—which it argues that it is not a disbelief—should not be embraced too tightly by the Muslims as if it aptly substitutes the Sharia. It recommends that Muslims should participate in Nigerian politics due to some overriding public interests. To ensure peaceful co-existence with those who hold a different view, it will help to organize conferences on regular basis where scholars with opposing thoughts on critical issues like this could come together to rub minds. Having scholarly and intellectual debates that are well coordinated on the need for Nigerian Muslims to participate in current democratic dispensation will also be a right step in the right direction.

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