

ISLAMIC ETHICS TOWARDS IDEAL ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Electoral processes in Nigeria are riddled and beclouded by perversion and unscrupulous tendencies in spite of the extant constitutional provisions and several instituted electoral reviews and reforms towards achieving reliable, valid, transparent and acceptable processes. The nation's hope of serving as the beacon of functional democracy in sub-Saharan Africa continues to dwindle from time to time. The sensibility of the majority of the electorates is defective, politicians employ all means to get to and cling power while the integrity and credibility of the umpire of the electoral processes, have been subjected to a serious question. The reasons are not far-fetched. The players in the nation's electoral processes have chosen to sacrifice conscience, ideal orientation and redeeming ethics. For a workable democracy, stable and reliable electoral processes, relevant ethics have to be ensured. The Nigerian democratic platform is flagged off by series of electoral hiccups such as fraud, violence, intimidation, manipulation of sorts, compromise, subjugation, suppressive militarization and brazen vote buying. The situation calls for re-branding through sensitization and ethical re-orientation. This paper thus suggested the need to imbibe Islamic ethical teachings to achieve desirable electoral processes as background for good governance and nation building. If the processes that produce a set of leaders are defective, meritocracy would definitely be sacrificed on the altar of mediocrity. This paper used descriptive methodology by relying on existing literatures.

Keywords: Islamic Ethics, Electoral Processes, Nigeria.

Introduction

The negative perceptions citizens and people across the globe, have about politics and electoral processes in Nigeria, have been awkward and derogatory. This is due to inadequacies that becloud the processes thus making the people losing hope in realizing functional, ideal and productive democracy. The management and coordination of the electoral processes have been marred due to improper orientation. Any faulty process will not produce final good result. This situation calls for practical ethical reorientation and in this case, Islamic religious ethical teaching, orientation and re-branding to put Nigerian electoral processes on the path of sanity to usher-in growth and developmental democracy.

Here, it is important to establish the relevance and importance of religious ethical orientation in re-branding our electoral processes in Nigeria. Re-branding the electoral processes through religious ethics advocated in this paper points to effecting change of the sensibility of the stakeholders in the implementation and actualization of the electoral processes using religious ethical and moral appeal as recipes. If the electoral processes according to Nkwede (2016), amounts to conduct of elections and election of people into public offices, there is the strong need for the intervention of religious ethical orientation to consolidate the ordinary and common orientation undertaken by National Orientation Agency (NOA) and those peddled on social media. This is in consideration of the fact that Nigeria's brand of politics and its processes according to Caleb, Daniel and Osita (2020), are essentially corrupt, violent and manipulative of the wishes of the people. It is therefore, pertinent, to redeem the trend through religious conscience as the stakeholders are adherent of one religion or the other.

The Concept of Electoral Processes

Electoral processes include all election related actions guided, moderated and controlled by electoral laws, policies and guidelines. The processes include party formation and registration, voters' registration and generation of Voters' register, campaigns, conduct of the elections proper, collation of election results and eventual declaration of the winners as well as the handling of the post election litigations. The processes are actions through which candidates are elected to occupy political posts or public offices (Eyiye,2003). All these mentioned above, are the intended electoral processes that call for ethical attention under review in this paper. According to Afolabi and Muse (2008), there exist strong links between religion and electoral processes most especially in the aspects of ethics and morality as Islam upholds peace, justice, impartiality, equality and mutual consultation all of which are essential ingredients of functional and productive democracy.

The Concept of Islamic Ethics

The word ethics as perceived by Al-Aidaros, Shamsudin and Idris, originates from the Greek word 'ethos' which means character, spirit and attitude of a group of people or culture. Islam has its own culture and stipulated pattern of conduct and behaviour. Thus, Islamic ethics according to Hashi (2011), connotes ethical system formed by the teachings of the Qur'an and explained by Prophet Muhammad through actions and words and features, virtues, duties and attitudes of the individuals and society. There is a strong link between religion, ethics and morality. Islam as a religion is a force to be reckoned with in terms of moral pushing and ethical reformation. The Qur'an extols the basic foundation of Prophet Muhammad's *risālah* (messenger- ship) and aspect of ethics is not down-played. Qur'an Chapter 62 :2 explains thus :

He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger
(Muhammad) from among themselves, reciting to them His
Verses, purifying them (from the filth of disbelief,
polytheism and moral debauchery) and teaching them
the Book (this Qur'an, Islamic Laws and Islamic jurisprudence)
and *Al-Hikmah* (As-Sunnah; legal ways, orders, acts of
worship of Prophet Muhammad) And verily, they had been before
in manifest error

. الذى بعث فى الاميين رسولا منهم يتلو عليهم آياتهم ويزكيهم ويعلمهم الكتب والحكمة وان كانوا من قبل لفي ضلل مبينهو

The Qur'an also extols the character of the Prophet **انك لعلی خلق عظیم ناك** – You (Muhammad) is of the best character. Prophet Muhammad as the religious and political leader of his ummah, exemplified moral excellence. Through his leadership style, the Prophet impressed sense of humility, truthfulness, transparency, justice, altruism, dedication, service to humanity, genuine love and sincerity of purpose. He impressed upon the Muslim *ummah* that a leader is a servant

سيد القوم خادمه خادمه -

He also emphasized legitimacy in assuming leadership when he says

– كن جعوك جعوك اماما ان جعوك جعوك :

'Be a leader if you are elected' He also said :

- ان الله لا يقيم دولة ظالمة ولو كان مسلمة وان الله يقيم دولة عادلة ولو كان كافرة

Allah would not uphold any unjust government even if led by a Muslim but surely will uphold any just government even if led by an unbeliever.

The *khulafaur-rashidun* were also not lax in terms of moral and ethical uprightness. They adopted *shura* i-e consultative approach in choosing their *khalifah*- leader after the demise of the Prophet and the approach was not accompanied by any form of rancour or violence. Islamic leadership ethics frowns against imposition, assuming leadership through foul or crude means, lies, making fake promises and inability to deliver on the mandate given by the masses. The Qur'an says

O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?
Most hateful it is with Allah that you say that which you do not
do (Qur'an 61 : 2-3)

What is wrong with Nigeria's Electoral Processes ?

The Nigeria's electoral processes are stained with gross inadequacies and thus make democracy to fail short of international standard tests and best practices. Mediocrity and inordinate bid run in the vein of party politics in Nigeria, campaigns are flawed with character and physical assassination, hooliganism, violence and wanton destruction of lives and property. Elections are marred with riggings, manipulations and money-bagging, the security architecture in most cases compromised while the election umpire perverts the electoral process for one reason or the other by way of compromise too. To achieve free and fair elections, there must be peaceful and serene atmosphere devoid of any form of intimidation. Democracy according to Jens (2011), is people's right to choose their leaders and not to be ruled by force or tyranny. Akinseye (2008), submits that democracy consists of popular participation in the decision making processes, open and fair competition within firmly and generally accepted rules of the game, and a normative dimension that consists of the acceptance of majority rule, respect for the rule, protection for individual and minority rights and safeguard of the disadvantaged group.

The ideal processes that lead to choice or election of modest, descent, virtuous and God-fearing individuals are most desirable. This concern however, has been the prayer point of those who mean well for this nation. The *ulama* are not left out of this concern for good leadership constituted through worthwhile processes. Haruna (2009), echoed the stand of the *ulama*'

especially in Kano State towards 2007 general elections emphasizing the choice of credible, honest and God-fearing candidates irrespective of their political party affiliation. They emphasized this over and over through their various sermons and pronouncements. The case of the situation in Nigeria is observable corruption of the electoral processes and that spells danger. Hadi (2009), observes that corruption has the potential to destroy the legal order essential of good governance and break the sacrosanct bond of trust that has to prevail between those in authority and those they represent. Sanity in Nigerian electioneering processes can better be achieved through *taqwallah* (Fear of God and His Consciousness) which is basic to Islamic ethics. The above listed political vices have constituted major challenges and threats to Nigerian democracy.

Religion and Shaping Nigeria's Electoral Processes

Religion plays pivotal roles in shaping electoral processes in Nigeria overtly or covertly as every stage according to Familusi (2012), has an input of religion. Religion as a social unit of the society, has the moral and conscientious duty to ensure active participation in electoral processes that would translate to free, fair, transparent, just and successful elections. This assertion is made because religion on a large scale, influences and moderates all aspects of the society including politics and electoral processes. Familusi (2012), submits that all aspects of the society are influenced by religion. Electoral processes in Nigeria are dented with such inadequacies such as manipulations, over monetization of politics, negative influence of power of incumbency, violence, massive rigging, perversion of justice and in recent time, vote buying which in the Yoruba parlance referred to as “*dibo ki o se obe*” meaning cast vote and earn money to prepare delicious sausage. If the above pervade the Nigeria's electoral processes, it then requires religion and particularly Islam to rise to the occasion in reshaping the processes through its moral and ethical teachings. According to Adeleye (2014), religion is a medium to breed ideal heart. He is hereby quoted to have said ;

Religion breeds an ideal heart in man to be able to be conscious of the need to have a clean heart. By this, he will grow to have a philanthropic or patriotic though before venturing to lead or represent his people in government of the state. In another words, religion will prepare the mind of man to be a good politician who will constantly fall back upon his religion to guide him. The teachings or threats of religion are expected to guide him to be able to lead his people aright as a politician with fear of God in him. He will never consider himself first, rather he knows that he is the servant of the electorates (sic)- his people. Religion in an idealistic set-up, therefore, serves as oil to lubricate politics. This is to say that religion bears peace and love, both of which are vital ingredients that can sum the interests of societies together for an ideal, healthy and purposeful politics.

The fact that elections in recent time have despised and dashed the hope and trust of the electorates when votes may not count, people have developed apathy and lost interest in partaking. Islamic ethical teachings would at this crucial time, go a long way in re-engineering the perception and mindsets of the masses as Islam mandates its adherents to discharge their

civic responsibility and display of love for one's nation. A tradition of Prophet Muhammad encourages thus ; حب الوطن من الايمان meaning 'love of one's nation, constitutes part of faith.'

Relevance of Islamic Ethics in Re-branding Nigeria's Electoral Processes

Ethics according to Hornby in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, refers to the moral ideas and attitudes that belong to a particular group or society while Islamic ethics has to do with Islamic moral and attitudinal ideas. Islamic ethics seeks to entrench ideal democracy i.e *shura* democracy as a precursor or justification for electoral democracy. For instance, The 1992 and 1997 Yemeni Congregation Platforms for Reform seek to promote *shura* democracy. The latter platform translates the *shura* democracy thus :

The people's right to decide on their affairs and choose their rulers, monitoring them and making them accountable and ensuring their adherence- in the decisions they make and creation of conditions for the nation's good – to take the opinion of the people directly or through their representatives, so that no individual or one party monopolizes the state to the exclusion of others. (www.akparti.org.tr .)

The particular ethos of Islam in this case, concerns with establishing democracy through ideal and impressive electoral performances by all the stakeholders. Electoral processes according to al-Jarhi (2016), should guarantee equity, justice and efficiency as *shura* democracy seeks to adhere to implementation of electoral actions in favour of national interest and abstaining from others that run against it (al-Awa, 2006). The Qur'an respects and entrenches the sanctity of life. It warns against taking another person's life unjustly (Qur'an 4: 92-93) :

It is not for a believer to kill a believer except by mistake, and whosoever kills a believer by mistake, he must set free a believing slave and a compensation (blood-money i.e Diya) be given to the deceased's family unless they remit it.-----
And whosoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein, and the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him and a great punishment is prepared for him.

For Justice and equity ethical elements during election processes. The Qur'an says :

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to Allah, even though it is against yourselves, or your parents or your kin, be it rich or poor. Allah is a Better Protector to both. So follow not the lusts (of your hearts) lest you avoid justice: and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well Acquainted with what you do.

If the virtues and other ethical teachings of Islam could be allowed to moderate our electoral processes in Nigeria, democracy will thrive and produce good governance. Such virtues as enshrined in the Qur'an include: faithfulness, honesty and integrity, peacefulness manifesting in

unity, co-existence and brotherhood, courtesy expressed in respect for others' rights, accountability, justice and respect for the rule of law, modesty and consultation.

Imbibing Islamic Virtues as a recipe for thriving Electoral Processes in Nigeria

Islam regulates all aspects of human life and the primary aim of its law (*shari'ah*) is to enshrine order and well being of man. The ethical virtues and teachings of Islam according to Adedeji (2001), aim at serving as guidance that would conduce harmony, promote co-operation, remove or reduce social ills, uplift man's mental capabilities and maintain body and mind in a healthy condition. He submits that electoral processes in Nigeria are bundles of deception lacking in morality and ethical virtues and thus, the players make unachievable promises, bribe the electorates, rig elections, enlist the services of journalists on image laundry, media commercials, advertorials and opinion polls which constitute a big impediment to the freedom of voters. To overcome these electoral shortcomings, Nigerians need to imbibe the virtues of Islam to achieve sanity and ideal in the processes. According to Tanveer (2013), many virtues/ good character traits/ moral qualities such as kindness (to people and animals), charity, forgiveness, honesty, patience, justice, respecting parents and elders, keeping promises and controlling one's anger, are commanded or encouraged in verses of the Qur'an and sunnah of the Prophet.

Imbibing moral virtues during electioneering processes in the view of Aminu, Musaddad and Isa (2020), entails achieving justice in the society, aspiring to maintain the dignity of individuals and protection of their freedom, encouraging virtues, prohibiting vice and achieving political aim through consultation, participation, representation, accountability, transparency and through legal conventional regulations in all social formations.

When we talk of moral virtues in election processes based on Islamic precepts and principles, such virtues are honesty and integrity, peaceful co-existence, courtesy, accountability, justice, modesty, consultation and rule of law. The directives (virtues) enshrined in a religion according to Robert (2020), have normative authority for its practitioners and acting otherwise attracts criticism and punishment and that holds for killing, lying and theft. Adibah Binti (2013), refers to these virtues as noble characteristics which enable man to apply what ought to be done and what ought to be avoided. The sunni and shia' according to Muhammad (2018), emphasized legitimacy of a chosen or elected ruler based on virtue and such a leader must meet the demanding standard of probity (*'adāla*). The leader of the Muslim community must not only be a virtuous member of the community, he could forfeit his legitimacy by subsequently engaging in sinful conduct. Nigerians could imbibe the following virtues to make electioneering processes align with the global standard:

Faithfulness: Politicians in Nigeria need to hold the faith that holding position of authority is a trust and trial and striving for it, does not worth crooked and foul means which are socially and religiously condemnable. It is the prerogative of Allah to assign position of authority. He enthrones and dethrones as occasion demands (Qur'an 3:27). Seeking to hold position of authority/responsibility should not be made a -do-or-die affair.

Honesty and Integrity: There is the need for display of honesty and integrity in Nigerian democratization and electioneering processes. People that are involved in the processes must not turn their backs to the mandatory status of these virtues. Electorates must not sell their

conscience under any disguise, candidates must be people of worthwhile and proven characters who genuinely intend to serve the people, election umpires must protect the integrity of the institution and the nation in general by maintaining neutrality while the judiciary should not compromise. Qur'an al-Baqarah 2 ; 188-189 says :

And eat up not one another's property unjustly (in any illegal way (e.g stealing, robbing, deceiving, e.t.c), nor give bribery to the rulers (judges before presenting your cases) that you may knowingly eat up a part of the property of others sinfully. They ask you (O Muhammad) about the new moons, Say: "They are signs to mark fixed periods of time for mankind and for pilgrimage' It is Al-Birr (piety, righteousness) that you enter the houses from the back but Al-Birr (is the quality of the one) who fears Allah. So, enter houses through their (proper) doors and fear Allah that you may be successful.

Peacefulness manifesting in unity, co-existence and brotherhood: Islam is a religion of peace that cherishes peace. All actions and utterances that are capable of disrupting the communal and individual peace should be eschewed. Among such vices prohibited in Islam are hooliganism, violence, character assassination, rumour mongering, fake news, brigandage and the host of others. Qur'an 25 :63 describes the true servant of Allah he who is actually the keeper of peace thus:

And the faithful slaves of the Most Gracious (Allah) are those who walk on the earth in humility and sedateness, and when the foolish address them (with bad words) they reply back with mild words of Gentleness.

An-Nawawi Hadith number 15 records thus:

Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak goodness or remain silent. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him honour his neighbour. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him honour his guest.

Courtesy expressed in respect for others' rights: This is in terms of respecting other's rights and not doing anything that would wound their feelings and besmear their personalities. Islam enjoins all to do well to others as much as one wants others to do in reciprocity. Qur'an 49 :12, 17:37 and 2:84 lend credence to this assertion.

O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions are sins. And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is the One Who forgives and accepts repentance, Most Merciful (Qur'an 49 :12).

Accountability: The Last Day in the belief of the Muslims, is a Day of accountability when everyone would be held accountable and responsible for his earthly deeds. All stakeholders in

electioneering and democratic processes are expected to be watchful and mindful of their actions and inactions. Qur'an 17 : 36-38 says:

And follow not (O man i.e, say not or do not or witness not) that of which you have no knowledge. Verily, the hearing and the sight, and heart, of each of those one will be questioned (by Allah). And walk not on the earth with conceit and arrogance. Verily, you can neither rend nor penetrate the earth, nor can you attain a stature like the mountains in height. All the bad aspects of these (the above mentioned things) are hateful to your Lord

Justice and respect for the rule of law: Justice is the most important of all virtues. Adibah (2013), admits that courage, temperance and wisdom are virtues of particular faculties of soul, but justice is the virtue of the entire soul. Justice requires the electorates to vote wisely according to their conscience, requires the umpires (INEC and Security outfits) to play neutrality, requires the judiciary to dispense unbiased justice in adjudicating election matters and that political office holders should respect their promises. Qur'an 4:58 declares:

verily, Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. Verily, how excellent is the teaching which He (Allah) gives you! Truly, Allah is Ever All-Hearer, All-Seer

Modesty and Consultation: Modesty is required to make democracy thrive in Nigeria. The manners and approaches to participation and implementation of electoral processes are immodest and that is responsible for the usual failure in Nigeria politics. Adequate and sufficient consultations should be given priority in putting any socio-economic policies in place. Such will go a long way in taking care of the interest of the masses. Qur'an 31;18-19 has this to say:

And turn not your face away from men with pride, nor walk in insolence through the earth. Verily, Allah likes not any arrogant boaster. And be moderate (or show no insolence) in your walking, and lower your voice. Verily, the harshest of all voices is the braying of the asses.

Qur'an 3:159 also sways:

And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you (Muhammad) been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (Allah's) Forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him)

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has identified and established that election processes in Nigeria are challenged due to lack of ethical requirements. The challenges are hallmarks of democratic under-development. It

is in that light that Islamic ethics are advocated to moderate Nigerian polity and politics in order to meet up with the global democratic standards and practices. To achieve this, the following are hereby recommended :

- (i) Ethical teaching aspects of the Islamic Studies curricular (primary, secondary and tertiary institution) need to be improved, vitalized and reviewed periodically to accommodate the socio-political dynamics of the nation;
- (ii) “Ethics of Religion and Political Practice” in series, should be introduced as mandatory General Studies course (GNS) in our institutions of learning;
- (iii) Religious leaders and scholars who are abreast of the teachings and ethics of their religion and callings respectively, should not distance from direct participation in politics. Preaching and prayers are not enough; and finally,
- (iv) Annual inter-religious summit should be organized to assess and review the impacts religion has made on socio- political life of the society (Nigeria) and to chart course of relevant intervention for the common good of the citizens.

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