

# SECULARISM AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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## **Abstract**

Nigeria is a plural state with diverse culture, ethnic and religious institutions. These portray the beauty of the country to the outside world and successive Nigerian governments have not ceased to preach the nation's desire to forge unity in diversity. However, the reality on the ground is that ethnic chauvinism, ethnic politics, ethnic consciousness, ethnic factionalization, religious fanaticism and extremism have overshadowed the desire for unity, which is a basic ingredient for national development. These are manifested in political and constitutional instabilities, ethnic and religious violence, bad leadership and governance, political competition for power, insecurity of lives and property, corruption, tribalism and nepotism, injustice, immoral acts, bloodshed, and intolerance. The challenges of national development in Nigeria assume such an awful proportion that seems to defy any kind of antidote; this is the stage at which the concept of secularism becomes most apt. This study therefore explored the effect of secularism on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. A descriptive method was adopted and data was collected via a survey of 900 respondents comprises of Christian leaders, Muslim leaders, Traditional leaders, leaders of Civil Society groups and Youth leaders. Data collected were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation and linear regression analysis. The result of the study revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between secularism and national development. The result also showed that secularism does have a significant effect on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. Requisite recommendations and conclusion were provided in the light of theoretical and empirical findings.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Secularism, National Development, Religion, Ethnicity, Unity.

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## Introduction

Nigeria is a plural state with diverse ethnic and religious institutions. The country has over 350 ethnic groups and plethora of religious beliefs. Nigeria's societal base comprises indigenous societies ranging in scale from smallest autonomous village tribes to the largest kingdoms and empires of pre-colonial Africa. Within Nigeria, there are varieties of sects ranging from the Christian and Islamic sects, to those of African traditional religions (Ogoloma, 1996) which had threatened the unity of the country from time to time. The consequences of these cultural and traditional diversities are too many. That is why Nigerian unity and secular ideals has been threatened by the absence of strong feelings of patriotism and national integration (Ogolom, 2012) which are the basic ingredients for national development. These are manifested in political and constitutional instabilities, ethnic and religious violence, insecurity of lives and property, bad leadership and governance, political competition for power, intense local parochialism, tribalism and nepotism, sectionalism, injustice, corruption, immoral acts, bloodshed, intolerance, and other fissiparous tendencies. These situations ushered liminary coup and counter-coups in 1966 and the civil war that followed from June, 1967 to January 12, 1970. The recurrent competition for control of political power between the North and South, the fear of domination of the minority by the majority, regional greed, and the porous foundations of the country, became the main causes of the many coups and the long tenure of military rule in our short history as a nation (Azaiki, 2003 cited in Ogoloma, 2012).

The challenges of national development in Nigeria assume such an awful proportion that seems to defy any kind of antidote because of ethnic chauvinism, ethnic politics, ethnic consciousness, ethnic factionalization, religious fanaticism and extremism. This makes the concept of secularism to become most apt. According to BBC English Dictionary (1993), secularism is the belief that religion should have no influence on or connection with the running of a country. For example, in the educational or political system. Today, the philosophy that was called secularism tends to be labelled humanism or secular humanism and the concept of secularism, at least in the social sciences, is much more restricted. The first and perhaps most common understanding of "secular" today stand in opposition to "religious". According to this usage something is secular when it can be categorised with the worldly, civil, non-religious sphere of human life. A secondary understanding of "secular" is contrasted with anything that is regarded as holy, sacred, and inviolable. According to this usage something is secular when it is not worshipped, when it is not venerated and when it is open for critique, judgement, and replacement (Cline, 2008). This study therefore explored the effect of secularism on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic.

## **Statement of Problem**

The extremity of religious practices in Nigeria created more problems than a blessing in the development of the nation. This has contributed to societal menaces such as ethno-religious conflicts, fusion of politics and religion, integration of ethnicity and religion. This has been a serious problem to the Nigerian constitution and the leaders of the country; past and present, military, civilian, among others uses resources from the government treasury to support pilgrimage to Mecca, Rome, and Jerusalem. A lot of billions were abused and still being abused to finance these functions while more than half of the country's population is wallowing in abject poverty and hardship yet the country, braggart its head as a secular state (Chentu, 2013). The birth of extreme practice of Islam and Christianity ushered in a serious problem to the act of governance. The issue of who constituted the majority group and the preference of their interest has long been a problem to the country. Ethnicity and religion move hand in hand in Nigeria but religion is more of a unifier of groups than ethnicity (Cinjel & Chujor, 2017). Religion generates sympathy, mass participation/involvement and also transcends ethnicity, but tends to compete with the state in its act of governance (Cinjel & Kachi, 2015). This can be seen in the violent conflicts in the country, the showcase of religious politics and the discrimination among citizens on the ground of religion (Sampson, 2014). The essence of secularism in the Nigerian constitution is to promote unity, balances, and the superiority of the state over all other institutions in the state (Bello, 2013). Therefore, the combination of governance and religious practices constituted a serious threat to the Nigerian constitution, national integration, and national development. In Nigeria, religious zealotry often equates secularisms to atheism and some blamed the problem to the fusion of governance or politics with religion in the country. It is against this backdrop that the following research questions were posited to guide the study.

1. Does secularism mean atheism as it is being peddled?
2. Is there any significant relationship between secularism and national development in Nigeria's fourth republic?
3. Does secularism have any effect on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic?

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the concept of secularism and ascertain if secularism mean atheism as it is being peddled.
2. To examine the relationship between secularism and national development in Nigeria's fourth republic.
3. To determine the effect of secularism on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic.

## Research Hypotheses

The null hypotheses were formulated to guide the researchers in finding answers to the second and third research questions:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between secularism and national development in Nigeria's fourth republic.

H<sub>2</sub>: secularism has no significant effect on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic.

## Literature review

### *Concept of Secularism*

Secularism draws its intellectual roots from Greek and Roman philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius and Epicurus, Medieval Muslim polymaths such as Ibn Rushd, enlightenment thinkers like Denis Diderot, Voltaire Benedict Spinoza, John Locke, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, and modern freethinkers, agnostic and atheists such as Bertrand Russell and Robert Ingersoll. Moreover, in Nigeria, secularism drew its root and strength from chapter one and article 10 of the 1999 constitution which states that, "the Government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion" (Ogoloma, 2012). The word "secular" is the coinage of the Latin word "saeculum" which denote an age of time, non-involvement in religious or spiritual affair and exclusion of religious from public affairs. It is the process by which religious element and dimension are being removed from a thing. A secular state on the other hand is a state in which the constitution transcends all persons and groups. It is a kind of state at which the state surpasses and also has power over all other institutions (Cinjel & Chujor, 2017). According to Galtung (2014), a secular state is a state that removes religious colours in its act of governance. It is usually practice among pluralist and heterogeneous society and the essence is to give group her sense of self-expression, freedom, and unity.

In the words of Holyoake (1846), secularism is a way of promoting a social order separate from religion, without actively dismissing or criticising religious belief. Secularism is the religion of humanity; it embraces the affairs of this world; it is interested in everything that touches the welfare of a sentient being; it advocates attention to the particular planet on which we happen to live; it mean that each individual counts for something; it is a declaration of intellectual independence; it means the pew is superior to the pulpit, that those who bear the burdens shall have the profits and that they who fill the purse shall hold the strings (Ingersoll, 1853 cited in Ademowo, 2014). Ingersoll further claims that secularism is a protest against ecclesiastical tyranny, against being a serf, subject or slave of any

phantom, or of the priest of any phantom. It is a protest against wasting this life for the sake of one we know not of. It proposes to let the gods take care of themselves. it means living for ourselves and each other for the present instead of the past, for this world instead of another. In political terms, secularism is a movement towards the separation of religion and government. This refers to reducing ties between a government and a state religion, replacing laws based on scripture (such as the Ten Commandments in Christianity and Sharia law in Islam) with civil laws, and eliminating discrimination on the basis of religion. This is said to add to democracy by protecting the rights of religious minorities (Suleiman, 2008).

According to Gbadegesin (1988), the contemporary usage of the word “secularism” can be of two forms, namely, hard secularism, according to Gbadegesin, considers religious propositions to be epistemologically illegitimate, warranted by neither reason nor experience. While in the view of soft secularism, the attainment of absolute truth was impossible and therefore scepticism and tolerance should be the guiding principle and overriding values soft secularism is therefore more receptive as it appreciates certain ‘truism’ or truth in all religious and/or even unbelief. In the context of this study, secularism is defined as the political principle or philosophy that there must exist some sphere of knowledge, values, institutions, and action that is independent of religious authority. If there is no such secular sphere, then everything is under ecclesiastical control and this undermines the possibility for liberty and autonomy.

## **Secularism and the Nigerian Nation**

The Nigerian constitution pre-supposes that an individual has freedom to practice religion of his or her choice without government interference. This is where secularism comes into play. Secularism is a legal position in the supreme law of Nigeria, stating that religious belief should not influence any public and/or government decisions. In order words, secularism is a documented position in a constitution relating to political belief in the separation of religion and state. While people are allowed to practice whatever they believe in as their religion, the government must not allow that to influence public policy. Religion is the service and worship of God or gods. The word “religion”, which was first used in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is Latin in its origin. From a sociologist perspective, the society creates religion as an instrument in moulding, controlling, and directing societal thinking and behaviour (Durkheim, 1915). Therefore, in a secular state, citizenry is allowed to practice whatever kind of religion of their kind but the law of the state which is enforceable through the constitution exceeds and transcends all other laws (Ghali, 2008).

Nigeria is a heterogeneous state with different groups practicing diverse religion. The only emblem that gave the nation power over the diverse groups is the secular outlook which empowered the constitution over every institution. It also created a sense of balance and harmony among the diverse groups (Gofwen, 2010). However, the place and position of religion has continued to compete with the state in Nigeria and the aftermath of their clash is violent conflict (Igwere, 2007). Reasoning along similar line, Sampson (2014) posits that anyone saying Nigeria is a secular nation does not understand the meaning of the word “secular”. There is nothing secular about Nigerian nation since whatever we do will always put Islam and Christianity in the fore front. A statement by Archbishop Olunmi Okogie, the Catholic Bishop of Lagos Diocese, represents the Christian community’s perception on the relationship between the state and religion: ‘when you are in a position of trust, forget about your religion because it is a private affair between you and your God. If you want to bring religion in, let it be after office hours’. On the other hand, Northern Muslims have consistently maintained a hostile view of secularism since independence in 1960, describing the concept as atheism or irreligion, a perception consistently expressed whenever reference is made to Nigeria as a secular state. The *Jamma’atu Nasril Islam (JNI)* the society for the victory of Islam for example, argued that ‘secularism is a system of social teachings or organisation which allows no part of religion’, while Sheik Abubakar Gummi, the late pillar of Islamic activism in Nigeria, said ‘a secular state is an atheistic state’. Another Muslim intellectual, Ibrahim Suleiman, argued that ‘secularism is hostile to Islam. It seeks to undermine Islamic values, supplant the Islamic laws with those of its own and deface the sanctity of the Muslim society’. With this divergent view of secularism by the two dominant religious groups, it was only a matter of time before the contradictions inherent in the seemingly secular Nigerian state bequeathed by the British colonialists would manifest themselves (Sampson, 2014).

Regardless of the popular misconceptions that surround it, secularism is not a principle of anarchy (even though there are many religious people who would give it this interpretation to condemn it). Secularism is a principle of tolerance. A secular society that is established on the principle of secularism does not force beliefs (or unbelief) on its citizens; neither does it limit the expression of people’s beliefs, and even unbelief (Ademowo, 2014). A secular state is therefore any state or country purports to be officially neutral in matters of religion, supporting neither religion nor irreligion; a state that treats all its citizens equally regardless of religion or non-religiosity; and claims not to or ceases to give preferential treatment(s) to a citizen (or citizens) of a particular religion over another with different religions or non-religious affiliation(s).

Historically, the process of secularising states typically involves the following:

1. Granting religious freedom.
2. Disestablishing state religions.
3. Stopping public funds to be used for a religion.
4. Freeing the legal system from religious control.
5. Freeing up the education system.
6. Tolerating citizens who change religion or abstain from religion.
7. Allowing political leadership to come to power regardless of religious beliefs.

These ideals are so endearing, hence Wing and Varol (2007) exhaustively as follows:

First, in secular regimes, sovereignty belongs to the nation and not a divine body. Second, religion is separate from state in a secular government. Religion does not affect the government's affairs, meaning that laws and regulations are not based on religion. Third, a secular government is neutral towards all religions. As such, the regime cannot have an official religion and does not protect one religion over another. Likewise, all individuals, irrespective of their religion, are equal before the law. Fourth, a secular regime requires the education and the legal systems to be secular. The legal system does not contain laws based on religion, and the education system is based on logic and science, not religion or dogmas. Fifth, a secular government requires freedom of religion and conscience. Thus, secularism does not mean the absence of religion from society. Individuals are free to exercise their religions and manifest their religious beliefs in both the private and the public sphere. Finally, a secular regime is based on pluralism, which requires the government's respect for all religions and religious beliefs.

On the basis of these characteristics, therefore, the following queries are appropriate: where does sovereignty reside in Nigeria – in the state or in a divine body? To what extent are Nigerian laws insulated from religious dogmas? Is the Nigerian state neutral and fair in its dealings with all religions? Are Nigerian legal and educational systems independent? Does the Nigeria constitution guarantee freedom of religion and conscience? Does the Nigerian state adhere to the principle of religious pluralism (respect for all religions)?

In the preamble of the Nigerian constitution, the state is secular and it enthused:

We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria have solemnly resolved to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic, and sovereign nation under God, to provide for our self a constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country on the principle of freedom, equality, and justice.

And in section 14(1) (a), the constitution enthused:

Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this constitution derives all its powers and authority.

The important of this provision is that where as sovereignty resides in the state, the state in itself derives its sovereignty ultimately from the people who had collectively yielded sovereignty to the state via the constitution. However, most leaders of the country, both limitary and civilian have incorporated this practice in the country, but with some certain modifications from what secularism entail (Jibrin, 2009) created the weaker and has worsen the foundation for secularism in Nigeria. This is as a result of the involvement of the country in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the preference bestowed on one religion over the other, a position of non-delicate balance in which some religious groups live in fear and at a state of marginalisation (Cinjel & Chujor, 2017). Most government in Nigeria often claimed and pronounces secularism whereas, it is only applicable in written and is not being practice. As Sampson (2014) has observed concerning Nigeria's respect for religious inclusiveness. For instance, Muslim and Christian holidays are observed. Nobody respects the wishes of traditionalists. Politicians want power to rotate between Christians and Muslims as if every Nigerian must be either a Christian or a Muslim. Pilgrimages are sponsored by the state. The billions of Naira that is often channelled for pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, Israel and Italy suggest the opposite of secularism (Jibrin, 2009). But no one gives a thought about traditional religious adherents.

In addition, there are an unofficial tradition of making Christian and Muslim prayers at every official and state function in disregard to animists and other religious adherents. The Presidential State House has a church and mosque in it, while states' government houses have either churches or mosques, depending on the religious predominance of a religion in the state (Sampson, 2014). The challenges from different angle like the movement and the establishment of sharia law among northern states during the second tenure and reign of Olusegun Obasanjo is a prototypical example, the clash of the Islamic movement in Nigeria with the Nigerian military in the recent times, the homage of the country's leaders to religious leaders and the incorporation of the place of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Importers Association of Nigeria (IAN) in Nigeria is a visible feature of the confusion. What seem sympathetic is that plethora of the country population are wallowing in abject poverty while Government is busy channelling funds to support religious institution which has continue to be a threat to state cohesion and peaceful co-existence of the country. Reasoning along similar line, Igwara (2007) and Yesufu (2016) affirmed that Nigeria is a confused and a fail state with a constitution that is loose and only applicable to the poor. Secularism is merely in a written from than in practice and if care is not taken, religious apparatus would one day



dominate the state. In 2015, *Yarim Sanni*, a former governor of *Zamfara State* marry an underage and it was the place of religion that transcend, also, in 2011 during the post-election violence, religion dominate the scene. In most societal conflict in Nigeria, it is religion that often raises its ugly head above other institutions. Where is the power of the state and the constitution in Nigeria? (Cinjel & Chujor, 2017).

Also, at the national level, the cultural and traditional diversities equally manifested itself especially in the way issues were tackled in the parliament. Legislative activity in the National Assembly and its outcomes demonstrate a strong deference to religious bias. For example, the attempt by the senate to enact a law legalizing prostitution was condemned by legislators who cited religious reasons to delegitimise it. In the same vein, some Nigerian laws are laden with religious substance. The Penal Code Act, which is modelled after the Sudan criminal code, has significant sharia flavour, while the enactment of laws like Same Sex Marriage (prohibited) Act 2006, where influenced by religious arguments. The English laws, runs concurrently with customary and Islamic laws, and there is a strong religious influence on the Nigeria legal system generally. In addition, there are laws establishing religious institutions which are wholly funded by government. For instance, the Muslim National HAJJ Commission of Nigeria, and the Nigeria Christian Pilgrims Commission (Sampson, 2014). Therefore, one can assert that Nigeria falls short of the characteristics of secularity which requires laws devoid of religious bias. From the foregoing, one can argue, therefore, that whereas religious pluralism is guaranteed in the constitution, the religious neutrality requisite for characterizing a state as secular is absolutely lacking in Nigeria.

## **National Development**

The concept of national development has been defined from different perspectives. Development means different things to different people. For some, it means making a better life for all. To others, development means economic growth (increase in GDP). Development is also equated with progress and modernity (Willis, 2005). According to Martinussen (1997), the various conceptions of national development include economic growth, increased welfare and human development, modernization, elimination of dependency, dialectical transformation, and capacity building. The growth rate of a country's per capital income compared to those of other countries can be used to describe its level of national development (Lucas, 1988). This increase in per capital income must however be accompanied by an unprecedented shift of the society from a condition considered to be unacceptable to a more acceptable one in terms of poverty level, employment, creativity, efficiency, productivity, and quality.

In the words of Arndt (1987), national development is a process of total improvement of human behaviours, values, language, cultures, institutions, and physical structures. It is about political stability, economic viability, and educational and intellectual sustainability. It borders on the sovereignty of the nation, the welfare of the people, the reign of peace and the rule of law. In short national development signifies total progress. Specifically, it connotes among other conceptions, the process of economic growth, normally reflected in the gross domestic product (GDP) per capital ranking of economies, provided annually by the World Bank. The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) report 2002 cited in Oladosu (2015), identified the key attributes of national development to include:

- a. Regard for fundamental human rights and freedom.
- b. Citizen's involvement in taking decisions that affects them.
- c. All inclusive rules, practices and institutions governing social interaction that is fair to all.
- d. A system that enables citizens to hold accountable their decision makers
- e. Equal opportunities for all irrespective of gender, race, nationality, ethnic background, etc.
- f. Secured future.
- g. Sound socio-economic policies aimed at addressing the needs and aspirations of the citizenry.
- h. Improved standard of living guaranteed by poverty reduction strategies.

Also, in a related World Bank's World Development Report (WB-WDR) 1991 cited in Akingbola (2009), national development attributes include:

1. Better and qualitative education.
2. Clean environment.
3. Effective and efficient utilities.
4. Adequate and functional social and economic infrastructures.
5. High quality of Health and nutrition.
6. Increased and equality of opportunities.

National development as argues by Cainen (2009) means the extent to which people are free from forced labour, child labour, compulsory work permits and censorship. It also measures the extent to which women and ethnic minorities enjoy political, legal, social, and economic equality, as well as the extent to which trade unions enjoy freedom of operation. Cainen's thoughts are in line with the Human Freedom Index (HFI) which brings to fore the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as a systematic social deprivation, neglect of social facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states. As observed from the foregoing, ensuring human welfare is the ultimate goal of national development. Thus, an

overwhelming improvement in the quality of life occasioned by a rise in productivity, energy, employment, etc., indicates national development.

In the light of the various national development indices, no country can be described as 'developed' except that which enjoys remarkable calm, harmony, tranquillity and whatever it takes genuine peace to reign. A good percentage of its citizens must be economically buoyant, socially amiable, and culturally well exposed. They must have a sound educational background, acceptable political system, increased industrial output, a democratically elected government, and a very high standard of living. A developed nation would have minimal cases of poverty, ignorance, diseases, accidents and all forms of artificial mishaps and abnormal behaviours, zero tolerance for corruption and all forms of abominable acts (Oladosu, 2015). Going by these criteria, Nigeria does not seem to comfortably satisfy the essential practical requirements for national development, particularly from the perspective of the reign of peace and religious tolerance.

## **Secularism and National Development**

The return of multiparty democracy raised hopes as to the arrival of the solution of Nigeria's crises of governance – good governance, the rule of law, freedom as well as institutional, infrastructural, and national development. However, some religious activities have deterred the spate of political development in Nigeria, negative religious fundamentalists in the northern region of the country have been discovered to be a threat to sustainable national development (Iwuoha, 2014). Religion in Nigeria functions as a means for the perpetration of violence, fuelling ethnic preciousness and solidarity, acquisition of political power and socio-economic gains, massive killings and the wanton destruction of lives and vandalising of property of those considered infidels or who pay allegiance to other religions. This is traced to the acrimony between the two dominant religions – Islam and Christianity which had often resulted in the struggle for power and supremacy, bitter feud and wanton destruction of lives and properties. This religious madness had like a cataclysmic vortex devastated the ground for sustainable socio-economic development of Nigeria (Ngele, 2008). This argument is still forceable today. The emergence of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria has affected negatively the political, economic, social, and environmental situation of the region and in extension Nigerian economy. The continuous killing and destruction of lives and properties in northern Nigeria in the name of Islam has a negative effect on the economy of northern states and Nigeria at large. Economic activities have almost been grounded by series of terrorist attacks in Borno, Yobe, Sokoto and Benue States, living people stranded, jobless and some refuges in their home land. Many businessmen, companies both local and foreign

have left some of these 'worst hit' states depriving government millions of tax revenue that would have been collected if economic activities are booming. The government is only left with diversion of money meant for development of the country and improvement of living standard of people to heavy spending on security (Ajaegbu, 2012). This is a clear negative influence of religion on national development in Nigeria.

The apparent linkage between religion and national development attracts criticism. According to Cohen (2002), there is either no logical reason to link religion to economic development or insufficient empirical evidence of any actual linkage. Wallerstein (1974) expressed high scepticism of seeing capitalist development as guided by religion. He argued that any complex system of ideas can be manipulated to serve any particular social or political objective. Any connection between religion and economics is likely the one in which the latter is cause and the former effect. Religion is a source not only of intolerance, human rights violations, and extremist violence, but also of non-violent conflict transformation, the defence of human rights, integrity in government and reconciliation and stability in divided societies (Appleby, 1996 cited in Ajaegbu, 2012). Therefore, if there must be development in Africa generally and in Nigeria in particular, finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. This is because if Muslims and Christians are not at peace as we are presently witnessing, there cannot be any meaningful development. Development in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is at stake if these two major world religions refuse to cooperate with one another. Both of these religions (Islam and Christianity) in turn should also be ready to accommodate other religious faiths especially the African Traditional religions instead of denigrating and demonising them (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016).

The analysis above reveals that, though opposition to secularism is ostensibly founded on its apparent anti-religiosity, the concept does not necessarily connote agnosticism or atheism. Instead, the cultural basis of religion as a fulcrum for political mobilization has been exploited by politicians to portray secularism as promoting atheism and moral degeneracy. This perception has served to degrade the utility of secularism while reinforcing an unholy matrimony between religion and politics at the expense of national security and development. Nigerian politicians have historically leveraged religion and religious identity to gain political advantages for themselves. The elite have used religion as a tool of exploitation to achieve selfish socio-economic ends, while politically deploying religious fanaticism and favouritism to polarise the people and sustain unhealthy tension in the country. To date, public officials use public funds as a tool for political patronage, thereby generating resentment and outrage from rival religious groups (Sampson, 2014).

In view of Nigeria's extant multi-religiosity, and having advertence to the unsavoury inter-religious relations that are created by the blurred relationship between religion and politics, subscription to concessional secularism is strongly advocated. Secularism and national development are seemingly inseparable. Secularism promotes pluralism and dispersal of governmental powers, which is good for a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria. Secularism and national development are implicitly related and mutually complementary and compatible. Indeed it would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of national development if Nigeria failed to subscribe to the tenet of secularism as advocated in the Nigerian constitution. National development, says Cinjel and Chujor (2017), can exist only where there is subscription to moderate secularism; the absence of national development is, ipso facto, the absence of secularism as advocated in the Nigerian constitution. It can be gleaned from the constitutional provisions examined above that there is an understanding, in principle, among all Nigerians that state affairs should be separated from religious affairs. This could be achieved through intellectual development in the province of secularism and religious pluralism. The establishment of an institute for secularism and religious pluralism is advocated. The institute should be charge with the onus of research and publication as well as advocacy in these fields of study. Once sufficient awareness has been developed of the shared values of religion, the desired values of religious pluralism and the fundamental principles of secularism, a constitutional recognition of secularism would be made easier (Sampson, 2014). As long as the religious adherents are largely ignorant or at most ill-informed concerning what secularism represents, the religious power blocs would continue to present their self-seeking conception of secularism, with the clandestine aim preserving the status quo which benefits them (Sampson, 2014) at the expense of national development.

## **Forces Threatening the Growth of Secularism and National Development in Nigeria**

### ***Ethnicity***

Like any other terminology employed by social scientists, the concept of ethnicism is a term that does not lend itself to easy definition. To fully understand this, some related concept like 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity' needs to be defined. Ethnic group is an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the members of other ethnic groups with the larger society because they share kinship, religious and linguistics ties (Cohen, 1974). This means that an ethnic group consists of those who are themselves alike by virtue of their common ancestry, language, and

culture, and who are so regarded by others (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Ethnicity on the other hand, means the interactions among members of diverse groups (Nnoli, 1978). According to Achebe (1983: 8), Ethnicity is “discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth”. In Nigeria, the word ‘ethnicity and tribalism’ are used interchangeably. In all political activities in Nigeria, the factor of ethnicity is reflected. It is particularly obvious in areas like voting, distribution of political offices, employment, and government general patronage of the citizens (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). The experience in Nigeria so far, is that as the nation aspires for socio-economic transformation, growth and development, parochial considerations based on ethnic colorations tend to impede the quest for unity which is a basic ingredient for national development. However, Ajayi and Owumi (2013) affirm that it would not be easy to identify a country that is not affected by issues triggered by ethnicity but some countries’ situations are particularly striking because of the lessons they provide regarding the impact of ethnicity on national development. While ethnicity is a politically neutral concept and does not pose any danger to democracy or development but rather could positively engender development where interactions and interrelationships are healthy, it is the politicization and manipulation of ethnicity that poses a problem (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). This aspect of ethnicism in Nigerian situation has set one ethnic group against another with immeasurable consequences, mostly hostility in the form of interethnic violence.

### ***Religion***

Religion as the oldest discipline in human society is the most difficult concept to define. This is because religion has passed through many critical stages from the medieval period to the modern times. It has suffered great deal in the hands of the rationalists, enlightenment and modern thinkers who have shown how irrelevant it is to societal development (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016). According to Gilbert (1980: 5), religion is “any system of values, beliefs, norms and related symbols and rituals, arising from attempts by individuals and social groups to effect certain ends, whether in this world or any further world, by means wholly or partly supernatural”. Similarly, Vernon (1962) defined religion as that part of culture composed of share beliefs and practices which not only identify or define the supernatural and the sacred and man’s relationship thereto, but which also relate them to the known world in such a way that the group is provided with moral definitions as to what is good (in harmony with or approved by the supernatural) and what is bad (contrary to out of harmony with the supernatural). By Religion, Obilor (2003) cited in Iwuoha (2014) interprets it as a capacity

or a power which enables man to observe the laws of his nature, the natural law and/or of the divine law. According to Obiefuna and Uzoigwe (2012), religion reflects, sustains, and legitimises social order. Iwuoha (2014) believes that religion occupies a distinctive place in the enterprise of world-building. The effort to build a developed nation could advance dramatically if religious people advocate national development. Religious traditions in Nigeria enjoy moral authority and broad grassroots presence that out them in a powerful position to shape the worldviews and lifestyles of millions of people within the nation. As it has been rightly observed, all religions possess one or more of five sources of power: They shape people's worldviews; wield moral authority; have the ear of multitudes of adherents; often possess strong financial and institutional assets and are strong generators of social capital, an asset in community building (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016).

However, based on the increasing rise of religious bigots and extremists, one may be tempted to suggest that religion is not relevant to societal development and hence should be extricated from human social life. Religion has been used, abused, and misused by political elites, and unfortunately by the so-called clerics of Christianity and Islam, so much that it has continued to cause conflagrations all over the world. Even in the so-called secular societies, religion has not only penetrated but has also continued to be a source of concern as a result of its damaging nature in those societies. Nigerian experience is one among many of the countries witnessing Islamic extremists' senseless killings and maiming of innocent lives (sadly women and children are not spared) all over the world (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016). Religious riot orchestrated by Maitatsine and the Shiite sects holding tenaciously to their religious dogma including sacrificing anything including their own lives and those of other persons in pursuits of their heinous objectives, have in no small measure disturbed the relative peace and security of lives and properties of the inhabitants of this country (Iwuoha, 2014). In addition, the Nigerian constitution stipulates that we are Nigerians first and then Christians and Muslims second. However, some fanatics from the north who are elected officials are insisting that Muslims are Muslims first and Nigerians second. By this, they are entitled to live by the sharia Islamic Law. These Muslims' leaders always want the constitution to be subordinate to sharia law. Ogoloma (2012) posits that sharia law is subordinate to the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. There should be no circumventing of the constitution. Sharia can never be superior to the constitution and absolutely wrong to operate two sets of contradictory laws in any state.

### ***Competition for Political Power***

The sudden and apparent emergence of the Boko Haram sect in the history of the country was meant to destabilise the Jonathan's Administration as well as the equilibrium the country has been brought to by the government. Nevertheless, the emergence of Boko Haram sect has been attributed to the political rivalry between the north and the South towards controlling the political power in the country. Poverty of the majority of the Muslim people too has been attributed to it. But how could that be explained when we realize that for most of the independence years, the northerners have been at the helm of affairs of this country if this is to be accepted (Ogoloma, 2012). Reasoning along similar line, Adigwe (2004) affirmed that Nigerian politicians have found it very useful, even more in recent times, to cling to one religious group or the other as if that group were the driving force or sources of their political power, while at the same time wanting all of the people to believe that they strive to govern them, or are governing them in the name of God. As a result of competition for political power, political aspirants now have "prophet", "Imams" and "native doctors and seers" whom they consult regularly, especially in times of crises. In Nigeria, almost all politically motivated riots and crises have religious overtones while all religiously motivated crises have political implications. While some religious crises, are engineered either by politicians or the government in power to achieve political goal or interest.

### ***Tribalism***

According to Ogolomo (2012), tribalism is the twin broth of ethnicity and has been the major cause of the domestic political instability in the country immediately after independence and until the early 1990s. This is noticeable in the utterances of the leaders from Igbo), made from time to time especially when they are not in power such as the marginalisation of the North and their interests or the marginalisation of the Igbos and their interests, without any damper and whimper for the feelings of the minorities from where the bulk of the federal revenue comes from. The surprising aspects of these statements and words are that, sometimes, it comes out from former heads of state, federal ministers, or other high government functionaries. Tribalism has been a thorn in the flesh of the country like every other African country. It has been against development of the country and the continent as a whole. Tribalism has led to ethnic politics and the issue of marginalisation. In the process, this has led equally to ethnic mistrust and under development (Ogoloma, 2012).



### ***Other Forces***

Corruption, nepotism, injustice, immoral acts, political and institutional instabilities, bloodshed, and tolerance are other forces that threaten the growth of secularism and national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. From the foregoing, it is obvious that secularism does not mean irreligion or disregard of the sacred as some have attempted to assert. Consistent with the Muslim perspective on secularism discussed above, Sampson (2014) affirmed that a nation is secular only if it is concerned with temporal, worldly matters to the exclusion of religion or the profane in disregard of the sacred. In this view, Nigeria is not a secular state, to the extent that it is concerned with both temporal and religious matters. This is the general illogic that pervades Islamic literature on secularism in Nigeria. In reality, secularism does not detract from religious devotion; instead, it reinforces it. This is because a secular state guarantees freedom of religion and conscience, thereby enabling all religious adherents to practice their faiths uninhibitedly.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical bedrock of this study are the demand-side theory and supply-side theory by Norris and Inglehart (2004). The demand-side and supply-side theory was developed to explain how a state can construct its attitude to religious. The demand-side theory focus 'bottom-up' on the mass public suggesting that as societies industrialise, religious habits will gradually erode, and the public will become indifferent to spiritual appeals. The supply-side theory, on the other hand, focuses 'top-down' on religious organisations as it emphasises that public demand for religion is constant and any cross-national variations in the vitality of spiritual life are the product of its supply in religious market (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). The supply-side theory therefore suggests that the more churches or mosques or/and other religious centre established, the more people will become attracted to religion. However, whichever of the two is explored, the buck stops on the table of the state actors; the state can decide which path it wishes to take to institute secularism and channel its path to secularisation.

According to Gbadegesin (1988), there are currently four ways in which a state can construct its attitude to religions: (1) *Secular Attitude of Indifference (SAI)* – This means an attitude to religion whereby the state exhibits lack of concern about religions and religious matters. The state with this attitude is expected to be indifferent to the existence or non existence of religions. But the truth is that there is hardly any state that can afford to be unconcerned about religious matters since they have the tendency of being relatively dangerous and volatile or affect the social

order (2) *Secular Attitude of Rejection (SAR)* – The state that operates this attitude is secular if it rejects all religious considerations; including overt or covert relationship with religions. The secular state that operates on this assumption rejects religious considerations an anti-development. One however needs to take a second look to understand how it is possible for a state to adopt and operate based on this mantra (Ademowo, 2014). (3) *Secular Attitude of Exclusion (SAE)* – This is the total omission of religious considerations in the plans of the state. Religion and religious groups are not recognised as religious but as social group. However, the possibility of a state operating with this attitude is very low because no state (Secular or otherwise) can afford to exclude (omit) religious considerations (in general) from its calculations, if only because of the prudential need to arm itself against subversive activities of religious adherents. (4) *Secular Attitude of Accommodation (SAA)* – This means that the secular state will seek to treat all religious equally in recognition, supports and funding. None of the religions and religious groups will be taken or recognised as higher than the others.

All the four attitudes outlined above have implications on the nature of secularity of the state. However, to Gbadegesin (1988) and Yesufu (2016), the main focus of secularism is the separation of religion from politics, and state actors must never lose sight of this. Therefore, an adequate interpretation of the principle of secularism that guides the secularisation of processes must essentially include at least four related elements with respect to the separation of religion from politics. These elements are:

- 1) Refusal of the state to adopt an official religion.
- 2) Non-encouragement of the incursions of institutionalized religions into the affairs of the state or into matters which are best handled by the state.
- 3) Neutrality of the state to religion and religious matters unless they are subversive or threaten the existence of the state or are in other ways harmful to human interest.
- 4) Non-sponsorship and non-patronage of religious programmes or events by the state (Gbadegesin, 1988).

## Methodology

The study assessed the impact of secularism on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. The descriptive approach was adopted and data was collected via a survey of 900 respondents comprises of Christian leaders, Muslim leaders, Traditional leaders, leaders of Civil Society Groups and Youth leaders randomly selected in each geopolitical zone as shown below.

**Table 1. Population of the Study**

Geopolitical Zones	Christian Leaders	Muslim Leaders	Traditional Leaders	Civil Societies	Youth Leaders	Total
South-South	Delta (30)	Bayelsa (30)	Edo (30)	Rivers (30)	Akwa-Ubom (30)	150
South-West	Lagos (30)	Osun (30)	Ekiti (30)	Ogun (30)	Oyo (30)	150
South-East	Anambra (30)	Abia (30)	Ebonyi (30)	Enugu (30)	Imo (30)	150
North-West	Kaduna (30)	Kano (30)	Sokoto (30)	Zamfara (30)	Kebbi (30)	150
North-Central	Kwara (30)	Plateau (30)	Kogi (30)	FCT (30)	Niger (30)	150
North-East	Bauchi (30)	Borno (30)	Yobe (30)	Taraba (30)	Adamawa (30)	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>900</b>

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2018.

### ***Sampling Technique***

The non-probabilistic method was adopted to target respondents with knowledge about the specific issues in the study. Sample was drawn from the six geopolitical zones to elicit views on the relationship between secularism and national development and the impact of secularism on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic.

### ***Reliability and Validity of the Instrument***

Structure questionnaire were design to elicit needed information. The reliability was established through a trial test conducted on 100 respondents in South-South who also took part in the study. Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the internal consistency of the instrument as shown in the table below.

**Table 2. Reliability Statistics of Variable**

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Secularism	13	0.834
National development	16	0.783

The results yielded a coefficient of 0.834 and 0.783, which satisfied the general recommended level of 0.70 for the research indicators (Cronbach, 1951). Experts also judged the face and content validity of the questionnaire as adequate. Hence, researchers satisfied both reliability and validity of the scale.

## Data presentation, analysis, and interpretation

### *Distribution of Questionnaire and Response Rate*

The study examined the impact of secularism on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. To achieve this, nine hundred (900) questionnaires were administered across the six geopolitical zones. Of the 900 questionnaires distributed out of which 523 questionnaires representing 58.1% were retrieved as shown in the table below.

**Table 3. Distribution of Questionnaire and Response Rate**

S/N	Geopolitical Zones	Questionnaire Distributed	Questionnaire Retrieved	Percentage (%)
1	South-South	150	109	12.1
2	South-West	150	97	10.8
3	South-East	150	101	11.2
4	North-West	150	88	9.8
5	North-Central	150	62	6.9
6	North-East	150	66	7.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>58.1</b>

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2018.

**Table 4. Correlation Matrix**

Variables		Secularism	National Development
Secularism	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 523	.786 .000 523
National Development	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.786 .000 523	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Table 4 shows the correlation between secularism and national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. There exists a significant positive high correlation between secularism and national development in Nigeria ( $r = .786$ ,  $n = 523$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This implies that secularism has a strong and positive relationship with national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. This is widely supported by the previous findings

of Maritain (1951); Berger (1997) Mosad and Valaintisna (2010); and Sampson (2014).

### ***Regression Analysis***

**Table 5. Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the estimate
1	.0293	0.547	0.813	0.721

Predictors: (Constant), secularism

Dependent variable: national development

**Table 6. ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean	Ff	Sig
Regression	7.283	1	7.283	23.189	.000 <sup>b</sup>
1 Residual	87.238	521	.342		
<b>Total</b>	<b>94.521</b>	<b>522</b>			

Dependent variable: national development

Predictors: (constant), secularism

Source: Field survey, 2018.

The simple linear regression shows ( $R^2$ ) value of 0.547 which reveals that secularism independently account for 54.7% of the variation in national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. The F statistics of 23.189 revealed that the model is statistically significant at 0.05 significant levels.

### ***Discussion of Findings***

With respect to the second objective of this study, it was found that secularism has a significant and positive relationship with national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. This is in agreement with the previous studies of Maritain (1951); Berger (1997); Mosad and Valaintisna (2010); and Sampson (2014). Also, based on the results of the statistical analysis, secularism has significantly explained 54.7% of variance in national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. This finding is in agreement with the views of Ogoloma (2012); Sampson (2014); Yesufu (2016) that stressed the ability of secularism to engender national development in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

Based on the empirical and theoretical findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

The Nigerian state should adhere to the principle of secularism and religious pluralism (respect for all religions). Also there is need for a clear constitutional definition of the attributes of secularism, a proper delineation of its scope and extent, and most significantly, a consensual home-grown designation or appellation of the concept that is agreeable to all religious stakeholders without derogating the essence and reverence attributed to their respective religions.

The Nigerian state should desist from interfering and incorporating religion activities in the act of governance.

The establishment of an institute for secularism and religious pluralism is advocated. This institution should be charged with the onus of research and publication as well as advocacy in these fields of study.

The content and dictates of Nigerian constitution should strictly be applied practiced and utilized as provided. This will go a long way to strengthen and empowered the potency of government in the act of governance.

The Nigerian state should remain steadfast with the tenet of democracy and should always adhere to the spirit and principle of secularism enshrined in the constitution in its day to day activities. This will make the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to transcend and surpasses all belief, customs, values, and religious institution in the country.

If there must be national development in Nigeria, finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. This is because if Muslims and Christians are not at peace, as we are presently witnessing, there cannot be any meaningful development in Nigeria. Therefore, national development in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is at stake if these major world religions refuse to cooperate with one another.

As Nigeria progresses in her democratisation journey, adherence to the rule of law, building strong and inclusive institutions (political and economic) will increase investor confidence in the Nigerian economy and attract foreign direct investment as well as strengthen the private sector.

Religious leaders should give proper orientation to their followers and should emphasize that religion pursues peace and not violence.

Nigerian should see their pluralism in terms of diverse religion, political and ethnic affinities as a blessing that would make her a multicoloured nation with diver's potentialities to give leadership to Africa, the third world and the world at large.

Nigerian government should desist from sponsoring Muslims and Christian's pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Italy on the expense of national development.

## Conclusion

Secularism is not the absence of religions in the state. Rather, it is the absence of state sponsored religion so that everyone will be free to choose a religion of their choice. Regardless of the popular misconceptions that surround it, secularism is not a principle of anarchy even though there are many religious people who would give it this interpretation to condemn it. Secularism is a principle of tolerance. The impact of religion in a secular state seems to have played out negatively in Nigeria, as politics and religion are mixed in the attempt to gain political power. The Nigerian state has variously been characterised as a patrimonial, prebendal and rentier state. These characteristics of the state have implication for state civil/society relations and consequently, inter-ethnic and religious relations. The study has revealed through its perceived findings that secularism has a positive impact on national development in Nigeria's fourth republic. The study therefore concludes that if there must be national development in Nigeria, the major religions in Nigeria especially Islam and Christianity must live in harmony. Their identity would be respected while mutually respecting each other. This is the only way the country can achieve a meaningful development in terms of providing security, and social amenities which include quality education, transportation infrastructure, youth employment, portable water, and medical care.

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