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DEMOCRACY AND WESTERN IMPERIALISM: TOWARDS DECOLONIZING RELIGIONISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *The way allied Western nations protect their interests has been a major problem and factor in the demise of governance and democracy in the Nigerian state and other African nations. This has made Nigeria's democracy, like that of other African countries, unstable since independence. Therefore, this article examined Western imperialism, which used religion as a tool and barrier to a strong, viable democracy in Nigeria. The article used critico-historical analysis as a method. The results showed that although Western imperialism and globalization, along with religion, have an expansionist and civilizing nature, they have also exhibited traits of dominance over other countries and systems of governance, thus making democracy weak and less rewarding. We argued that Nigeria's democracy and religion must be independent and self-sufficient to avoid Western exploitation and imperialism and provide a context for religious inculturation. We concluded that for Nigeria and other African nations to thrive in true and strong democracies, religion should be decolonized through pulling down colonial religious presumptions, de-internationalization of religion, reorientation of religious education, restoration of indigenous languages, authentication of religious freedom, non-governmental funding of religion, and provision of theologically motivated research to a more legitimate position within religionism.*

Keywords: *Democracy; Western Imperialism; Decolonization; Religionism; Globalization; Nigeria; Africa*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has resulted in a worldwide imperialism of Western existence, power, and knowledge. However, a departure from the accepted geography of reason's Western origins makes globalization unique. The dominant nature of Western civilization is the result of forcing its will on others to generate money for themselves. If accepted, this results in political torture and the mental and emotional suffering of the recipient nations. From the Renaissance through the late 20th century, Western powers and bureaucracies produced and controlled it, turning it into the darkest side of Western modernity (Mentan 2015, 63). Since its independence, Nigeria's democracy has proven precarious, with succeeding administrations trying to forge a sense of national cohesion in a complicated nation home to over 300 distinct ethnic groups. Democracy is both the act of exploitation and the language of colonial exploitation (Gagnon 2018, 101). This article's most crucial thrust focused on the obstacles to a robust democracy in Nigeria as a result of indirect or direct interference from Western nations using religion as a tool, including strife, corruption, a lack of interaction with the public and commercial sectors, and a lack of freedom for members of civil societies to campaign for reform. Political rivalry, community, ethnic, religious, or resource distributional conflicts pose a danger to democracy in Nigeria.

This paper makes the case that democracy is the most recent and extreme example of Western exploitation employing race and religion as tools. It also looks for ways for Nigeria's democracy and religion to be independent and self-sufficient. It examined how a country's leaders' moral principles and religious preferences influence its domestic and foreign policies due to the Western world's religions and ethical traditions resulting in imperialism. Additionally, it is an effort to give Nigeria's religious inculturation a context and focal point. Distinctively, this article comprehends the standard of international policy leadership in democratic nations such as Nigeria and other African nations.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY AND RELIGIONISM

There is disagreement about the exact definition of democracy, although it is widely accepted that voting defines it. A survey found 2,234 adjectives within the English language that defines democracy (Tangian 2020, 12). However, Popper (2016, 7) contends that a democratic system is the people's government. Democracy is a form of government that is based on popular consent. According to Addis (2007, 125), democracy is a form of government whereby every citizen can vote to choose the government's leaders. Democracy is also an arrangement and a framework in that everyone is treated equally and has the power to cast a ballot and make decisions. Democracy is a system of governance in which the people either rule themselves or choose representatives to do so, according to Lijphart (2012, 68). Democracy is described by Abjorensen (2019, 116) as government by the people, a type of governance in which the people themselves, or their chosen representatives, hold ultimate authority through a free election process. Instead of tyranny, dictatorship, or oligarchy, it is a government that is run according to the "will" of the people. The beginning of democratic systems, established in Athens in the fifth century BC, is ascribed to the ancient Greeks (Wilson 2006, 510). It was a direct democracy where the people gathered, spoke about governance issues, and made decisions. The small group of people who could directly participate, which included women, enslaved people, foreigners, and minors, made this system feasible. Based on an estimated population of approximately 300,000, there were likely 50,000 men actively involved in politics, which is far higher than in a contemporary democracy (Annan 2023, 4). He asserts that numerous kinds of democracy exist, just as there are democratic countries. Two fundamental tenets of democracy are individual freedom and equality. These fundamental ideas help shed light on why it is so well-liked. However, the absence of a method for resolving divergent opinions makes putting these concepts into practice difficult. Consensus decision-making aims to identify shared areas of interest and is a more sincere approach to reflecting everyone's interests.

There are many different types of modern democracies, including presidential or parliamentary democracy, federalism or unitary democracies, majoritarian structures, monarchies, and proportional voting. The use of representations of the citizens, who are chosen by the electorate to rule on their behalf, is one feature of contemporary democracies. The two guiding principles of this system, known as representative democracy, are equality for everyone and the right of each person to some measure of personal autonomy. Democratic systems may be improved to be more inclusive, reflective of the preferences of a wider range of people, and receptive to their influence. Although women were allowed to run for office in parliament for the

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first time in 1919, New Zealand was the first nation in the world to offer universal suffrage in 1893 (Annan 2023, 6). Many nations originally allowed women to vote but did not allow them to run for office until many years later. Only in 2011 did Saudi Arabia allow women to vote in elections (Annan 2023, 8). Other groups, such as immigrants, migratory workers, convicts, and minors, are not allowed to vote, even in well-established democracies, even though they may pay taxes and abide by the law. More so, ordinary citizens should utilize as many alternative channels as they can to participate in politics and the government because democracy pertains to more than simply voting. People who want to engage should keep up with current events, communicate their thoughts, and work with others to get their voices heard. The best method for individuals to be heard is to vote since they are not held responsible if they do not.

Religionism, on the other hand, implies the devotion to and practice of religion. According to Emoghene and Okolie (2020, 36), religion is also hard to describe. Depending on their specialties, various individuals have different viewpoints on religion. While anthropologists see religion as a part of culture, sociologists see it as having sociological rather than political relevance. According to theologians, religion is civilization's foundation and focal point, the supreme artistic expression, the source of all choices and acts, and the final justification for civilization (Emoghene and Okolie 2020, 32). According to Durkheim (1965, 113), religion is a group representation that holds things holy. According to Yesufu (2016, 27), religion is the act of serving and honoring a deity or gods. According to Ogugua and Ogugua (2015, 195), religion is a significant component of traditional backgrounds and significantly impacts the thinking and emotions of the targeted population. According to Obilor (cited in Emoghene and Okolie 2020, 33), religion allows humans to follow natural or divine laws. Religion serves as a roadblock to human self-actualization. Authorities may utilize religion to keep the populace under control or as an ideological instrument. Islam and Christianity are the two main religions practiced in Nigeria.

According to Onimhawo and Ottuh (2007, 57), religious fervor and religious extremism are two terms used to describe religious extremism in Nigeria. Balogun (1988, 41) described fanaticism as violent and unreasonable religious fervor and the incapacity of religious devotees to reconcile their ideas with the practical realities of their religion, while Hornby (2000, 735) defined it as extreme views or actions. Popular religious revivalism has increased due to the dynamics of social relations controlled by the federal government and the Nigerian economic downturn, including the state's role in it. Muslim hardliners and Christian Pentecostal believers significantly influence the advancement of democratization. Church leadership follows a conflicting course of action, supporting national democracy but sometimes decrying governmental abuses. Islamist groups and Muslim reformers have emerged and assumed leadership roles in their respective political spheres and democratic republics. Throughout the period of political transitions under military government, organized religious bodies actively participated, often in opposition but predominantly in favor of the changes taking place.

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WESTERN IMPERIALISM LINKED TO DEMOCRACY

Imperialism is the practice, philosophy, or mentality of spreading or retaining authority, especially Expansionism, the use of both soft and hard power, and the creation or maintenance of a formal empire are all examples of imperialism. Although researchers sometimes struggle to distinguish between imperialism and colonialism, while they can be used interchangeably, both prescribe an economic and political advantage over a region and the indigenous inhabitants they rule (Fay and Gaido 2012, 84). The idea and practice underlying imperialistic expansion are not universally accepted; in contemporary times, comprehensive foreign policy is associated with the term "imperialism" (Smith 2020, 528). Liberal philosophers, socialist thinkers, and previously colonial people have all attacked imperialism as a practice for a variety of reasons. The divide between urban and colonial life, people, and lands lies at the heart of colonialism. Western dominance, existence, and knowledge have been imperialized on a global scale due to modernity. Border thinking deviates from the recognized Western geography of reason. As a novel form of power to colonize the Americas, colonialism emerged. Far-right organizations often target non-indigenous members of the populace and have no business upholding democratic principles. A limitation on free speech is a law that forbids the promotion of racial hatred. The justification for imperialism in the West has always been advancing democracy and freedom (Chull-Shin 2021, 152). Democracy, however, does not make imperialism impossible. It might reflect how society and politics are progressing, or it could result from intelligent beings on another planet with limited energy resources.

Imperialism and its false promise of expanding democracy are indescribably terrible, and any people hoping to choose their future must decolonize the Western democracy that has been forced on them (Lightfoot 2021, 978). For instance, Biden substituted imperialism's false position, which claims to do well for the globe it intends to rule, oppress, exploit, and destroy, for Trump's "America First" approach (Desai 2022, 170). The most recent iteration of this discourse focuses on advancing democracy and human rights. However, this position is fraught with paradoxes due to inequality, poverty, mistrust, social division, and political disaffection. Decolonization during the Cold War featured the abolition of the last surviving official colonies, regulations, and trusteeships and the distribution of restricted self-government powers to the elites of Westernized, ostensibly autonomous local governments (Tully 2008, 474). This difficult time of transition is referred to as both "imperialism for decolonization" and "the end of empire amid the continuity for imperialism" (Anghie 2004, 40). This intricate system of government has been expanded around the globe since the Soviet Union and its allies from the Third World were defeated in 1989, ending the Cold War. Experts now commonly accept that the current global administration system represents the continuation of Western imperialism via covert means (Harvey 2003, 29). It is a sophisticated system of governance that recognizes subordinated or oppressed peoples as independent constitutional governments and controls imperialized peoples in ways other than via official colonies.

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NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY AND ISSUES

Nigeria is one of Africa's most religiously diverse nations and the biggest nation belonging to the black race worldwide. Sir Fredrick Lugard combined the two distinct protectorates in northern and southern Nigeria prior to the unification in 1914. In a paper published in 1897, Miss Flora Shaw (Lugard's wife) offered the term "Nigeria", which she derived from the River, "Niger area" (Odeh 2010, 3). The blending of the two rival faiths - the Islamic and Christian faiths - with the pre-existing traditional religions and the country's multiethnic makeup has had and continues to have both beneficial and negative effects on Nigeria's democratic government. Over 180 million people call Nigeria home, making it the most populated African country (Ogundiya 2010, 203). The country was supposed to have a fully democratic administration after gaining independence in 1960. However, a military dictatorship arose and lasted over a decade of the country's over 50 years as an independent state. The three major faiths practiced in Nigeria - Islam, traditional faiths, and Christianity - have various ideas on the sort of government in that country. These ideas lead to a fundamental issue and conflict in Nigerian administration, resulting in riots, disputes, conflicts, loss of riches, and wars of culture and religion. By incorporating Sharia into the administration of certain sectors of Nigerian society, the British colonial masters gave the North a sizable portion of the country. They sowed into the minds and hearts of northerners the primacy of their way of life and religion over others. With its integrated 50% representation of the legislative body of 312 members in the center, encompassing 53.3% of the nation's population, the British constitutional heritage produced a scenario above the remaining three southern districts (Ogundiya 2010, 201). The bitter rivalry involving the two distinct regions of Nigeria has been blamed for the country's historical fusion.

The Sokoto Caliphate was the epic center of pre-colonial Nigeria's Islamic Empire, which had a sizable Muslim populace. The larger Muslim world inspires the successors of the Caliphate in terms of its religious, sociopolitical, and cultural values. The South is a multiethnic area that leans heavily towards Christianity and has strong sociopolitical ties to modern Western culture and traditional African traditions. Each area contains minority ethnic and religious groups with grievances and often expresses them through acrimonious politics or sectarian conflict. Since the fall of communism, democracy and good governance have proven to be significant problems in Nigeria. Europeans have made futile efforts to democratize African nations, but this is now popular across practically the whole globe. African political and democratic advancements trace back to the eras when different kings ruled the continent. Following several European voyages of exploration and travel, foreign philosophies invaded Africa between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries AD. The development of what can be referred to as the "new Western culture" was greatly aided by missionary explorers like William Muuray, Richard Lander, Henry Molton Stanley, Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, John Speke, and Richard Burton. Due to this division of Africa, several European countries, like Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, and Germany, each of which formed its governmental system, received portions of the continent (Ushe 2012, 225) - a time of political conflict and democracy followed the division and colonization of Africa. Africans' desire to govern themselves sparked the battle for independence from the European colonialists.

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The final phase of Western democratization occurred between the late 1980s and the Middle of the 1990s, when wealthy Western powers pressured several African countries, including Nigeria, to accept multiparty democracy to obtain financial assistance (Diamond and Plattner 2010, 40). This has shown that Nigeria, like other African countries, is not immune to the time's widespread desire for democracy. The cumulative experience demonstrates that Nigeria, like other African nations, is still far from a more authentically democratic society. Recent events on the African continent imply that we advance one step today and regress ten steps tomorrow. According to Ushe (2012, 225), Nigeria is in a league of its own since it effectively transitioned the government from military back to elected civilian rulers in 1979 via the organization of a free and fair election. Postponements and cancellations of elections are seen as attempts by the Nigerian military to keep the current ruling class in place, and the nation has been plunged into a state of fervent obscurantism. Because democracy has not established itself in Africa and Nigeria has been able to go from one democratically elected administration to another, there is disillusionment, cynicism, fatalism, and a lack of faith in the democratic process (Ottuh 2015, 26).

Nigerians have been looking for democracy for over 50 years but have not found it. Nigeria underwent a democratic transition in 1999, following practically sixteen years of uninterrupted military administration. A bicameral government, an autonomous judicial branch, a free press, a framework of balances and checks, basic rights, and civil freedoms were all included in the 1979 Constitution. The 1999 Constitution guarantees the right to vote, exercise one's franchise, and have regular elections (Jibrin 2016, 41). The lack of democratic impulses inside us and our innate propensity to sabotage the electoral process, however, are the two mutually reinforcing causes that are to blame for this disease. According to Ottuh (2015, 22), democracy is regarded as the best kind of governance because it is based on the idea that each person is unique. However, it requires the greatest levels of self-control, restraint, and a readiness to make promises as well as sacrifices for the sake of the whole. These fundamentals should be continually practiced to become ingrained and appear as impulses. Many theories have been put forth by analysts as to why political crises occur, including a centralized position of power in the hands of the central government as a result of military rule, the degradation of the rule of law along with the autonomy of the judicial system, and the dearth of institutions and structures to allay the fears and mistrusts shared by Nigeria's numerous ethnic groups. Komolafe (2023) contends that since democracy's conception and perception were founded on presumptions, it has varied meanings to various individuals in Africa and Nigeria. The elite leadership made no intentional attempt to impart its true meaning to the populace since it opposed poor governance.

The dynamic interplay of altering democratic ideals and their effects on the nation's democratic effort has not received enough attention from academics. The northern and southern regions of Nigeria have differing levels of democracy. Whereas in the South, education has played a significant role in guaranteeing that people are aware of their rights and can confront the government, in the North, it is perceived as being adverse to the continuation of feudalism. The Department of the Public Defender (OPD), which provides free legal representation to people who cannot afford it, was founded in Lagos State in 2000. As a result, democracy has grown, and genuine public involvement has been boosted (Jibrin 2016, 41). The birth or introduction of democracy into Nigerian society, which establishes the operational

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procedures for any paradigm, also determines its character. A revolutionary paradigm emerged in the Greek city-states to correct, checkmate, and liberate the populace from tyranny, monarchy, and related ideas. It is also influenced by our social ideals, such as the idea that a woman without a husband is a loose woman and a man without a wife is irresponsible.

Democracy in Nigeria is a blend of many multifaceted and sometimes issue-specific practices; it lacks uniform applications (Ogundiya 2010, 211). In other words, what is deemed democratic in Oyo will be influenced by whatever is democratic in Sokoto, and what is democratic in Borno State would resemble something democratic in Osun. Elections with low voter participation have raised questions about the state of democracy, especially in mature democracies. This results in voters doubting the constitutionality of democratically elected governments due to an absence of interest and engagement. The civil society in Nigeria is complicated and has a wide range of opposing political attitudes, viewpoints, perceptions, and value orientations (Jega 2001, 110). This has caused a severe political culture problem in the nation of Nigeria, resulting in a significant impact on ideas about democracy. It has been said that the ongoing process of democratization must rely on African traditions to tailor democracy based on the culture and historical experiences of the common people if it is to have any significance for the populace. However, the collapse of democratic government is not just attributable to differences within the political culture about the proper democratic ideals for Nigeria. Is the postcolonial political economy characterized by an armed forces-controlled state and a crony capitalist economy?

The dynamics of social interactions mediated by the state, the Nigerian economic crisis, and the state's role in it have all contributed to a rise in popular religious revivalism (Ottuh 2023, 214). Many Christian Pentecostal believers and Muslim fundamentalists, including reformer organizations, and their ideologies on spiritual salvation and socioeconomic and political liberty significantly impact the progress of democratization. According to some more developed Christian clergy, God is not a democrat. As a result, church leadership pursues a contradictory policy, advocating for democracy on a national level and occasionally criticizing state excesses while conducting the flock's internal affairs in a very undemocratic manner and engaging in its excesses. In Western Nigeria, Pentecostalism opposes governmental authority and criticizes the ruling class. Muslim reformers and Islamist organizations have gained prominence, particularly in northern Nigeria's cities (Thompson 1993, 48). With little respect for the greater secular political community, these organizations are well-established, controlling their political space and running their teeny-tiny democratic republics. Organized religious organizations, such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA), have participated in the political transition under the military administration, frequently playing opposing but almost always supportive roles (Onimhawo and Ottuh 2006, 343). They have opinions that largely favor the military's transition measures, advising caution on the part of the political elite and pro-democracy organizations while pleading with everyone to give the programs a chance. There are a few cases when they might be seen to have supported popular democratic movements, such as the invalidation of the presidential elections held on 12 June 1993.

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RELIGIONISM AS IMPERIALIZING TOOL AGAINST NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

The notion of "religion" was crucial to imperialism's effort to bring about civilization, and the objectives of various imperial actors modified it in a manner that is still clearly relevant today. For instance, East and Southeast Asia's religious landscape was significantly influenced by statecraft, legislation, scholarship, and conversion (Dubois 2005, 113). Academicians developed and imposed state theologies before and during the European empire, while missionary followers advocated for religious conversion. Prior issues were expanded upon throughout this period. Christianity had a significant role in the colonial conquest of Africa and subsequently emerged as a tool of resistance. Africans were offered a path to salvation rife with ideals of European supremacy, and they later transformed these ideas into a belief system that was more in line with the original intentions of the church. Although it has been questioned if European missionaries made friends with the colonial rulers of the area, it is not easy to contest that they ultimately had a favorable influence on the citizens of Africa (Kalu 2007, 291). The missionaries sowed the germinating material, and the Africans harvested the fruit from the tree to start their orchard, where they might find stability and create new identities to obtain freedom. Since colonialism, religions have been employed to oppress, mistreat, and enslave people and organize and free them. With more believers expressing their views, demands, and objectives in the routine religious life and the public domain, religion, and religious discourse have become important developments across political institutions in Nigeria. Religiously, Nigerians identify as followers of Islam, Christianity, or traditional African faiths; nevertheless, estimates of religious affiliation vary owing to the absence of comprehensive demographic statistics and the fact that many follow indigenous religious doctrines and customs. Ottuh and Omosor (2022, 38) posit that in recent estimates, 10% practice traditional faiths, 40% are Christians, and 50% are Muslims. In Nigeria, religion has contributed to many difficulties, including social unrest, economic stagnation, constitutional violations, the insecurity of people's lives and property, and the precarious position of the secular state (Ottuh, Ottuh, and Aitufe 2014, 200). In Nigeria, along with being fundamental to people's everyday lives, religion also plays a crucial role in their democratic battles and revolutions.

Politically motivated economic and social affairs are all influenced by religious fundamentalism in Nigeria, which is an absolute and rigid philosophy. By concentrating on the assumption that there only exists a single, unchanging, and undeniable truth, it is employed to uphold a neoliberal objective. This fundamentalist theological perspective, which claims that God entrusted followers to civilize the barbarians, is closely related to the US imperialist mission. Protestantism in Nigeria is being used to support the nation's imperialist policies. This supports Ottuh and Idjakpo's (2021, 27) argument that the God of religion can be used in diverse ways to please one's interests. The movement aggressively positions itself against its detractors in various situations outside of the religious sphere, intruding into both the world and the everyday lives of citizens. Instead of a common identity as workers, the average person is shifting into a more evangelical identification based on religious brotherhood. According to Portugues (2022, 3), the change in common language to represent a people who no longer organize themselves solely via labor organizations, social communities for struggle, and mainstream movements but instead primarily in churches and mosques shows the influence of

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faith at the grassroots level. This change exemplifies the influence of religion on the local level. In Nigeria, the Christian faith, for instance, prefers Western resources like the Latin language used in Holy Eucharist celebrations. Priests in mainstream churches, including Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and even Presbyterian congregations, often employ western-made liturgical items (Obiefuna 2010, 77). Pastors of Pentecostal churches and indigenous African churches find wearing suits and other Western clothing more comfortable. The gospel band is one of several musical instruments utilized in Nigerian Christian churches to represent Western imperialism. In Nigeria, the Christian faith has likewise seen the effects of contemporary globalization, riding the wave of globalization to support imperialism.

Nigeria is often portrayed as primarily a secular state, although this is oversimplified since religion affects politics there. According to Ottuh (2012, 218), secularism is not always synonymous with atheism. For Onimhawo and Ottuh (2005), the secular social contract proposes a continual form of colonial domination by granting security and economic growth to certain economic strata. Religious revivals challenge social stratification, moral frameworks, and contemporary politics. To show the links connecting politics and religion in Nigeria, a 2020 research project traced this linkage back to colonial practices that acknowledged Islam as a civilization (Segall 2019, 91). By upholding Sharia jurisprudence and westernizing southern Nigeria, Islam became integrated into the imperialist administration of politics in the Northern Protectorate and, eventually, the northern region (Ekpo 2023, 2). Ottuh and Erhabor (2022, 247) argue that as religious fault lines widened, Ahmadu Bello's goal of Islamic revivalism and rhetoric of the Islamic takeover of southern Nigeria aroused tensions, mistrust, and fear. He was the head of the dominant Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and a descendant of Usman dan Fodio (Ottuh and Omosor 2022, 31). Religionization, or votes cast along religious lines, would affect the nation's stability after the elections during the Nigerian presidential elections in 2023. This is because religious concerns focus on inflexible beliefs and ideals in both a political and practical sense. According to Ottuh and Jemegbe (2020, 3), neglecting the need for religious inclusion poses a danger to national security in a sensitive and polarized society. Politically supported religions are thought to inherently benefit from political and economic advantages over their rivals due to the intertwining of politics and religion, contributing to the perception of marginalization and horizontal inequality.

Democracy and human rights are closely related and mutually reinforcing. Human rights include the ideals of equality and autonomy, as well as the right to participate in politics (Ibrahim 2012, 47). Without acknowledgment of human rights, including the freedom of opinion, conscience, and religion, a democracy is nonetheless lacking (Ottuh and Idjakpo 2022, 421). Governments have attempted to restrict this freedom because they thought it might jeopardize the present system. According to Annan (2023, 9), the three basic human rights that are fundamental to democracy are the freedom to express oneself (UDHR Article 19), freedom from unlawful association and assembly (UDHR Article 20), and the ability to establish interest or lobbying groups - are the most significant features in this document. Using these rights, individuals may join interest groups, debate concepts with others, and demonstrate against choices they do not agree with. Any violation of these rights might make it harder for someone to speak out and lessen the effect of their decision. Based on the ethical standards of international law, Freedom House's Freedom of the World Index evaluates the level of freedom,

including the ability to vote. Only eleven African countries are classified as "free", according to the score, while 37% of the world's population lives in absolutely unfree conditions (Mazadou 2022, 3). The most dramatic fall occurred in 2017 when the fundamental principles of democracy were seriously jeopardized (Gjorshoski 2020, 31). An additional metric for measuring democracy is provided by Van-Allen (2001, 40), who emphasizes the importance of social and socioeconomic equality movements as measures of how well-protected or prevalent liberal democratic rights and liberties are in a given state.

DECOLONIZING RELIGIONISM FOR A STRONGER NIGERIA DEMOCRACY

A political and intellectual movement known as decolonization seeks to dismantle global disparities and power systems. Decolonization is about altering how people think, communicate, and behave through a bold engagement with various voices and viewpoints that have traditionally been marginalized and suppressed. According to Nye (2019, 43), it challenges dominant structures of hegemony and results in the return of Indigenous land and life; it is not merely a theory or a hazy dream for change. Segall (2019, 76) said religious revivals are not new to the Middle Eastern and North African areas and require ethical, social, and political transformation. Reform-based political Islam was once an anti-imperial position. The Western world is where the concept of religion originated as we know it now. It is context-dependent and difficult to apply in many cultural, political, economic, and historical settings. According to historians, the development of colonial empires often benefited from the application of science in the 19th century (Scott 2017, 117). In Nigeria, the Christian religion prefers Western materials, liturgical objects, attire, and instruments to symbolize Western imperialism and has experienced the consequences of globalization. To promote and establish a more effective and sustainable democracy in Nigeria, free from the influence of Western imperialism and religion, the following workable synthetic solutions are proposed.

De-Internationalization of Religion

Most religions or religious groups in Nigeria are still under foreign religious bodies' direct or indirect control. For example, the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and a few Pentecostal churches are in this category. The Catholic Church, for instance, still takes orders from the Pope in Rome. The Baptist Church is still under the indirect control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States (US). At the same time, the Church of England still has indirect control over the Anglican Church in Nigeria. These foreign bodies affect the adherents' lives, including their political thinking, which in turn serves as a determinant factor in national democracy. Religious denominations may provide various means to live out their principles, beliefs, and practices. Religious groups accept specific principles and convictions in their social teachings that affect their members' political and economic lives. Thus, it may be claimed that a person's religion influences their opinions on various policies, including governance, which could influence national democracy. Hence, I argue that Nigeria should be treated equally by the US government, not only as a partner. Officials in Nigeria are becoming less inclined to put up with perceived paternalism or intervention from the

US and the European Union (EU) (Mazadou 2022, 4). Exerting pressure on Nigerian counterparts by American politicians would not yield significant results in addressing any issue, particularly the delicate matter of religious regulation. Such an approach is not conducive to the health of Nigeria's democracy. Hence, rather than actively seeking to influence Nigerian policy decisions, the US could be more successful as a mediator of discussions regarding religious regulation involving Nigeria and Nigerians.

Considering the Hausa-Fulani, Yorubas, Igbos, and Kanuri being the most numerous ethnic groupings, religion has significantly influenced Nigeria's internal and foreign affairs, including politics, because it inspires citizens and gives policies more credibility. This is shown by the Nigerian political system, where the populace is credulous and easy to persuade when religion is utilized as a lure to gain their awareness and trust. This has made it possible for wealthy foreign and local politicians to use religion as a means of mind control to further their immoral goals. Nigeria's internal and international politics can be shaken by religion, just as an earthquake would be. The Maitatsine (a fundamentalist Islamic organization that started in the early 1980s) issues, Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) membership, anti-Israel groups, the Sharia, the Miss World beauty competition, homosexual marriage, and the emergence of Boko Haram are a few examples in this regard. Most of these organizations are directly or indirectly sponsored by foreign nations or groups. The birth of the Shia group is a significant event that has significantly impacted Nigerian internal politics. The group's founder, Alsheik Yahaya Al-Zakzaky, who gets financial, educational, and training support from Iran, criticizes the Nigerian state's secularism and calls for forming an Islamic *Jumhuriyet* (Islamic State). Due to the Christian-dominated Biafra territory, which Israel helped with financial backing and military training, the Nigerian Civil War (1966-1971) was perceived as revenge for Israel (Uche 2008, 114). Fundamentalist religious outfits were the root of the diplomatic crisis surrounding Nigeria's participation at the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986. This diminished the nation's favorable reputation in the eyes of other nations, including those in Africa, and decreased its influence abroad. The country's Christian associations vehemently opposed the plan and demanded its abandonment; however, President Ibrahim Babangida ignored their request. A notable instance of religion affecting foreign activity in Nigeria is the 2003 anti-US war on Iraq (Higgs 2023, 3). Abuja's announcement that some of its residents had been enlisted for combat alongside Iraqi troops against US-led troops set off this. Nigeria was seen by the US administration as a barrier to its policies, which resulted in the friendship between the two countries experiencing a brief deterioration.

Nigeria passed an anti-gay marriage bill in 2014, which the US and its allies found repugnant. It is illegal to host a gathering of homosexuals or run or participate in a gay club, group, or organization, and gays who are found guilty risk up to 14 years in jail in Nigeria. The manner in which allied Western countries have handled the safeguarding of their respective interests in the nation has played a significant role in the downfall of the Nigerian state. Britain, a de facto auxiliary state for the choice and administration of such interests for Nigeria, has carried out this action. As a result, merit has been abandoned, and nepotism has become the foundation of national administration. The Berlin Conference of 1884, which divided Africa among European nations, was when Britain first gained control over how Western nations would respond to crises and challenges in Nigeria (Higgs 2023, 4). The breakdown of the Nigerian state

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was caused by this fusion of various culturally and sociologically distinct provinces, which was encouraged by British interests. Donald Trump feels that the North's submission to Britain and its Western allies is strategically important; thus, his strong stance on the mass murder of innocent Christians in the country is not grounded in morality or respect for religious freedom.

Advocating Religious Liberty

Authentic permission for religious freedom is a *sine qua non* to sustainable democracy in Nigeria. The expulsion of indigenous peoples and their knowledge and value systems is a long-standing colonial geopolitical history, with contemporary frameworks like the freedom of religion being the most recent episode. The rhetoric used to advocate for safeguarding religious liberty by diplomats from Western nations across the globe may seem just as admirable as the guiding motto of French colonization. In the 19th century, the terms "religious" and "political" referred to the civil government versus the ecclesiastical authorities, as well as the Christian countries versus the "uncivilized" and "primitive" tribes of Africa and the Ottoman territories (Dube 2021, 304). The concept of the "religious" is used in social science theories to explain events that threaten Western civilization. Western policymakers, legislators, and diplomats struggle with religious tensions and bloodshed overseas. This may be explained by connecting present conceptions of religious others to colonial frontier regions and showing how the scholastic terminology developed then is still used in modern notions of religious difference and diversity. According to Pape (2005, 28), drawing a link between Islamic fundamentalism and acts of suicide terrorism is false. It might result in foreign actions aggravating the foreign power's condition and unintentionally killing many Muslims. This occurs due to the inaccurate and derogatory portrayal of religion across many African nations, including Nigeria. This problem has affected authentic religious freedom in many nations. On the one hand, non-adherence to the freedom of religion negates true democracy, and on the other hand, adherence to the freedom of religion promotes and authenticates true democracy.

Decolonizing the Nigerian Constitution

The Nigerian constitution, since independence, has been modeled after the British constitution. Bringing the fundamental constitutional and constituent institutions under the shared participation authority of people subject to them is the fundamental tenet of freedom in democracy and constitutionalism. According to Onimhawo and Ottuh (2006, 341) and Ottuh (2015, 23), constitutionalism and democratic freedom are based on people's shared participation and authority. Although the reasons preventing the Nigerian people from integrating may have their roots in colonialism, it is important to realize that societies need to connect to share ideas, products, and services. Such a constitutional framework has adversely affected the country's constitutional democracy. This means that the constitution is not indigenous to the people. Respect for the rule of law, basic human rights, the right to free speech, the separation of powers, justice, equality, and the development of institutions for efficient service delivery are essential components of a democratic constitution (Ogugua and Ogugua 2015, 195). Additionally, due to the introduction of the Sharia Court of Appeal in 1978 and the effort to

substitute Islamic law with the colonial constitution, religion became Nigeria's cornerstone of social politics. Both faiths' adherents compete with one another for control of important governmental offices. Nigeria's illegitimate status contributes to national strife and disorganization by disregarding minorities' rights, an expression of the majority, and the concept of unity in diversity. While northern military commanders were quietly preparing an updated constitution extending Sharia and Islam across the nation, the South rejoiced in the president's transfer to it. This constitution established six geopolitical zones, three in the South and three in the North. To be elected to his first full term in government in 2011, Goodluck Jonathan beat Muhamadu Buhari, a contender from the North. Following Jonathan's triumph, there was extensive rioting in the North, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of Christians fleeing the South.

Notwithstanding this, the West concluded that control must return to the North. John Kerry visited Nigeria many times, and President Obama publicly stated his wish for this to happen. Additionally, a business controlled by Obama aide David Axelrod actively supported the Buhari campaign (Desai 2022, 174). Therefore, the Nigerian constitution, which supposedly is the holder of Nigeria's democracy, should be indigenized to reflect the will of the citizens.

De-Militarizing Religion

Boko Haram is an example of militarizing religion in Nigeria. With its destructive actions like suicide bombings and kidnappings, Boko Haram is a significant religious organization influencing Nigeria's internal and international policies. Abuja was forced to alter its international relationships due to Boko Haram's attacks against the United Nations headquarters in Nigeria in early 2011, the abduction of the Chibok girls in early 2014, and its declaration of affiliation with ISIS in 2015. With these ugly phenomena, foreign nations can make policies that disadvantage Nigeria's democracy.

Mitigating Religion for Politics

Many Nigerians see blending politics and religion as a barrier to advancement and development. According to Balogun (2023, 2), this concept may be traced back to the Middle Ages in Europe, when governmental and ecclesiastical powers fought. Recent research shows that interaction involving politics and religion is not necessarily counterproductive (Balogun 2023, 1). However, there are certain risks to peace, progress, and democracy in multi-religious countries when religious groups compete for money and power. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), as well as the Northern Christian Elders Forum, cautioned regarding the selection of Muslim vice presidential nominees of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party, which has made this apparent in the run-up to Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections. Although religious organizations have a legitimate interest in who holds the reins of power in the country, the amount of their interference might spell major trouble for the government. Religion asserts that it is founded on a supernatural power higher than the power of the government and thus undermines the validity of that authority. This is why religion must be tamed to provide a conducive atmosphere for sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

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Deemphasizing Government Funding of Religion

Today's important Christian and Islamic pilgrimage locations include Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, and Lourdes. Muslims make pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina, while Christians make theirs to Jerusalem and Rome, among others. The nationally recognized Hajj Commission of Nigeria and the Nigerian Christian Pilgrim Commission are among the religious organizations the Nigerian government heavily financially supports. For instance, in 2020, 2.6 billion naira was set aside in the national pilgrimage budget (Udo 2020, 1). Such a scenario does not portray government neutrality on religious matters. Some civil society organizations in the country have shown patriotism by opposing such huge financial appropriations, but the government has remained silent. I argue that the financial sponsorship of religions in any guise is a call to bring religion into national politics, which is detrimental to national democracy. The stoppage of government sponsorship of religions also lessened foreign control or negative interventions on national economic and political matters.

Reorientation of Religious Education towards Democracy

Historically, education and religion were the cornerstones of every European empire from the thirteenth century through the epoch of decolonization during the twentieth century. One of the main contributors to this development was the arrival of Christianity, first in its Catholic form and then in its Protestant form during the Reformation. Sometimes, the emphasis on Protestant and Catholic missions throughout the history of colonialism is contrasted with the emphasis on Biblical literacy that characterized the Protestant missionary initiatives of the British Empire. Combining educational with theological reasoning is shown by the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*, whereby studying God's Word becomes necessary for salvation and well-being (Gearon 2021, 2). Democracy promotes citizens' well-being. Throughout the period of European empires, little consideration has been devoted to the way religious education integrates into the discussion of democracy and governance. Today, this mixing link could be corrected by reworking religious education curricula in Nigerian schools to integrate the promotion of democracy, good governance, and political leadership.

Reviving Native Languages

Recovering indigenous languages and re-examining the effects of capitalism and religions on Nigerians' way of life are steps in the decolonization process and democracy revivalism. It also entails re-examining the religions' historical foundations to comprehend how Nigeria inherited religions built on the enslavement and coercion of white people into assimilation. Avalos (cited in Higgs 2023, 4) analyzes the exclusion of interested voices, the continued political usefulness of religion, and the rejection of academics to acknowledge the validity of thinking about non-western epistemologies. He advises group activities to stop reproducing and maintaining established colonial hierarchies and power structures in academia to encourage broader decolonization activity. Decolonizing religionism may include partly tearing down barriers that were put up to combat colonial-religious presumptions and giving

theologically interested studies a more legitimate place within the practice that will favor good governance in human society. This new interpretation of underlying hope and other dangerous pursuits is an effort to highlight the significance of religious transformations as a component of social strata that are subject to contestation (Ottuh 2023, 213). These transitions revitalize agency while integrating personal identities and political justifications.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is the world's largest country of the black race and one of the African countries with the most religious diversity. This article examines the obstacles to a robust democracy in Nigeria brought about by Western countries' intervention using religion as a tactic. Significantly, the current global imperialism of Western control, existence, and knowledge has been brought about by globalization. Decolonization aims to deconstruct global inequalities and power structures. Decolonizing religion in many forms serves as a solution for Nigeria's democracy and the autonomy and self-sufficiency of religion. Western countries have used religion to oppress, abuse, and enslave people since colonization, which has exacerbated socioeconomic stagnation, constitutional abuses, the sense of inadequacy of individuals, and the vulnerable position of most secular states. De-internationalizing religion is essential to building a more efficient and enduring democracy in Nigeria. It also involves reducing government financial support for religion, reworking religious education curricula to promote democracy, restoring indigenous languages, and re-evaluating the impact of capitalism and religion on Nigerians' way of life. Furthermore, it involves removing barriers to fight colonial religious presumptions and providing theologically motivated research to support more legitimate positions on religionism and democracy.

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