

Islam and Contemporary Protest in Nigeria

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Abstract: Islam highlights the significance of justice in maintaining social stability. It suggests while a society can potentially survive without religious belief, it cannot endure without fairness and justice. This perspective underscores the need for equitable system and institutions to ensure well-being and cohesion of the society. However, the expression of dissent or protest is conditioned by specific principles outlined by Islamic jurisprudence and ethics.

Keywords: Islam, Protest and Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In Islam, shariah has provided guidance on the principles of justice, leadership and addressing the grievances. Islamic law gave much emphasis on the importance of justice and ethical conduct of governance. At the same time, the expression of dissent or protest is guided by the Islamic shariah. In fact Qur'an and Hadith promote justice and standing up against oppression but they do not directly call for modern forms of protest which destroy the lives and properties of the Muslim ummah. Islamic shariah emphasized on addressing injustice or grievance through proper channels and maintaining faith, integrity, law and order.

PROTEST

Protest is the act of saying or showing publically that you object something. Protest usually arise when people feel injustice occurred in their societies. People protest in different ways for instance.ⁱ Some protest through writing letters, boycotting products, joining protest groups to the extent of breaking law and order of a particular country. Generally speaking protest can be classify into two namely:

- Violent protest
- Non violent protest.

PROTEST IN NIGERIA

Protest in Nigeria has a long and varied history, reflecting the country's complex socio-political landscape. Here are some key moments and movements:

Pre-Colonial and Colonial Era

Anti-Colonial Movements (1920s-1960s): Early protests against British colonial rule began in the 1920s, with notable figures like Herbert Macaulay leading demands for self-governance. The 1945 Aba Women's Riots were significant, as women protested against taxation and exploitationⁱⁱ. This is

the first protest in Nigeria organized by the citizenry.

Post-Independence (1960-1970s)

-Civil Rights Movements (1960s): After gaining independence in 1960, various groups protested against corruption and military ruleⁱⁱⁱ. The Nigerian Youth Movement advocated for greater political participation.

-Biafran War (1967-1970): The conflict led to widespread protests and activism, particularly among those advocating for the rights of the Igbo people and the Biafran independence movement^{iv}. This protest took the lives of many people in its course.

Military Rule and the 1980s

-Student Protests (1970s-1980s): Students became vocal against military regimes, with notable protests in 1978 against the increase in school fees. The government responded with repression^v. The first protest of its kind organised by Nigerian's students.

-Pro-Democracy Movements (1980s): The campaign for the restoration of democracy gained momentum, with groups like the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) forming in opposition to military rule^{vi}.

Return to Civilian Rule (1999)

-Ongoing Protests: Following the return to democracy in 1999, protests continued, focusing on issues such as governance, human rights abuses, and corruption. The Niger Delta region saw significant protests against oil companies and environmental degradation^{vii}.

Recent Protests (2010s-Present)

EndSARS Movement (2020): This significant protest movement emerged against police brutality, particularly targeting the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)^{viii}. It garnered

international attention and led to widespread calls for reform.

Environmental and Social Justice (2010s-2020s): Protests against environmental damage in the Niger Delta, as well as movements advocating for women's rights, labor rights, and governance reforms, have persisted.

Recently, Nigeria including the diaspora nationwide protest over the rising cost of living since the beginning of president Bola Ahmad Tinubu's administration in may 2023. The protest were mainly over fuel subsidy removal, hike in electricity tariffs and customs duties, hunger and insecurity among others.

Contemporary Challenges

Protests in Nigeria often face government crackdowns, censorship, and violence. Activists continue to challenge systemic issues, using social media to mobilize support and raise awareness^{ix}.

Overall, Nigeria's history of protest reflects its struggle for democracy, social justice, and accountability, demonstrating the resilience and activism of its people.

CAUSES OF PROTEST

Protests in Nigeria stem from a variety of causes, often reflecting deep-seated social, economic, and political issues. Here are some of the key factors:

Political Corruption

Widespread corruption among political leaders leads to mismanagement of resources, eroding public trust and prompting citizens to demand accountability and transparency.

Human Rights Abuses

Incidents of police brutality, especially by units like the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), have spurred movements like EndSARS, as citizens demand protection of their rights^x.

Economic Hardship

High unemployment rates, inflation, and economic inequality create widespread dissatisfaction, prompting protests over living conditions and calls for better economic policies^{xi}.

Ethnic and Regional Disparities

Tensions between various ethnic groups, often exacerbated by unequal distribution of resources and political power, can lead to localized protests and broader conflicts^{xii}.

Environmental Issues

In regions like the Niger Delta, environmental degradation from oil extraction has led to protests against multinational companies and government inaction regarding pollution and land rights^{xiii}.

Social Injustice

Issues such as gender inequality, youth disenfranchisement, and lack of access to education and healthcare have motivated protests, particularly among marginalized groups^{xiv}.

Demand for Good Governance

Citizens increasingly demand effective governance, including better public services, infrastructure, and adherence to democratic principles, often leading to organized protests.

National Security Concerns

Rising insecurity due to conflicts with insurgent groups like Boko Haram and issues with banditry have resulted in protests over the government's failure to ensure safety and security.

These factors combine in various ways to ignite protests, reflecting the complex and dynamic challenges facing Nigeria.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PROTEST IN ISLAM

Early protests in Islam can be traced back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and the nascent Muslim community in Mecca. Key events include:

1. Opposition in Mecca: When Muhammad began preaching monotheism, he faced significant opposition from the Quraysh tribe. Early followers faced persecution, leading to protests against their treatments^{xv}.
2. Boycott of the Hashemites: In 615 CE, the Quraysh imposed a social and economic boycott against Muhammad's clan (Banu Hashim) and his followers. This led to communal protests and solidarity among the oppressed Muslims^{xvi}.
3. Migration to Abyssinia: In response to persecution, some early Muslims sought refuge in Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia), appealing to the Christian king, who provided them protection^{xvii}.
4. Medina and Political Protest: The move to Medina allowed the establishment of a Muslim community with political and social reforms. Discontent over unfair treatment or tribal conflicts often led to protests.

These early instances were foundational in shaping the Muslim community and highlighted issues of justice, equality, and religious freedom.

After the assassination of Uthman ibn Affan (R.A) in 656 CE, Aisha (R.A), the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), played a prominent role in the ensuing political justice. Her protest, often referred to as the Battle of the Camel, was significant for several reasons:

1. **Advocacy for Justice:** Aisha (R.A) called for accountability for Uthman's murder, seeking justice for his death and opposing the perceived negligence of Ali ibn Abi Talib (R.A), who had become the caliph.
2. **Gathering Support:** She rallied supporters in Basra, emphasizing the need to confront Ali's leadership, believing that Uthman's death must be avenged.
3. **Military Engagement:** The situation escalated into armed conflict at the Battle of the Camel in 656 CE, where Aisha led her forces against Ali's troops. This battle was one of the first major civil conflicts in the Muslim community, highlighting the divisions that had emerged.
4. **Aftermath and Legacy:** The battle resulted in significant casualties and deepened the rifts within the Muslim community. Aisha's involvement demonstrated the active role women could play in political matters, though the conflict also led to her later retreat from political life^{xviii}.

This episode reflects the complex dynamics of early Islamic politics and the challenges faced by the nascent Muslim community.

ISLAM AND PROTEST

Muslims must be guided by either the Glorious Qur'an or Hadith of the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in all aspects of their lives being it social, economical, religious and political. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) as a messenger of Allah during his life time has taught his companions (Sahabah) every affair that would please Allah (S.W.T) in this material world. Likewise he warned them from every affair or action that would invite the anger of Allah (S.W.T) on them. Islam places much emphasis on justice (Adl) and prevention of oppression (Zulm). The Glorious Qur'an and prophetic sunnah has provided a frame work that supports standing against injustice in the society. A good example of this statement can be seen in the Glorious where Allah (S.W.T) states:

O you who believe be maintainers of justice, bearers

Of witness of Allah's sake though it may be against your

Own selves or (your) parents or nearer relatives; if he be

Rich or poor, Allah is nearer to them both in compassion;

Therefore do not follow (your) desires, lest you deviate; and

If you swerve or turn aside, then surely Allah is aware of what you do^{xix}.

The above quoted verse of the Glorious pointed the duty of muslims to uphold justice even when it requires challenging any one.

Muslims scholars generally divided into two groups concerning the position of protest in Islam. Namely:-

Anti-Protest

Pro- Protest

These scholars based their arguments using the texts of the Glorious Qur'an and Sunnah of prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), as well as the consensus of muslim scholars as we are going to see in our discussions.:

ANTI-PROTEST IN ISLAM

These category of scholars see protest as unlawful in Islam. They based their argument with the following evidences.

Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was reported to have said:

‘‘Help the oppressed and oppressor’’

When it was said to him that is correct that the oppressed should be but how does one the oppressor? He responded

‘‘Stop him and prevent him from oppression, and that is helping him’’^{xx}

While in another tradition he said:

Whoever among you sees an evil, let him stop it with his hand.

If he is not able, let him stop it by speaking. If he is not able, let him

At least hate it with his heart for that is the weakest of faith

(Iman)^{xxi}.

Despite all these there are principles that go along with these two traditions to avoid anarchy, dispute and disorder in the societies.. In fact, the concept of enjoining good and forbidding evil (Al- amr bil ma'aruf wa nahy an al munkar) is the foundation

of Islamic ethics that supports corrective action against wrong doings should not be violated. Many people did not understand the Islamic shariah and think that any individual can do whatever he wishes to correct evils by using any means in the society. In addition to this, prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) said:

If one of you sees something from the ruler that he hates,
let him not publicise it^{xxii}.

These authentic narrations make it very clear that the ruler should only be advised in his presence and not in the presence of the people. So, one may write to the ruler with gentle words advising him with correct conduct. The Messenger (S.A.W) never ever protested in the streets of Makkah though he and his companions were oppressed and persecuted for 13 years in Makkah. They never once blocked the streets, participated in sit-ins, or plotted assassinations. However, the Prophet would constantly advise them and remind them of their duty to their Lord and the impending Day of Judgement wherein Allah would call them to account^{xxiii}.

So to oppose this methodology is to oppose the Prophet (S.A.W) as he himself said:

“Whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not from me^{xxiv}”.

He also said: “You will have rulers over you who will not follow my Sunnah, nor my guidance. There will be amongst them men who will have the hearts of devils in the bodies of humans^{xxv}”.

When asked how one is to behave towards such oppressive Muslim rulers, he responded:

“Listen and obey the ruler, even if he takes your wealth and beats you in your back. Listen and obey.^{xxvi}”

So patience is very important in times of hardship. There is tremendous wisdom behind this because of the great bloodshed and anarchy that results in standing up against those in authority. Furthermore, it is a reminder that the Muslims are only ruled by those they deserve and the leaders are merely a reflection of society. So Allah gives good people a good ruler and wicked people a wicked ruler as the great scholars such as Ibnul-Qayyim, Ibn Bāz and Al-Albāni have stated.

So protests, demonstrations and rising up against the rulers and those in authority are not allowed in Islam^{xxvii}.

Ibn Taymiyya states the following regarding the issue:

“According to the most well-known view of Ahl as-Sunnah scholars, it is not permissible to revolt against the ruler even if he is an oppressor. This view is supported by many hadiths. The mischief, chaos and injustice caused by armed conflict is worse than the oppression and mischief caused by the ruler. History shows that the mischief, chaos and injustice caused by those who revolted against the rulers by weapons always became worse than the mischief, chaos and injustice they tried to eliminate^{xxviii}”.

Allah does not propose revolting against a cruel ruler in any way.

If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them: but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of Allah; but if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair: for Allah loves those who are fair (and just)^{xxix}.

The issue is clearly stated in the verse above. How does Allah allow armed struggle against rulers? If Islam allow this act anarchy will prevail in the ummah of Islam no doubt about it.

But in a case where Muslim people in any Islamic country organize peaceful demonstrations – free from armed actions, destruction and injustice – and if the despotic governments shoot them, the responsibility will belong to those fascist states and governments.

To sum up enjoining what is good must be fulfilled within the boundaries of good deeds and forbidding the evil must not involve doing evil deeds.

As for the duty of forbidding evil and how it is to be carried out, then the principle is as follows:

1. Forbidding evil with the hand is for the rulers and those in authority such as the courts and the police appointed by the ruler.
2. Forbidding evil with speech is for the scholars of Sunnah and those with knowledge (and not pretenders who claim they know!).
3. Hating evil with one’s heart is for everyone to whom the truth has reached from the general folk.

As for boycotting products and goods, then one should only do so if the ruler has commanded with that or the great scholars of Sunnah with the

authority given to them by the Muslim rulers. Writing to advise the oppressive ruler should be done in private whilst showing gentleness and concern, free from rude and wicked speech. Also one may approach a government minister or scholar who can in turn advise those in authority. A worker may approach his employer directly, or complain to the leaders in government about mistreatment^{xxx}. This is the balanced and orderly method of rectification whilst maintaining patience and supplicating to Allah.

One can see the evil effects of following a methodology that opposes the Quran and Sunnah in the “Arab Spring” which began in Tunisia (in 2011) with an Islamically forbidden act of suicide (a man burned himself alive as an act of protest) and then these protests spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and other countries that resulted in anarchy, mass killing of civilians and the general collapse of Muslim societies^{xxxii}.

People were deceived into thinking they were doing a religious act approved of by the Quran and Sunnah. Since then, hundreds of thousands have died (and continue to do so), millions are homeless, schools and hospitals are bombed, and thousands imprisoned. Knowledgeable Muslims say: This is a clear proof that abandoning the guidance of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and resorting to direct public protests only brings about greater harm. One can see the many terrorist groups have arisen in the wake of the “Arab Spring” such that no right-minded person looks upon those protests except with sadness and regret. And let us not forget that these protests were condoned, justified and supported by many “liberals” and ignorant Muslims.

In Nigeria, recently as a result of end bad governance protest many people lost their lives in the name of hunger protest or end bad governance. This clearly shows the effects of violent protest in our countries in the course of salvaging their countries from corruption of bad rulers.

PRO PROTEST

Protest which means a statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something. Demonstration is just one among the kinds of Protest; protest may be done by demonstrating or any other means.

There is no proof or evidence from the Qur’an and Sunnah dissuading the Muslims from agitating for justice. Islamically, the Muslims have the right to

keep agitating till every hidden secret is unraveled without calling for anarchy in the society. In fact Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) provides a structured approach to protest. The principles of Maqasid al-shariah (the objectives of Islamic law) emphasize the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Protest, therefore, must be in line with these objectives, aiming to rectify injustices without causing injury to people or disrupting societal harmony.

Right to protest against injustice of the leaders is one of the rights that Islam has conferred on the Muslims. Allah [S.W.T] said in the Glorious Qur’an.

Allah does not love the public utterance of hurtful speech unless [it be] by One to whom injustice has been done; and Allah is Hearing and knowing^{xxxii}.

This clearly shows the legality of protest when facing injustice in the course of Mu’amalat with the rulers. At the same time it means Allah (S.W.T) strongly opposed the use of abusive language but for the person who has been the victim of injustice Allah (S.W.T) gave him the right to physically and openly protest the injury that has been done to him by the unjust ruler. This right is not limited to one person it is also applicable to the group of people if injustice was made to them. In addition to this, another verse in the Glorious Qur’an said.

O you who believe be maintainers of justice, bearers
Of witness of Allah’s sake though it may be
against your
Own selves or (your) parents or nearer relatives; if
he be
Rich or poor, Allah is nearer to them both in
compassion;
Therefore do not follow (your) desires, lest you
deviate; and
If you swerve or turn aside, then surely Allah is
aware of what you do^{xxxiii}.

This verse underscores the importance of standing up against oppression. In addition to this prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was reported to have said:
The best jihad is speaking a word of truth to a tyrannical ruler^{xxxiv}.

This also shows the right of Muslims to stand against injustice and uphold justice at the same challenge injustice. History never lied, there are many instances which shows the occurrences of protest against the injustice of Muslim rulers in

the past that can not be considered as un lawful. Some of these instances can be seen as follows:- Ka'ab bn 'Ujra's public insult and criticism of Abdul Rahman bn Umm Hakam (who was appointed by Mu'aawiyah to rule over Kufa at that time).

Ka'ab bn 'Ujra reported that he entered the mosque and saw Abdul Rahman bn Umm Hakam delivering the sermon in a sitting posture. Upon this, he said:

"Look at this wretched person; he delivers the sermon while sitting^{xxxv>}

In addition to this, the case of ubadah bn Saamit where he criticise Muawiya bn Abi Sufyan can also serve a reference point here.

Ubaadah bn Saamit's public criticism of Mu'aawiyah bn Abee Sufyaan. When they went out on an expedition, Mu'aawiyah was the leader of the people, and they gained a lot of spoils of war. And there was one silver utensil in what they took as spoils. Mu'aawiyah ordered a person to sell it for payment to the people (soldiers). And when the news of (this state of affairs) reached 'Ubaadah bn. Saamit, he stood up and rebuked such Mu'aawiyah's action saying: "we will definitely narrate what we heard from Allah's Messenger though it may be unpleasant to Mu'aawiyah and even if it is against his will. I do not mind if I do not remain in his troop in the dark night^{xxxvi>}

This clearly shows the courage of Sahabah of telling the truth and uphold to justice even when it requires challenging the authority.

Likewise Muslim community protested to the Abbasid caliph as a result of his persecution to to the Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.

During the time of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal when he was incarcerated and tortured by Al-Mu'tasim (the caliph), the Muslims protested and agitated at the doorstep of the palace of the Caliph until the Caliph was frightened and was forced to release Imam Ahmad unconditionally.

Sheikh Ibn Taemiyah was notorious for opposing the rulers contradiction of the Shariah, and he was imprisoned several because of that. He was also banned by the ruler from issuing Fatwa. And he refused and insisted on opposing whatever contradicts the Kitab and Sunnah. Ibn Taemiyah was imprisoned on many occasions for different reasons, and not just the only reason they seek to subtly establish. On some occasions, he was

imprisoned for instigating the populace against the ruler. And at others, for refusing the rulers orders to stop issuing fatwa^{xxxvii}.

Islamic jurisprudence(Fiqh) provides a structured approach to protest. The principles of Maqasid al-shariah(the objectives of Islamic law) emphasize the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Protest, therefore, must be in line with these objectives, aiming to rectify injustices without causing injury to people or disrupting societal harmony.

The issue of protest is not aqidah matter one; but a matter based upon maslahah and mafsadah (advantages and disadvantages). There is no clear cut evidence in the Qur'an and Sunnah against it which can be cited by those who opposed it. So it has nothing to do with aqeedah. And a person cannot be considered mubtadee' because he engage in or support Protest. In fact, obvious texts preach unifying against tyranny and oppressions. As for those who oppose Protest and claim anyone who engages in Protest is a khaarijiy among the Khawarij and no more upon the noble Sunnah of the Prophet, the ignoramus should know the scenario of the Khawarij is entirely different and it is based on their false premise of Takfir (considering Muslims and sinners Kaafir) and not based on justice and equity.

Protest in Nigeria and Its Position in Islam

Protest in Nigeria has a long and varied history, reflecting the country's complex socio-political land scape. The protest in Nigeria started in 1920s as a result of anti colonial movement. Since then Nigeria continued to witness series of protest due to different number of reasons and causes. Nigeria engaged in violent protest i.e extreme forms of protest which include methods that are intended to incimidate others and force change. They believe direct violence against people and property more especially damaging and destroying government properties would force the authority to succumb to their demands.This form of protest is unlawful in Islam due to the number of reasons established in Islamic shariah. One of the major problems of protest in Nigeria is destruction of life and property. Allah [S.W.T] said in the Glorious Qur'an

Any one who kills a believer deliberately will receive as his reward

[a sentence] to live in Hell forever. God will be angry with him and curse

Him and prepare dreadful torment for him^{xxxviii}.

In fact it is only shariah has right to take life when the law demand so. In addition to this prophet Muhammad(S.A.W) in his farewell sermoon made an elaboration with regard to this where he said: Your lives and properties are forbidden to one another till you meet Your Lord on the Day of Resurrection^{xxxix}.

Prophet did not only prohibited the lives and properties of Muslim but also added with the protection of honour of the muslims. None of these has been safeguarded by protest in the Nigeria. This is one of the reason why protest in Nigeria can not be legalise because it involved destruction of lives and properties.

Sanctity and security of private of life has been recognized in islam as one of the rights of every citizen in the state. In fact interference or encroachment of one life privacy is forbidden in islam. Allah (S.W.T) said in the Glorious Qur'an Do not spy one another^{xi}

In another verse of the Glorious Qur'an He said Do not enter any houses except your own homes Unless you are sure of the occupants consent^{xii}.

In fact peering into people homes has been strictly prohibited by Islam. This has also been violated by Nigeria's protest. Recently Nigerians protests over the rising cost of living since the beginning of president Bola Ahmad Tinubu's administration in may 2023. The protest was mainly over fuel subsidy removal, hike in electricity tariff, customs duties, hunger insecurity among others. In the name of this protest hoodlum entered people's houses looted away all their properties. This incident happened in various places like Kano, Kaduna and Zaria to mentioned but few. In fact no religion will legalize this kind of evil in the name of protest.

In another authentic tradition was reported to have said: If one of you sees something from the ruler that he hates,

let him not publicise it^{xlii}

This authentic tradition make it very clear that the ruler should only be advised in his privacy and not in public. So, one may write to the ruler with gentle words advising him with correct conduct. This hadith debunk the idea of protesting or up rising against the rulers.

In the case of Nigeria, no scholar should call for protest or revolution when the legitimate means to select the leader is well known by everyone which is election. If you want to revolt or protest, you protest or revolt through your vote. Get your PVC, step out and vote. Your power lies there. And peaceful protesters must not allow one nonentity fighting for his own selfish goal to hijack their peaceful protest by turning it into a Revolt or Riot.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The finding of this research paper are as follows:-

- Protest is divided into two namely: peaceful and violent
- Scholars are divided into two regarding protest some see it lawful while some unlawful.
- Protest in Nigeria is violent is nature right from inception.
- People lost their lives and properties in the hands of hoodlums in the name of protest.
- The main reason for protest in Nigeria is corruption and lack of good governance
- Protest in Nigeria always ends with negative effects to both government and the citizenry in the country.

CONCLUSION

Islam as a religion condemned injustice in a very strong term i.e totally. Likewise never support violent protest in any way. In islam, the position of protest is detailed and informed by both Qur'an, Hadith and theological perspectives. Islamic teachings have emphasized the importance of justice and ethical conduct of governance.

END NOTES

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- ^{xxxvi} Hadith(Sahih Muslim)
- ^{xxxvii} Ibn Taofeeq, 50 Evidence supporting protest in Islam, online publication, 2020, p33
- ^{xxxviii} AlQur'an 4:193
- ^{xxxix} Hadith(Sahih Muslim)
- ^{xl} AlQur'an 49:12
- ^{xli} AlQur'an 24:27
- ^{xlii} Hadith(Sahih Muslim)

Source of support: Nil; Conflict of interest: Nil.

Cite this article as:

Bako, A. "Islam and Contemporary Protest in Nigeria." *Sarcouncil journal of Arts humanities and social sciences* 3.11 (2024): pp 1-8.