

Pulpit and Politics: Christianity in the Struggle for Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Christian pulpits are vocal and powerful political platforms in most countries of the world today. Through diverse forms of oracular messages, Christian pulpits engage itself in state affairs and governance of Nigeria. From blatant or cautious prophecies to flagrant or stealth solicitations for political candidates and their parties, some pulpits immerse themselves in politics. Moreover, either with the view to compliment or disparage the pulpit, the diverse politically inclined pews and the public often argue on the boundary of Christian pulpits in politics. As the pulpit actors often claim a divine responsibility to guide the country in the political space, it is confronted with the poser, on where and how to draw the line between its spiritual mandate and political stewardship. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the roles of Christian pulpits in the struggle for good governance in Nigeria. Adopting literal criticism, the study concludes that the roles of the pulpit can be well-defined in politics. In addition, it should not limit its contributions to politics, as long as good governance remains its primary concern.

Keywords: Christianity, Election, Governance, Nigeria, Politics, Pulpit

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Introduction

The burgeoning of secularism notwithstanding, the Church remains very active in politics. A growing number of pulpit actors, pastors/preachers all across Catholic, orthodox evangelical, Pentecostal, Aladura, Zionist and other denominations in Nigeria have found their secondary calling in some forms of political actions. It is common knowledge that pastors/preachers use their pulpits effectively, for homiletical advocacy as well as criticizing government. Moreover, most Nigerians today look up to them, not only for homilies but political predictions about likely winners of elections for various political offices in government, as well as political and economic situations in the country. The increasing acceptability of this practices connect to the burning question, should politics be left in the hands of the political class alone? This is perhaps, the basis of engagement of the pulpit in politics, which is to find solution to poor governance being experienced by citizens.

It is common knowledge today that politicians frequent the pulpit actors, because of the latter's stewardship of influence among their congregants, especially, those overseeing mega churches or with large branches all across the country. Either for electoral endorsement or spiritual backing, politicians associate with pulpit actors, as well as other religious leaders. In returning such favour to the religious leaders, these politicians directly or indirectly provide political benefits, such as infrastructural projects, employments opportunities and other fringe benefits to them, when they got into power. In this way, the pews and associated communities to the pulpit actors become political beneficiaries. As a result, the pulpit is further encouraged to be fervently political for different reasons. Little wonder, pulpit actors differ in their ways of influencing the political space. While some only speak the truth to power; other supports political movement and even form political parties. As some pledge loyalty to and defend the parties of their

political benefactors; others are indifferent and only pray for the best political leaders to emerge.

Apparently, there is a growing interest in politics among religious actors in Nigeria. Remarkably, some pulpit actors have taken their second vocation in partisan politics. More so, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body of all Christian bodies in the country has been at the vanguard of Christian political activism, protesting against marginalization and ensuring equity for Christians in the country since the military era. In the same vein, the second-largest umbrella body of church associations, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) has gone further to establish the Directorate of Politics and Governance to strengthen its political interest and advocacy (Daily Trust, 2022).

Political activism in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial period, when African Indigenous Churches (AIC) used their pulpits as platforms to address the highhandedness of the colonial government. Oshitelu (2007) argues that, the political struggle during was aimed at liberating the Church from the European government empowered missionaries by the vocal Aladura leaders, during the colonial period in Nigeria.

The postcolonial period is however not different as the pulpit actors continue to engage the political sphere in Nigeria. The growing concerns on the need for good governance are apparently a driving force for the pulpits' participation in politics. As some scholars and political philosophers argue and discredit the role of religion in the secular state; some theologians and members of the public have also accused the pulpit actors of overreaching, leaving their primary calling into otherworldly concerns to participate in mundane politics.

On the other hand, scholars in support of pulpit's intervention or engagement in politics argue that the present political landscape of the country welcomes it. Thus, if the pulpit refuses to participate actively, it might lose out in its vision and struggle for

good governance and liberating the believers from political oppression. It is against this background that this study examines the various discourses on political thoughts which provide a framework for the relationship that ought to exist between pulpit and politics in Nigeria. It discusses the politicization of the pulpits with the view to identify its trajectory, and the various dimensions it engages politics in the country. Furthermore, it examines the progress and effectiveness of Christian advocacy and the operations of political activism among Christians in Nigeria.

Political Thoughts, Pulpit and Nigerian Politics

Christian denominations, unlike some religious radical sects have promoted debates on sensitive issues of politics and state, without stimulating the public against the legality of incumbent authorities nor calling them to account (Cooke, 2015). The political is therefore presumed as part of the broad spectrum in which the pulpit has chosen to use the leeway afforded it. A number of Nigerian preachers use their pulpits for various political reasons. While some galvanizes their audience to be actively political; others prefer to only educate them on civic responsibility, especially in the buildup to elections. Diverse denominations notwithstanding, national political issues bond them (Falola, 2018).

It is interesting that religion in Nigeria defies modern political thoughts such as the principle of separation of church and state, as well as secularism. Against scholars' arguments supporting these political thoughts; pulpit actors in Nigeria appear to be more engaged both in government and politics of the state. The Christian Association of Nigeria and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria have always been at the vanguard of influencing the political space for some reason, especially, the fear of Islamization of the country, should Muslims be allowed to dominate the political space, as well as the corridor of power.

Scholars have argued that Pentecostalism in Africa rules out the possibility of Christianity becoming either a political regime or political community, but rather *politeia*— a certain way of responding to political issues (Afolayan, 2018). This position is based on first, the limitations of the otherworldly inclination in the existential struggles; second, the constraining nature of spiritual mode of cognition in the dynamic public episteme. Afolayan (2018) further opines that, despite the historical political regime of the Roman Catholic Church; there is a strong doubt on the capacity of the present-day Pentecostalism and by extension Christianity to achieve such a feat. This position reinforces the fact that the concerns of the church on earthly matters notwithstanding, its concentration on heavenly affairs remains the centrifugal force of believers. This therefore would limit their participation in both politics and public sphere. Therefore, Christians' attitudes toward politics in the recent times is motivated mainly, by need to ensure that their interests, which are confined to the private sphere could found expression in a possible public sphere, and not merely to lay claims on their exclusive right to the common good (Arendt, 1998). This submission however raises the question, if Christians do not have concerns that are mainly public inclined?

Politics unlike religion is a product of the public space and not the private sphere. It is a matter of people sharing a common world and a common space of appearance so that public concerns can emerge and be articulated from different perspectives (D'Entreves, 2022). The fact that the main focus of religion is considered not earthly and guided strictly by divine rules defines its concerns as private interests. Thus, religion is categorised to belong to the private sphere in the modern society. Post-classical political theorists such as Machiavelli reinforces the thought of the medieval period on politics; as which solely focused on the secular realm and oblivious of the chasm between private realm and "the merciless

exposure of the polls and, consequently, of the virtue of courage as one of the most elemental political attitudes” (D’Entreves, 2002, p. 25). The main thesis of Machiavelli’s political theory is that leadership requires courage to make tough choices and command fear and respect (without necessarily being cruel), instead of friendship and love. The prince according to Machiavelli is therefore to deliver ‘stability and governance’ to the state (Figueroa, 2014). This idea is against the religious ideas of love and brotherly kindness, which are significant to religion. However, if these religious values are not to influence governance in a secular society; their acceptance in the public sphere would be contradistinctive to the nature of the state.

The interconnection between the space of appearance (where individuals are politically free and equal, resulting, from harmonious exchange of views) and the common world (the robustly enduring atmosphere created by people’s actions such as institutions and other media) comprise the public sphere, required for the rejuvenation of the true idea of citizenship in the modern world (D’Entreves, 2002, p. 25). While the space of appearance ensures that citizenship flourishes; the common world provides the platform for it. Thus, the public space, which is required for political activities and equality of citizens needs to be artificial as opposed to natural. This is in the sense that the artificial is human made— as constructed by their various articulated perspectives and not a condition provided by nature or under the control of divine guide (D’Entreves, 2002).

The artificiality of the public sphere is *sine qua non* for the convergence of divergent views of individuals to construct a political entity. According to Arendt, neither, religious and ethnic affinity nor shared value system would substitute for a shared public sphere, political establishments and involvement in activities characteristic of such places or institutions that could realize a practical unit of a political community (D’Entreves, 2002, p. 25).

Contrary to Arendt’s artificiality of political space and the non-naturalness of politics; Aristotle’s idea on politics as maintained by Aquinas is that, necessities and goals of human nature itself leads to citizenship (*civitas*) or political society (Koritansky, 2019). It is therefore not a product of human creativity (expressed in the modern social contract theorists’ political knowledge) nor a man-made structure designed to explain away the human limitations or human nature. On the other hand, it is somewhat a prodding from nature itself that distinguishes human beings from every other creature of nature. The naturalness of citizenship is not tangible as emotional senses but artless as moral virtues, even as human beings are considered as natural political animal (Koritansky, 2019). Aquinas’s perspective of politics is consistent with his understanding of natural law “which is the eternal law as applies to human beings” (Koritansky, 2019, p. 15). As the standard guiding human conduct, the natural law affords the practical ground for morality and politics. Therefore, Aquinas considered religion as the moral compass for politics

The generational gap and changes in human sociopolitical space between Aquinas and Arendt are instructive in appreciating their perspectives on politics. Undoubtedly, their views presented a chasm between the ancient and modern political philosophy. Surprisingly, Arendt dislikes the idea of modern society but does not agree with Aquinas’ theological incursion into politics. Interestingly, ancient political philosophy from Aristotle held that the Greek creation of the political was the best achievement of the classic period. This was the beginning of politics, which is influenced by ancient poetry and religious sects, Hellenism, ancestral rites and practices, as well as other cultural practices of each city states (Lane, 2019).

Religious influence on the state lasted till the early modern period during the Reformation declined with the fall of the papacy. Against the catholic claim of the jurisprudence of sovereignty over people and a

given terrestrial space Protestant viewed the membership of the church as free and not coerced choice. (Callaway, 2019). The different Christian perspectives on salvation, either as inclusivist or exclusivist, further contributed to its waning influence in the public sphere during post reformation. Thus, the evolution of secularism, which can be dated back to Reformation and the Enlightenment eras, with the fall of papacy and the subsequent absolutism of the Kings in Europe (Ogbu, 2014). Further contribution to development of secularism are works of philosophers such as John Locke, who criticized the role of religion in the public space and made a case for possible tolerant and pluralistic society. Thomas Hobbes also considers the various religious differences as the major challenge to political stability (Callaway, 2019). Thus, it was based on the need to separate politics from the religious realm that the concept of secularism emerged and gained prominence.

Modern secularism, interestingly, confers absolute authority on the State above all other institutions, including religion. Its aim is to isolate and insulate politics from the influence of religious dogmatism and sectarianism (McClean, 1995), which are capable of fomenting dangers such as disunity and insecurity (Ogbu, 2014). Noting some spectrums and contemporary definitions of secularism, Ogbu (2014) describes a secular state as "one where: the supreme civil power and government is determined by the temporal as opposed to religious order, implying that sovereignty should belong to the state and not to religious order; the state does not claim any religion as state religion and is neutral or impartial to all religions but guarantees freedom of religion" (p.33). He further debunks such definitions that consider secularism as synonym of atheism but rather as an antithesis of theocracy from the historical evidence of evolution of secularism.

A secular state is one that prohibits business of state governance from pressures and infiltrations of religions (Dicksons & Chujor, 2017). They however

argue that Nigeria as a plural state is not neutral from religious influence, considering the principles and theories that explain statehood from both the pluralistic liberals to the capitalist state theories as presented in variance of Marxism. However, due to the obvious neglect of secularism as enshrined in the Nigeria constitution section 1(1) and 2 (1), the country risks following a dangerous path, resulting from condensing religion and politics. It is worth noting that Nigeria presents a classic example of a heterogeneous country that adopted secularism in order to foster a sense of liberty and harmony among various ethnic groups.

One of the arguments supporting the failing of secularism in Nigeria is not unconnected to membership of Nigeria in the Organization of Islamic Communities, initiated and signed during the military administration of Ibrahim Badamosi Babaginda (Dickson & Chujor, 2017). It is argued that this singular action of religious preference contradicts the tenet of secularism as stated in Nigeria constitution. Further weakening of the principles of secularism in the Nigeria state through the introduction of Sharia law in Zamfara State, the allegiance to Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and funding of religious activities, such as pilgrimage boards by government have elicited various confusions, controversies and conflicts. While Ogbu (2014) agrees that secularism does not allow involvement in religious affairs, they disagreed with Dickson and Chujor (2017) on the funding of religious activities in as much the principle of equity is followed for all the religions. Ogbu (2014) is of the view that whereas secularism eschews the involvement of state in religious affairs vice versa, its concern about religion, is how to accommodate it within the framework of secularism. Thus, it is correct to say religious matters are not entailed within a secular government, rather than saying that religion issues are not the concerns of state (Ogbu, 2014). Whereas secularism would characteristically not object necessary assistance to religion, it does not,

automatically, make religion a public practice in the state.

Remarkably, the analysis of various clashes between different religions and state security based on deprivation theory indicates that, the denigration of secularism is responsible for their frequency. Thus, the Nigerian state will continue to be enmeshed in avoidable sectarianism, religious bigotry and intolerance if adherence to its constitutional provision of secularism is not enforced (Dickson & Chujor, 2017). Nevertheless, Ogbu (2014) notes that, the critical examination of the rationale for secularism leading to the First Amendment to the American Constitution as quoted in Justice Joseph Story Commentaries on the American Constitution wrote:

It was under a solemn consciousness of the dangers from ecclesiastical ambition, the bigotry of spiritual pride, and the intolerance of sects, thus exemplified in our domestic as well as in foreign annals, that it was deemed advisable to exclude from the national government all power to act upon the subject.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Nigeria only appears to be dancing around secularism as a political principle. The various controversies over the secular status of the country in its 1999 Constitution seem not to border the political class. As Islam does not allude to secular ideology, most Christian organizations never rest from politicization of their pulpits.

Politicization of the Pulpit in Nigeria

The politicization of the pulpit appears inescapable, because of its interest in ensuring the delivery of good governance. In addition, the pulpit has to defend Christianity against any threat to its growth and expansion in Nigeria. If concerned itself about otherworldly alone, its prospective candidates for the otherworldly may have to endure undue political

oppressions, and perhaps suffer amidst plenty. Thus, its interests about this-worldly appear quite germane.

The relationship between pulpit and politics in Nigeria can be traced to the intersections among Christianity, politics and governance in the pre-colonial era. Henry Townsend of Christian Missionary Society served as the Secretary of State of the Egba nation, and facilitated the bilateral relations between England and Egba (Ijaola, 2014). This mutual relation between Britain and Egba nation in the precolonial Africa was predated by the Benin-Lisbon economic ties, which was facilitated by the Portugal Roman Catholic Priests-Merchants (Ijaola, 2014). Thus, Christianity served both as missionary and political tool internally and externally—galvanizing the growth and expansion of Christianity within Africa through its political stewardship, providing links to foreign nations for a robust economic exchange in the precolonial era.

The colonial period witnessed increasing missionary activities, aiding to fulfil the colonial government's objectives in Africa. However, scholars have underscored the European missionary complicity in duplicity to exploit Africa. Khopaya (2010) notes the missionaries' eschatological message, which diverted Africans' interests mainly to preparation for the heavenly home at expense of existential realities. This strongly affirms the dictum the 'opium of the people' used in reference to religion by Karl Marx.

The allegations against the missionary Christianity are evident in their persecution of Independent African Churches that criticized the highhandedness of the colonial government. The AICs were hunted for their 'power gospel' as against the 'materialistic gospel' of the missionaries. They sought for a Christianity that can "salvage the crumbling African societies affected negatively by colonial policy, but ignoring the actual cause of the problem (Khopaya, 2010). Apparently, the evolution of African Christianity was not merely an answer to the yearning of Africans for the spiritual decolonization, it was at the same time the media for the expression of the

political liberation of the continent. Thus, political opposition to colonial rule assumed religious dimensions. Independent Christian churches emerged at the end of the nineteenth century because, many European missionaries were racists and blocked the advancement of Nigerian clergy (Matthews, 2002). European interpretations of Christian orthodoxy also precluded the incorporation of local customs and practices, even though the various mission denominations themselves interpreted Christianity very differently (Matthews, 2002).

Christian preachers in Nigeria have continued to engage politics from various viewpoints. From the Catholics to the Protestants, Pentecostals and others, the use of the pulpits as the means to find solutions to various challenges of the country. They also to seek to defend Christianity and Christians' interest in the economic, social and political space of Nigeria. Enwerem (1995) traced the postcolonial politicization of the pulpit to three main factors, including: first, the agenda to Islamise the country by some groups of Muslims. Second, marginalization of Christians in government's appointments and policies. Third, the perpetuation of self in power by the various military Head of State in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the three main dimensions of pulpit participation which include: spiritual intervention, Christian political advocacy, and political activism.

Spiritual Intervention

The spiritual intervention of the pulpit in politics ranges from praying and providing prophetic responsibilities to the political. First, the pulpit provides a major and significant platform to remind and encourage believers to pray for the leaders and the state. The spiritual intervention is as a result of the biblical instruction, which explains the prophetic roles of the church in the state and politics. Bible urges "...first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people, kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all

godliness and holiness" (New King James Bible, 1983, I Timothy 2, pp. 1-2). Little wonder, there are numerous denominations mega churches and other Christian groups that pray and coordinate prayers for the country. For examples, 'Nigeria Prays'— a non-denominational prayer for Nigeria, and 'Prayer against corruption in Nigeria', an interdenominational prayer organised by the Catholic Church. The purpose of Christian prayers for the state is primarily for its peace and prosperity as stated in (New King James Bible, 1983, 2 Chronicles, pp. 7-14):

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Nigeria as a country faces enormous socio-economic challenges, ranging from terrorism, insurrections, kidnapping, increasing incidence of out-of-school children and poverty to unstable prices of its crude oil in the international market (which is the main source of the nation's revenue), as well as huge financial indebtedness to local and international lenders. To this end, Christians often seek the face of God in prayers, for political leaders that will lead the country out of its plethora challenges to a safer and more prosperous nation. William Kumuyi, the General Superintendent of the Deeper life Bible Church was reported to often say that by prayers, the situation of Nigeria can change for the better (Abioye, 2018). In the year 2019, a total number of 500 clerics under the umbrella of the National Interfaith and Religious Organisations (NIFROP), visited the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja to conclude their 40 days fasting and prayer for the unity of the country (Vanguard, 2019).

Remarkably, successive governments in Nigeria have always asked the citizens to pray for divine interventions at one point or the other. For instance, the Federal Government of Nigeria, under the leadership of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, requested

all Christians to join in praying for the country to overcome the forces of insurrections and onslaught from Boko Haram terrorists (Saale, 2014). This emphasis on prayers is connected to some Christians' belief that it is the only solution to the demonised problems of the country. Felix Adunpe, the General Overseer of the Signs and Wonders Prayer Ministries Evangelical for All Nations, Nigeria once argues that: over the years, experience has shown that the common idea that the country would experience faster progress with change of government, especially in the 2019 general election is not necessarily true. There is need for the citizens to repent from the idolatry promoted through FESTAC 77, before praying for liberation against the demonic powers unleashed to afflict the country as result of that sin (Punch, 2019).

It is however obvious that most people calling for prayers have poor orientation to what governance entails. Obviously, the broken thread is Nigerians' focus on human help for holistic transformation of the nation without much ado about divine intervention (Saale, 2014). To achieve the desires of Christians for Nigeria to be peaceful and prosperous, prayer alone won't do it. While the efficacy of prayer is not in doubt among; Christians must proceed from their prayers to take some practical political actions. It is however apparent that some Christians in Nigeria have added to their prayers such practical actions towards the political.

Christian Political Advocacy

Political advocacy has been found as one of the ways the pulpit can engage the political space, without necessarily becoming partisan. As a prophetic responsibility of the church, advocacy is, extending the love and shinning the light of the gospel of Christ to the world. Advocacy is a social transformation process for modifying peoples' convictions in social contracts and balance of power in order to civic society and enrich democratic process by expanding the political space (Beglonian, nd). It engages the use

of social capital to press home the demand or a positive response or a review of policies by government. Political advocacy is the active support for transformative innovations of the subject matter of the society at all level of government, through all forms of available media to lend our voices (Quorum, 2003). It also "refers to non-violent activities designed to influence policies, practices and behaviour" of the government (Roebeling & de Vries, 2011, p.23). Thus, political advocacy is a non-aggressive process and act of influencing decisions and actions of the government or the citizens towards an equitable and peaceful society.

The need for Christians to engage the political through the process of advocacy in order to promote and demand justice through witnesses is inescapable. Christian political advocacy can be defined as the "intentional acts of witness by the body of Christ that hold people and institutions accountable for creating, implementing, and sustaining just and good policies and practices geared toward the flourishing of society" (offut, 2016 p. 24). It can be further described as a non-aggressive process and activities of the Church and its various ministries, within its mandate of evangelizing the world, to influence decisions and actions of government as well as the citizens towards their responsibility to ensure a fair and peaceful society.

Furthermore, it is the use of the pastoral power as a soft power on behalf of the citizens, to achieve a social course, and provide an equitable society, despite the complex subjectivization resulting from power relations of the state and its apparatus. Christian political advocacy can therefore be anchored on the biblical understanding of spreading the light of the gospel to the world. To "speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (New King James Bible, 1983, Proverbs 31:8-9). Furthermore, "The People who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and those who were

sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned." (Matthew, pp. 4-16). Hence, central to Christian political advocacy is the pulpit, a fundamental platform that represent the voice of the Church and its various ministries.

Christian political advocacy is a call for the church and Christian organizations to engage government, in order to ensure it's fair to the public in the distribution of dividends of democracy. Clark (2016) argues that "common sense tells us that political engagement is only worthwhile if it yields concrete political results. But we as Christians have good reasons to engage politically whether we get concrete results or not, because political advocacy is an end in itself" (p.26). It is also a "biblical call to care for our neighbours particularly the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized" (Pierce, 2014, para 6). It is to speak out on behalf of others, to shoulder their burdens as one's own and use one's voice to cause a turnaround for their situation. One of the ways this can be achieved is by seeking a review of government policies at any level of its operations, through non-policy means, and on individual basis by prominent Christian individuals on the corridor of power (Pierce, 2014). Thus, religious bodies can through either ecumenical or interfaith relations influence issues of policies at all levels of government to sensitize and appeal to the elected officials on the significance of such reviews. This is what is expected of the pulpit, where and when people are powerless and have been robbed of their voices (Kooyman, 2019).

It is important not to misconstrue Christian political advocacy as exchanging "the gospel for a social cause, but a way of emulating Christ's compassion by speaking out against injustice on behalf of the docile bodies of the citizens; as well as acknowledging God's ideal of justice as a shared human value (Christian Advocacy, 2019). The need for the pulpit to engage in advocacy is primarily to ensure that the governed are not oppressed by the political class. Clark (2016) assertion is therefore

instructive that, as exasperating as it may, with the perversity and corruption, it is dangerous for Christians to leave politics into the care of non-Christians alone; since human societies wherever located is God's own, and they are duty bound to represent His divine interest. Nevertheless, the major limitation of Christian advocacy is being an end in itself and not a means to engage in politics. There are Christians who feel that since there is no political force within advocacy, its objectives are at the mercy of the political class. Hence, the need for the pulpit to become more forceful and be competitive in the political space for it to fulfil its mandate should be given careful consideration.

Political Activism

Political activism is a means of mounting pressure on the state on policies or issues regarded as inimical to the citizens or a set of citizens. It "entails activities directed towards third parties (e.g., the public) and may be non-violent or violent and illegal" (Roebeling & de Vries, 2011, p.24). However, it is important to note that the use of violence or acting illegally in political activism is relative, and it's largely determined by persons involved. For example, protest can be civil and peaceful. Activism can also be defined as the "process of campaigning in the public or working for an organization in order to bring about political or social change" (Collins, 2003, para 1). Campaigning in this context is seeking for public support for or endorsement of a particular course in order to bring about a political change. Political activism is therefore defined in this study as the act of pressurizing state powers to effect political and social changes through legitimate and vigorous public campaigns.

Christian involvement in political activism has been a controversial subject among Christians in Nigeria. Whereas some support it, others reject it based on their biblical interpretations of Christian responsibility in the politics. Campbell (2020) observes one of such controversies bordering on the

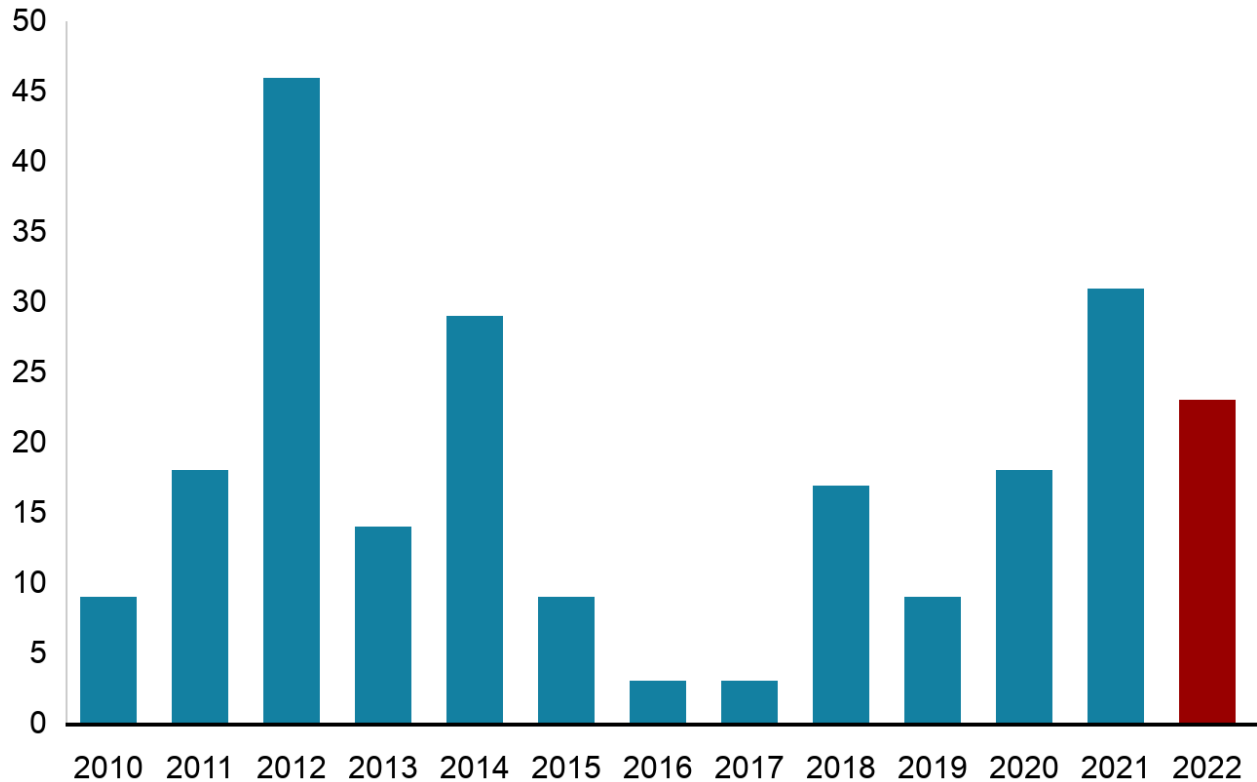
fear of coalescing political preference or nationalism with the actual gospel or Christianity. The argument is that, there is a strong tendency for the church to strangulate its mission to save the sinners by becoming centre of political activism, which predisposes it towards backing a political party or becoming the political front for unpredictable characters. This is because, any attempt of any Christian body to bring Jesus Christ under the umbrellas of any socio-political group could be misleading; as the saviour may desire to show case either his humanity or divinity by staying out in the rainfall. (Campbell, 2020). Thus, while the Church could encourage individual to participate in politics based on biblical principles, it must stay clear of party politics and maintains its status as the bride of Christ only.

Controversy on political activism is not unconnected to the very reason some pulpits would support prayer rather than encourage activism. A number of Christians, relying on Jesus' refusal to be made king by His large followers, argue against Christians' engagement in politics (Akpanika, 2017). Thus, they opine that, the pulpit is expected to place emphasis on evangelism as the sole priority of Christians. Their involvement in politics would only distract them from this important mission of Christ (Falaye, 2019).

Nevertheless, political activism is being regarded as a dimension to politics by the Christian

Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body of all Christian denominations in Nigeria. CAN is no doubt a major political platform for all Christian bodies in Nigeria. Three important exogenous factors that influence CAN's politicization and resultant political engagement include: military consolidation in the country, marginalization of Christianity in the political and economic space by the government, and the perceived agenda to Islamize the country. Little wonder, there is a fierce rivalry between Christianity and Islam over two major goals: proselyting for converts and political influence in Nigeria. In order to achieve these targets, they sometimes employ political languages and styles that's sometimes unsettled the public (Enwerem, 1995).

While CAN was under the leadership of its first President, Cardinal Olunmi Okojie, it was criticized for being an outlet of the Catholic Church to attack the Federal Government, because of the take-over of the mission schools in the country, mostly owned by the Catholic churches. Nevertheless, successive political activities of CAN under non-Catholic leadership including: Methodist, Anglican, Baptist and Pentecostal denominations have debunked the criticism that CAN is a manipulative device in the political game. No doubt, political activism aims at sensitizing people, and this role was effectively carried out by CAN to awaken the Nigerian Christianity, which was political dormant till 1980 (Enwerem, 1995).



Note: Data covers January to May, 2022

Fig 1: Attacks on Churches and Christians in Nigeria (Mwai, 2022 as cited in, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, [ACLED], 2022).

As at May 2022 there have been different 23 attacks on various church denomination premises. 31 and 18 of such attacks were also reported in 2021 and 2020 respectively (Mwai, 2022 as cited in ACLED, 2022). It is apparent that the murder of most of these Christians either politically or religiously motivated are perpetuated by some radical Muslims and Jihadist Fulani herdsmen. Thus, the reverberation of CAN's opposition to the country's membership of OIC and some Muslim's agenda to Islamize the country, escalates the pulpit engagement in political activism. It is noteworthy, the case of bad governance with the worsening situation of people living in abject poverty is a compelling factor for activism by Christians.

Conclusion

There is no doubt about pulpit's participation in Nigerian politics, even though it raises controversies

within Christian groups and the public sphere. As some Christians consider it as an abuse of the pulpit, other welcome it based on the diverse reasons for the Church to respond to the political sphere; noting the prevailing economic situation, insecurity conflict and oppression in the country. It is quite glaring that politics in Nigeria cannot be left in the hand of the politicians alone. Further, the apparent contestations for political influence and relevance between Islam and Christianity is a major undertone for the pulpit to keep seeking for mean to influence the political space. The need to have politicians or political parties to protect the diverse interest of Christianity and favour its wishes is paramount to the pulpit. More so, the need for good governance through freedom of religion, and religious tolerance will continue to propel the supports of pulpit's participation in politics

The persistent and rising incidents of conflicts and killings of Christians in the country is

worrisome, especially, for the pulpit actors. While the claim of the country being a secular state appears inconsistent with the reality of government's involvement in religion; the redemptive task of the pulpit provides it the sufficient motivations to engage both the political space and the public sphere for both Christians and the generality of the citizens. Since it appears the country is double-sided with being both

secular and religious, it is reasonable to encourage pulpit actors to influence politics in as much they are able to avoid trading off their primary mandate of preaching the gospel. Therefore, there is need for the pulpit to legitimately and actively integrate the spiritual, advocacy and activism in the engagement of politics in Nigeria without compromising the country's secular ideology.

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