

This Discussion Paper critically examines the pivotal role religion plays in Nigerian politics, particularly as it relates to the ways Islamic and Christian identities have been manipulated by competing political elites in their struggle for power. It provides a concise but well-informed history of the evolution of the religious factor in politics and its adverse implications for Nigeria's democracy. Its point of departure is a critique of the notion of a secular Nigerian state (as prescribed by the constitution), which shows how governments and politicians have taken advantage of constitutional loopholes and used state resources to foster the politicisation of religion, with serious consequences for society at large. Some of the adverse consequences identified include religious conflict, political instability, insecurity and the undermining of the country's democracy and development.

The study carefully peels away the outward display of religious piety by political elites and leaders to reveal some of the underlying personal and narrow calculations. Over time, these calculations have eroded the social elements binding relations in a multiethnic, multi-religious setting such as Nigeria, and there have been periodic explosions of sectarian and communal violence in various parts of the country. The authors show how the politicisation and ethnicisation of religious identities has further fuelled conflict between competing groups and geopolitical interests in Nigeria and raised serious questions for Nigeria's democracy, development and the nation-state project. While noting that religion cannot be completely de-linked from politics, the study proffers some suggestions to begin to address and reverse the adverse effects of the intrusion of religion into democratic politics in Nigeria, Africa's largest country and leading oil producer.

USMAN TAR, PhD. Lecturer and Director of Postgraduate Studies, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Kurdistan-Hawler, Iraq, and Managing Editor of *Information, Society and Justice* based at the Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University, UK. He has published in numerous journals, including the *Review of African Political Economy*, *Nordic Journal of Africa Studies*, *African Renaissance* and *Peace, Conflict and Development*. He is the author of *The Politics of Neoliberal Democracy in Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

ABBA GANA SHETTIMA, PhD. Senior Lecturer and Head, Department of Sociology, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. He was a Fulbright Visiting Researcher at North Carolina State University, Raleigh (2000–01). He has published widely in a number of journals in Nigeria and abroad, including the *Journal of Social and Management Sciences* (Nigeria), *Africa Development* (CODESRIA, Senegal) and the *Journal of Tropical Paediatrics* (UK).

Nordiska Afrikainstitutet
The Nordic Africa Institute

Nordiska Afrikainstitutet
(The Nordic Africa Institute)
P.O. Box 1703
SE- 751 47 Uppsala, Sweden
www.nai.uu.se



Endangered Democracy?

THE STRUGGLE OVER SECULARISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

USMAN TAR AND ABBA GANA SHETTIMA