Towards Addressing the Challenges Bedeviling the Strategies of *Jama’atu Izalatil Bid’a Wa’iqamatis-Sunnah* in the Democratization Process of Katsina State-Nigeria

Musa Kabir Umar¹⁺², Muhammad Ainuddin Iskandar Lee bin Abdullah² and Kamarul Zaman bn Hajj Yusouf²

¹Department of Political Science, Umaru Musa Yar’adua University, Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria. ²School of International Studies, Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government and International Studies, University Utara Malaysia, Malaysia.

**Authors’ contributions**

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

**Article Information**

DOI: 10.9734/ARJASS/2019/v8i30100

_Editors:_

(1) Dr. Raffaela Giovagnoli, Pontifical Lateran University, Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano 4, Rome, Italy.
(2) Dr. Takalani Samuel Mashau, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Management, School of Education, University of Venda, South Africa.

_Reviewers:_

(1) Thomas Prehi Botchway, Chongqing University, China.
(2) M. V. Chandramathi, Symbiosis Law School, India.
(3) Isidho, Alphansus Okpechi, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.
(4) Eko Harry Susanto, Tarumanagara University, Indonesia.
(5) Omololu Fagbadebo, Durban University of Technology, South Africa.

Complete Peer review History: [http://www.sdiarticle3.com/review-history/46545](http://www.sdiarticle3.com/review-history/46545)

**Received 18 October 2018**
**Accepted 21 January 2019**
**Published 25 February 2019**

**Original Research Article**

**ABSTRACT**

The paper investigates the challenges bedeviling the strategies of an Islamic civil society organization known as *Jama’atu Izalatil Bid’a Wa’iqamatis-Sunnah* [JIBWIS] popularly known as *Izala* in the democratization process of Katsina State-Nigeria with a view to proffering solutions. A lot of problems have been militating against the efforts of *Izala* Islamic civil society association towards improving the quality of the democratic order. As a case study qualitative research inquiry, the study was conducted through an in-depth semi-structured interview with 18 key informant’s personal experiences on the phenomenon. Analysis of data was done by using NVivo 12 which
1. INTRODUCTION

Whenever a gap is discovered on what is happening, as against what ought to be, a thorough research is greatly required. In this regard, scholars must spot the problem and carry out investigations to find out the facts related to such a phenomenon. The nature of the problem determines the process of finding a solution to address it—where the key task of the scholars, policy-makers and the relevant stakeholders as well. The phrase, civil society, denotes to a large group of non-governmental and non-profit making organizations which exist in public life, projecting their interests and values of their members or others, based on principled cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. In other words, it can also be construed to mean non-governmental entities such as community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations [1,2].

Indeed, civil society organizations are indispensable in any democratic enterprise world over. There is no doubt saying that research on civil society organizations and democratization process is concentrated largely on secular civic associations neglecting the religious ones, particularly Islamic civil society associations who have now been at the forefront in the politics of Muslim dominated societies of Asia and African regions [3]. Jamaatu Izalatil Bid’a Wa’iqamatul-sunnah (JIBWIS) is an Islamic civic group in Nigeria and some neighboring countries like Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Ghana among others (popularly known as Izala). The group has a tremendous influence on politics, religion, economy and almost the entire life of mostly northern Nigeria’s Muslims. There have been studies on Izala ([4]; [5]; [6]; [7]; [8]; [9]; [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]; [14]; [15]; [16]; [17]; [18]; [19]; [20] & [21]). Most of the above-cited studies mainly concentrated on either the Izala historical evolution, Izala splits or roles in good governance among others. However, the political activities of the Izala in the democratization process were overlooked; despite the concerns that surrounded its political influence. The problem of the study stems from the issues surrounding the strategies used by Izala which for quite a long time led to conflictual relations between the Izala Islamic civil society, the state and other stakeholders in the democratization process of Katsina State. So many issues were raised against the Izala deep participation in the state democratic project since 2003. This is due to the prolong loggerhead between the group with the defunct PDP governments which lasted for about sixteen years in the state. For instance, Yamadi has reported that former Katsina State Governor, Ibrahim Shema, had once cautioned the Izala leaders on their political strategies [22]. This was because of the serious criticism against directed against his government and his person to an extent of calling him an infidel during weekly Friday prayers. And, according to the report, it was the complications associated with the strategies they used in the democratization of the state that culminated into these frictions between the two stakeholders. Consequently, increased attention is required among social scientists to study religious oriented civil society organizations based on their political beliefs.
strategies and the challenges they faced [23]. Consequently, attention is needed in studying the strategies of this Islamic civic group as well as the challenges confronting it in the democratization process in Katsina State. At this juncture, it is instructive to note that Huntington argued that, though, elections are the central ingredients of democratization, but the process has been lengthened to include any other democratic ethics that are geared towards the improvement of the people’s quality of life [24]. Thus, state along with civil society organizations are intrinsically linked with the process of improving the quality of life for the people which is the hallmark of democracy and its processes.

Thus, irrespective of whether one is a member of Izala or not; the empirical evidence lays bare the fact that, the strategies of the group in the democratization process of the state is wedded with a lot of challenging and problematic issues. Simply put, there is no denying the fact that Izala participation in the democratization process is enveloped with serious challenges that spanned the broad gamut from socio-economic to political issues of Katsina State. Clearly, there is no doubt that the Izala religious group has made some progress in some varied areas. However, it would be quite premature to raise any banner as a sign of exuberance if such important discourse come to the fore. Alternatively, the best option is to understand the issues and build on the successful strategies by consolidating them and further improving and refining the strategies that proved to be problematic in the democratization process of the state. This would mean that the religious group must undergo a kind of paradigmatic shift: thus, it is imperative for Izala to abandon the failed and problematic strategies for effective development of democratization in the state. So many strategies used by Izala in the process of democratization were identified and they include: political strategies (strategy of inclusivity in governance; the strategy of aligning with a political party; the strategy of election monitoring; discussion and dialogue strategy); religious strategies and the socio-economic and peaceful protest strategy for gradual social change. Indeed, through these strategies tremendous successes were made in terms of voter education; election monitoring and sometimes the group serves as a check to the state.

Interestingly, the foregoing brought to fore the significance of Islamic civil society organizations as key actors in a democratization process. But, there is limited studies on the group generally. This lack of studies among non-party actors in democratization process is even more blatant when it comes to theoretical contributions [25]. However, despite their roles in the democratization process, the results are not always satisfying [26]. This study explored, examined and suggests some solutions to the faulty strategies of Izala in the democratization processes of Katsina State. Hopefully, it would contribute to the strengthening, refining and building a strong inter-groups and state relations for effective and efficient working of the democratic experiment in the state. Following the introduction, the paper reviewed previous literature on Izala. The third part of the paper dealt with the methodological issues of the study. The fourth part of the paper analyzed the challenges confronting Izala strategies in the democratization process of Katsina State-Nigeria. The fifth portion reflected the way forward on how to reconcile the burning issues distracting the strategies of Izala in the democratization. The paper ended with a conclusion and recommendations.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Civil Society

The World Bank translates the phrase civil society as a large group of non-governmental and non-profit making organizations that exist in public life, projecting the interests and values of their members or others, based on principled cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations [2]. In other words, it is also construed to mean non-governmental entities such as community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations.

2.2 Democracy

Democracy refers to a system of governance based on the rule of the majority with absolute protection of the minority rights. It is a system of government which is advocating for equality before the eyes of the laws and enjoyment of some certain inalienable rights known as fundamental human rights i.e. the right to life, human dignity, movement, peaceful assembly, religion and ultimately the right to vote and be voted for in a free and fair periodic election.
2.3 Democratization Process

Democratization is a continuous process of bringing about democracy in a defined political system. According to Rummel, democratization is a way through which political systems become democratic and it has no single process of its emergence in any polity [27]. In this context, democratization is beyond the mere periodic elections but encompasses everything that would improve the quality of human existence.

2.4 Strategy

This means a method or plan to bring about the desired future such as the achievement of a goal or a solution to a problem. In this context, it is the ways used by the Izala religious organization in its participation in the democratization process [28,29].

2.4.1 Jama’atu Izalatil Bid’a Wa’iqamatis-sunnah

Jama’atu Izalatil Bid’a Wa’iqamatis-sunnah (JIBWIS) is translated to mean ‘The Society for the Removal of Innovation and the Reinstatement of Tradition’. In popular parlance, it is called Izala [30]; [9]; [16]; [31] & [32], while its followers are referred to as Yan-Izala [The Izala disciples]. It is a registered Islamic organization established around 1978 in Nigeria to challenge the Sufi orders who are considered by the Izala advocates as the promoters of heretics and innovations in Islamic religion which is against the true teachings of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The group has also accepted, allow and supported democratic politics as against other religious groups like Shi’ites in Nigeria. They started participating in the politics of the country since during the Second Republic when they supported the defunct National Party of Nigeria (NPN).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The paper used system theory as the framework of analysis. The theory was proposed by a Von Bertalanffy, a biologist, who viewed system as a complex of interrelating elements. The approach is useful to virtually all disciplines as a scientific model [33]. It was later developed by David Easton who remoulded it to explain the working of political system. The focus of the theory is on the nature of how a political system interacts with environment [34]. Many approaches were built out of the general system theory i.e. viable system approach, viable system model and open system theory [35]. Open system theory is the model employed by this paper because it focused its attention on the relationships between the organizations and the environment within which they inter-relate. The proponents of the model saw a political organization as a system constructed by input-output machinery where the resultant outputs re-energize the whole system [36].

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Izala has been in existence for about four decades. However, it has received little attention by scholars, especially in relation to the strategies the group employs in politics or democratization process. Despite the inadequacy of the literature on Izala, some scholars have studied it from various perspectives. Among the few studies, Yandaki, historically explored Izala movement in Northern Nigeria up to 1989 [4]. The study revealed the reasons for the evolution of Izala and the procedural stages it went through before attaining the reckoning force in Northern Nigeria. The study had succeeded by explaining the relationship between Izala/Salafiyya and Wahabiyya as well as the movement’s relationship with the state and the rest of the Muslim population of Northern Nigeria. However, the study did not focus on the political modus operandi of the group especially as it emerged and participated during the politics of the Second Republic (1979-1983). Studying the challenges of Izala strategies in the political development of the country would have given a broader picture on its political history. Likewise, Olayiwola analyzed the lingering disagreement between the Sufis and Izala beginning from its formation, propagation, and consolidation. He finally concluded that it was the group’s internal challenges that eventually led to its split into two dominant camps [5]. Nevertheless, the study did not look at the movement from the political point of view, which is also necessary for understanding its trajectories.

Gurawa studied the reasons for the division of Izala into two separate entities as well as its reconciliatory moves [6]. The study demonstrated, comparatively, an analysis of the activities of Izala. This clearly showcased the nature of leadership struggles in an Islamic movement. However, it failed to explore how the movement conducts its activities in democratization process which is also seen by many scholars as one of the reasons for their
At this juncture, it could rightly be observed that the studies above had concentrated on the formation, autobiography, and relations with the Sufis as well as internal wrangling within the movement as against Kane, who viewed the organization as a modernizing force which implicitly encompasses some elements of democratization [9]. Kane viewed Izala as an agent of modernization in the post-colonial Nigeria as well as a mediator of social change and an expression of the ideology of modernity in the contemporary Nigerian context. Indeed, the study contextualized Izala religious group, as having a westernized egalitarian vision and modernity in the social order and religion of Kano State. It, therefore, conceived Izala as an agent of modern social change in Muslims societies. In this way, Izala is seen as an Islamic reform movement which championed the reformation of the socio-religious practices and political struggles like other modern Islamic movements in some parts of the world. The attention of Kane was focused on the Izala movement in Kano and observed that Izala acceptance of modernity had ossified and relegated the old Sufi orders to the background. It suggested that further research shall be conducted on religious movement in sub-Saharan African context; as there is limited concentration of scholars in that regards. Unlike other previous studies on Izala, Kane’s study symbolizes the mode of operation of the group in relation to how they perceived and accepted modernity, as agents of change. However, the study did not, in any approach, look specifically at Izala’s strategies and the challenges confronting the group, in the democratization process, which is a major dynamic determinant of the character of socio-economic, cultural and religious modernization processes [7]. This begs for further examination of the group’s strategies in the modernized political arrangement such as democracy.

In another study conducted by Gwarzo, on activities of Islamic civil societies in North-Western Nigeria, special reference was made to Kano state [10]. It explored, described and succeeded in explaining how the Islamic civil societies interact with the state. The study suggested for further research on Islamic civil society groups in the northern part of Nigeria. Indeed, there is the need to study these groups in relation to democratization processes. Based on this gap, it has become pertinent to look at Islamic civic groups from the political point of view, particularly the challenges confronting the strategies they employed in the democratization process that would uplift the condition of the populace. Adam had made a significant addition to the literature of Izala in Nigeria by studying its contribution in Jos with reference to the provision of Islamic schools [11]. The study comparatively examined diverse types of schools established by the Izala and their impact on Islamic and Arabic scholarship in Jos communities. This is in congruence with the study conducted by Abdulkadir, where he argued that Izala movement in Bauchi State has gone far beyond the religious platform and extended to the socio-economic and political landscape of the state [12]. These two studies had clearly indicated the contributory roles of Izala in almost all aspect of human endeavors. This calls for further understanding of the group’s strategies and their challenges in helping to democratize society in which they operate as a civic group; for democratization is beyond the realm of mere electoral democracy. Equally, Sounaye, highlighted the experiences of the Muslim actors accused of intrusion into the political realm of the Niger Republic, despite its secularity [13]. The study laid bare the fact that because of the importance of Islam, Niger republic has never
achieved a regime without the input of Islamic groups that were immensely in the socio-political activism but overlooked the strategies they used in the political arena. Interestingly, Sounaye, further studied Izala movement in the Niger Republic and, established its prominence as a socio-religious authority [14]. It revealed the various strategies employed by the Izala in diffusing its doctrinal ideology in Niamey, which included the wa’azin kasa [national preaching]; social interaction known as Markaz, and the mosques. It is indicated that matters affecting the condition of the society were discussed via these means, which were some of the strategies employed by the Izala to become a dominant force in the religious field of Niger Republic. It is indeed a classic study but limited to the main religious organizational operations of the movement. It did not extend to the strategies and their problems in politics or democratization which is also vital in addressing the challenges confronting both the group and other stakeholders.

Additionally, Nolte, Danjibo, and Oladeji, conducted case studies in Kano, Oyo and Anambra states on the relationships between Nigerian state and religious organizations with reference to Islamic and Christian religious groups’ contributions and challenges towards democratization [15]. It was revealed that the government sees these religious organizations as agents of political mobilization and, therefore, incorporated specific ones for political reasons. Similarly, it also succeeded in explaining the roles played by these religious groups in relation to good governance, development and pro-democracy activities. And, it revealed that the only reason for inclusion or otherwise of religious groups in government is because of their influence at the grassroots politics to gain the support of either a candidate or a specific program. Amara also studied the Izala movement from its formation, consolidation, and transformation [16]. The study succeeded in exploring the reasons behind the splits of Izala into two groups because of leadership tussles. It also delves into the re-implementation of sharia in the northern part of the country which the movement championed. But, Gwadabe, in his critique on Izala linked the causes of radical uprisings in Islam to the socio-political developments in the Arabian Peninsula from the eighteenth century, when the Saudi Islamic movement permeates the Muslim world [17]. According to him, violent Muslim crisis began in the northern part of Nigeria with the introduction of Izala into the life of the Muslim Ummah around the late 1970s by late Abubakar Gummi. However, the author did not look at the role of the group in respect of the democratization process of northern Nigeria. The study castigated the movement as a curse, in all ramifications, not minding looking at its efforts in terms of its contributions to the democratization of the country, which it championed since the beginning of the Second Republic. This was a period when its leading figure publicly preached the importance of politics more than even a prayer, which is one of the major cardinal pillars of Islamic religion.

Again, Amara in a recent study analyzed Izala’s active part in the implementation of Sharia [Islamic law] in the twelve states of the northern Nigeria [19]. The author had succeeded in clearly demonstrating the historical root of Izala as well as how it disintegrated into two groups of Jos and Kaduna faction. The author captured its relationship with the Sufi groups, and how it relates with the political class to have engineered the re-implementation of Sharia which began with Zamfara State under Governor Sani Yareema in the 2000s. In a nutshell, it could be deduced that the study had exposed clearly how Izala came back to the public limelight particularly into the political platform through the sharia politics. The unknown hidden fact which the essay did not deal with is the challenging issues surrounding the strategies of Izala in the process. Still, in another study conducted by Sounaye, where he investigates how Izala produced small media cassettes and CD’s during the wa’azin-kasa-da kasa [international preaching] in the Niger Republic, and its role in publicizing the discourse of Izala among their adherents [20]. The study was conducted via fieldwork in which participant observation and interviews were conducted. It revealed that Sunnah small media played a significant role in spreading Izala movement especially in the establishment of the new type of authority in the society they operate.

Bashir examined the role of Izala religious society in relation to good governance in Nigeria [21]. He relied on the secondary sources of data and it was revealed that Izala has contributed positively by for preaching peace and development. Moreover, the study further revealed that the group’s contribution is significant in governance because of their diverse roles in good governance advocacy. However, the study did not examine the
problems associated with the strategies used by the group in the process performing such roles. Thus, an empirical study is required to examine the challenges of the strategies of Izala in promoting democratic governance. Finally, Sani studied the impact of democratic governance on some Islamic da'awah organizations in Katsina State from 1999 to 2016 [37]. It revealed the negative impact of the government on da'awah organizations (Izala inclusive) which led them to deviate from their primary role of Islamic da'awah [preaching] to full-fledged politics. The research becomes very important because it examined a very vital area in the field of contemporary theories of politics and government. It also finds out that all the Islamic associations are mired into politics because Islam is not against any contemporary theories of politics and governments. It is therefore pertinent to note that the research was restricted and limited itself to only the negative impact of politics on Islamic organizations but failed to examine the strategies used by such groups as well as the challenges they faced in politics or democratization. It would have clearly brought out a clear picture of how these Islamic groups activities in Katsina State politics affects the democratization process both negatively and positively. In view of these literature gaps, this study examined the challenges bedeviling the strategies used by Izala in the democratization process of Katsina State and investigated both its negative and positive impact beginning from 1999 to 2017. However, for about four decades, since the establishment of Izala, the group’s political activities remained largely unexplored. Still, compared to the nationwide relevance of the group, the literature of Izala has been relatively inadequate. Most of the studies relating to Izala were mostly concentrated on its relationship with the Tariqa Sufi orders in terms of their ideological dichotomy in Islam [18]. Some few were related to its establishment or on the reasons of it splits and reunification among others.

4. METHODOLOGY

The paper used case study qualitative methods of inquiry in the data collection and analysis. And an in-depth face to face semi-structured interview was carried out. It is argued that interview can be used for exploring the understandings, experiences, and perceptions of individuals on any phenomenon [38,39]. In fact, it is the best way of exploring and understanding human perceptions. Hence, a purposive sampling approach was employed because the informants were more suitable and knowledgeable to offer rich and relevant data [39] & [40]. Therefore, using the maximum variation sample from purposive sampling technique, 18 key informants were recruited for the interview. Informants were engaged from the religious leaders, politicians, civil society organizations and academics. These consist of eight Izala religious group leaders (Informants A1-A8), five politicians (B1-B5), two civil society leaders (C1 & C2) and three academics (D1-D3) as shown in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1-A8</td>
<td>Izala Religious Leaders</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1-B5</td>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1-C2</td>
<td>Civil Society Leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1-D3</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Work, 2018

These informants were selected because they have broad ideas and experiences on the Izala religious group’s political activities in the democratization process of Katsina State. They were interviewed to get the most reliable and first-hand data on the organization’s strategies and the challenges bedeviling the group in the democratization process from 1999 to 2017. The period between 1999 and 2017 was chosen because it was the time when Nigeria returned to democratic civil rule after prolonged military rule which lasted for more than three decades. The data were analyzed after transcription, coding, thematic organization and representation. The paper approach is interpretive in nature.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section focused on the analysis and discussion of the findings of the research. Several issues were discussed in relation to the challenges that are mitigating against the strategies of Izala in the democratization process. The ways on how the problematic strategies can be refined, were objectively analyzed and discussed. The diagram below shows the informant’s responses word cloud as processed by NVivo 12.
6. THE CHALLENGES

The study revealed several challenges bedeviling the Izala religious organization in relation to the strategies they used in the democratization process. One of the foremost is the religious marketization and patronage seeking around the corridors of power (Personal interviews with informants A1, A2, A3, A5, A6, A7, A8, B1, B2, B5, C2, D1, D2, & D3). It is observed that the ulamas engaged in patronage seeking to satiate their own selfish interests on many occasions. Religious leaders unscrupulously mishandled religion for their own personal fortune from the politicians or government [41]. In this wise, they support politicians to electoral success through their pulpits preaching strategy which the later reward them after electoral victory. The system theory, is, therefore, suitable in this explanation as the Izala support is an input into the democratization process mechanism which released their rewards as outputs in various forms.

Though, many are of the view that religion and politics cannot be separated but incorporating religious groups in politics destroys the original intent of establishment of such groups. This made politics to damage religious groups such as the Izala in Nigeria [42]. Such unscrupulous tendencies made a lot of these religious groups to be assumed as merely established for selfish private accumulation [43]. Similarly, legal impediments are daunting challenge to Izala in the democratization. Indeed, some of the informants interviewed have attested that the group’s strategies used in the advancement of democracy are limited by the constitution of the country (Personal interview with informants A1, A3, A4, A8 & B4). The constitution has categorically frowned at the involvement of any group or association in political activities other than a political party through whatever approach or strategy. In part III (D) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) Section 221 has excluded any association other than a registered political party to campaign for any candidate or political party in the country [44]. This constitutional restriction scuttles the strategy of campaigning for credible candidates who were assumed to be most appropriate in the position of leadership, though they illegally do.

In addition, the Izala derogatory and abusive speeches in mosques and conferences; negatively affect its strategies in democratization. Abusive and derogatory statements have been a problem to the Izala because of the kind of unfriendly relationships it yields especially with the people in the position of power. It has been a tradition of the group to engage in such an undemocratic strategy since during the military era down to the present democratic dispensation which began in 1999 (Personal interviews with informants A1, A3, B1, B3 & B5). Informant B5 stated that:

“They utilize the derogatory statements strategy whenever an issue emerged.
Instead of them to go and meet the government with their grievances or that of the general society; they prefer going public abusing and castigating the government which they think would scare the state to comply with their demands. That is why; the government sometimes had to arrest them to contain the situation. Have you ever heard of the state ordered for the arrest of any ‘Dariya’ cleric in this state? Certainly, no! So, this strategy is bad, let them learn how to operate, please (Personal Interview with Informant B5, conducted on 01st-06-2018)”.

This strategy sets Izala against most Muslims and non-Muslims alike who were not comfortable with the approach. It was a mode of preaching for good governance which was characterized by rudeness and name-calling by some of its most vocal preachers. Emirs, traditional scholars, and ordinary people were not spared in such a strategy. However, their public utterances usually made the state to go after them in various ways such as death threats, arrest, and detention on so many occasions. Though sometimes, it is advocacy for justice, the strategy is defective to the group and its members (Personal interviews with informants A1, A2, A3, A4, A8, B2 & C1). It is a well-known fact that some of its members were brutally murdered because of political activism like the famous Izala cleric Sheikh Jafar Mahmoud Adam [45]. This is also in consonance with the system theory explanation of input-output relationship where the derogatory abuses by the Izala made the political system to produce series of threatening attacks in the form of arrest, detention or even death.

Moreover, financial constraints have also been adduced to be among the challenges confronting the strategies used by Izala in the democratization. It has been lamented by some of the informants that, lack of strong financial base and support militated against their democratization advocacies in the state (Personal interviews with informants A1, B1 & D2). Informant D2 categorically stated that:

“One of the serious challenges to the Izala group is losing credibility especially due to lack of enough funds which made them be following some politicians begging to sponsor some of the group’s advocacies such as enlightenment programs through media. This remains a serious challenge to the Izala strategies in the democratization process of Katsina State which requires urgent attention (Informant D2, interview conducted on 16th-05-2018)”. More so, it has also been attested by many informants that, another problem associated with the strategies of Izala Islamic civic association in the democratization process is creating division in the community (Personal interviews with informants A3, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, C2, D1, D2 & D3). On this note informant, A6 stated that:

“The involvement of Izala brought about more division in the community. Even in the group itself there are divisive issues which are almost purely because of politics. This, however, makes Izala create divisions into two different camps; one that is together with the government and those that are not supporting the state. This is a serious issue that can create tension which would eventually make the second group align with other parties or candidates to wrestle power for them to enjoy the same advantage (Personal interview conducted with Informant A6, on the 16th-04-2018)”.

The next challenge faced by Izala is inadequate knowledge of democratic ideals. Indeed, most of the religious civil society associations lacked the requisite knowledge of the democratization process. Izala civic association is lacking in the fuller understanding of the way and manner democracy works, hence their activities most often clash with the interest of many political stakeholders in the state (Personal interviews with informants A3, A4, A7, A8, B1, B2, D1 & D3). Indeed, many civil society organizations do not have adequate knowledge to operate in the field of their interest [46]. Informant B1 lamented that:

“...because of their limited knowledge of democratization process the Izala tend to support anybody that came from the party they chose to support no matter how corrupt such a candidate might be. This is a serious injury to the democratization process of the state. See, what is happening now, they supported a lot of candidates who turned out to behave unexpectedly of them. So, with this kind of development, the Izala group has not fared well for the people of the state (Informant B1, interview conducted on 01st-06-2018)”.

Finally, religious politics is also a great cancer to the strategies of Izala in the democratization. No
matter how good the intention of the Izala group in the democratization; once it is colored with religious sentiments it faults the ideals of the process. This has been bequeathed by colonial antecedents which extends to the post-colonial religious establishments of the country [47]. The religious-cultural discrepancy among the ethnic populations of Nigeria was known to have historically fueled by the colonial policy of governance which further oiled the culture of continuous rivalry, violence and struggle for superiority between various ethno-religious groups [48]. This categorically remained one of the illnesses of Izala strategies which reduce the effective and efficient working of its strategies in the democratization process in general (Personal interviews with informants A6, A8, D1 & D3).

“You see because of Izala’s de-campaigning of non-Muslims candidates not only in Katsina State but also the country at large, a lot of Christians have become apprehensive that we want to Islamize the country. It is injurious to the democratization process of a country with multi-religious conglomeration. Though, this is not true; it is just because of our massive support of General Buhari. And this man is a good man for the nation, we must support him and even among the Christians he has massive support. There is no way for Izala to Islamized Nigeria i.e. to Islamize the country as some of the Christians south are speculating about. Yet, joining politics with sound strategies can help for a better Muslim society even under the leadership of a Christian. But the way and manner, the Izala is playing its card in the game is faulty; there are tendencies of disagreement and fear by the Christians (Personal interviews with informants A8, conducted on the 07th-07-2018)”. 

The obnoxious trending phenomenon has been more prevalent among the adherents of the two most dominant religions in the country-Islam and Christianity. The environment usually responds to the behaviour of the political system and vice versa. Thus, the theory explains how the religious identity politics produce mixed feelings and thereby further polarize the society among religious lines.

7. THE WAY FORWARD

Human beings are easier to be regulated and controlled by the fear of divine punishment tendencies. The fear of divine penalties in the hereafter is particularly more pronounced within the circle of the three Ibrahimic religions- Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Thus, the cardinal ingredient for any societal development is justice; which cannot be achieved without the fear of God. A society cannot develop in whatever sense if there is injustice. In this respect, therefore, fear of God is adduced by many scholars to be at the forefront of whatever human endeavor, including democratization. Nwokoro and Chima quoted Adams Smith where he said that:

“In a society where there is a staunch belief in God, the moral value of honesty and integrity were common attributes, and fewer resources would be dedicated to determining the geniuses of individual’s or firm’s business integrity or ethics-what economists termed the credit threats linked with loaning money to an anonymous personality [49]”.

In relation to the above statement, it could be seen that fear of God among human beings generally brings about more trustworthiness in any process. Still, Nwokoro and Chima, posit that religious groups in any society provide a level playing field for the real business ground that aided socio-economic and political development which is the hallmark of the democratization process [49]. Informants A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, B2, D1, D2, and D3 had pinpointed that the greatest solution of these problems is the fear of God in whatever dealings an Islamic group like Izala engage itself, be it religious or political. The informants argued that religion cannot be separated from politics, but it should be done with Ikhlas [fear of God] because anything we do without fear of God is useless and cannot yield any meaningful result. Therefore, according to them the foremost refinement the Izala must do in the democratization, is to do politics with the fear of God. They should make sure that what they are doing is being recorded by God and would be judged in the Day of Judgment. So, the religious groups particularly Izala that is more active in politics should play it with fear of God especially when some of their members are opportune to be in government. This will earn them more respect and integrity in the eyes of the public. And, the essence of Islam from the onset is justice in whatever venture one finds himself. So, democratization process by whatever group or political party if merged with fear of God will go smoothly; hence will produce fruitful results to the public. This is in line with the system theory cyclical interactionist mechanism
of input-output model which assumed that if fear of God is inserted into the political dealings, the desired result would be achieved. In other words, fear of God in the activities of the Izala religious association is one of the credible means of achieving their goals in the democratization process.

In a flammable political environment like Nigeria, derogatory and abusive utterances by the leaders of any religious group are greatly hazardous to the effective working of the democratization process in its entirety. The hazardous tendencies of these speeches ignite violence especially among other sectarian groups that are not practicing similar religious beliefs in both Muslim and Christian faiths. Informant D3, A3, A5, B1, and C1 assented that lack of good strategy of Izala in politics made the people from the southern part particularly the Christians to look at the Islamic groups as trying to Islamize the country. This is because the ulamasi Islamic scholars] are deeply entrenched in the government and always de-campaigning and criticizing Christian candidates. On this note, the strategy of Izala in terms of speaking the truth or whatever they may call it, should be non-confrontational: they should be neither abusive nor derogatory. Moreover, informant B4 had also lamented that the Izala Ulamas must be considered in addressing any social problem because most of them use abusive and derogatory languages in the mosques to criticize any politician that is not in line with their interests. The purpose of politics is resolving conflict in an amicable manner devoid of mortifying or chastising the personality of any individual. So, democratic freedom of speech is not a freedom of castigating anyone. The Izala group must play it safely. This would avoid religious disagreement which Coady sees as a danger and a poisonous trigger to violence [50]. This is how Coady stated it:

“Again, there can be no doubt that religious identifications have given rise to civic disharmony in a variety of ways and continue to do so [50].”

Moreover, since Nigeria is a secular state, and there would be no time when, as a country, she would be ruled by the Muslims alone, the strategy of religious identity politics and abusive/derogatory campaigns especially against non-Muslims should be frowned at completely. This is because de-campaigning Christian candidates, especially at the Presidential level, is perilous to the fabrics of the unity of the country as it brings about suspicion, distrust, hatred, and likelihood of violence between Muslims and Christians. Informant D2 further lamented that instead of castigating each other both the Muslim and Christian religious associations should embrace dialogue in dealing with political issues. He further narrated that the groups must stop using insulting utterances in the mosques or churches to castigate people if they made wrong knowingly or unknowingly. It is inhuman especially in this 21st century Nigeria. We have democratically matured enough, to sit and discuss to resolve whatever it is. Indeed, religious politics is one of the challenges facing the strategies of Izala in the democratization process not only in the entirety of the Nigerian state. Thus, attaching religious sentiments in politics by the Izala religious groups negates its strategies towards contributing to the rapid development of the democratic enterprise. According to Obadare, religion is a private enterprise which ought not to be allowed to entrench into the political realm despite its assumed propriety of the truth [43]. On this note, the informants had responded that, this strategy used by the Izala religious group refutes the ideal precepts of democratization therefore detrimental to the corporate existence of the country.

Undeniably, for a democratic process to thrive and provide the necessary goals it is meant for, it must be delinked from religious politics by these types of non-party actors. For instance, the other religious associations particularly the Christian ones (though they also do same) are seriously nervous about the religio-political strategies of Izala in the process. Meesua and Edet believed that it started immediately after independence when there was the widespread rumor that the then Premier of the Northern Region Sir Ahmadu Bello was nursing ambition of Islamizing the northern region despite the Christians population [42]. In contrast to such conception, Adogame argued that it is more understandable if it is regarded as the politicization of religion and regionalization of politics [51]. On this note, Kukah observed that no politician in Nigeria aspiring for political office would not pretentiously align himself with any religion or religious group [52]. So, both faiths and their associations engaged in religious politics as a strategy to gain political sympathy from their adherents. And, this scenario made the two dominant faiths in Nigeria to be locked in a ring for fierce competition or war to capture power [53]. It could be observed that this is a serious issue that affects the strategies
of religious associations including Izala in the democratization which requires an immediate answer, for it is trembling, the corporate survival of the polity. This made some Informants to suggest for a complete detachment of these sorts of religious groups from politics in whatever approach or strategy in Nigeria. It is observed that in an advanced country where the level of education is high they need not any religious organizations to sensitize them, they can sit down and evaluate who to choose as their leaders (Personal interview with informant B4 & C1). For instance, informant B4, (though a Muslim) lamented that if there are two candidates—one Muslim the other Christian, if the Christian is more qualitative and competent to become a leader he will prefer him. Thus, it is a bad strategy for the Izala to continuously preach for a Muslim candidate in any electoral season period because it is politically overheating the polity.

It is noteworthy that another greatest catastrophic issue on the strategies of the religious organizations in Nigeria’s democratization process is their linkage with international religious organizations. In their bid to have a stronger influence they tend to be lured into a friendship with an extremist terrorist organization which would eventually destroy the democratic system as well as the existence of the country at large. A case in point is that of Boko Haram which was birthed out from the Izala in 2009. Akinrinade has aptly averred that:

“It in the meantime, the increased susceptibility of the country to external influence, which is a major consequence of the weakening of the state and its institutions, has translated into freer access by foreign religious groups and personalities to their local counterparts. This is the background to growing links between faith-based NGOs in the country and their transnational counterparts. For Christian organizations, the major external players in this respect have mostly come from the United States, the global influence of whose Charismatic televangelists has become an academic staple. Local Muslim NGOs have also forged sturdy linkages with other Muslim transnational NGOs and foreign governments, particularly in the Gulf states and Libya. Examples of such organizations are Saudi Arabia based World Assembly of Muslim Youth, the Kuwait International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, the Saudi-funded and UK-based Muntada Islamic Trust, and the African Muslim Agency with headquarters in Kuwait. This relationship dates to the recent exodus of much Nigerian youth to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in pursuit of educational and professional opportunities (54).”

The knowledge of both politics of Islam and that of western liberal democracy is paramount to not only the Izala group leaders, but also to anybody or group that wants to make an impact in the democratization process including the politicians. Without that there would be continuous fracas between the state, the Islamic groups, and the politicians. Informants A1, B1, A6, B3, C1 and C2 asserted that as one of the most modern religious group among its peers in almost every northern state in Nigeria, it is supposed to learn and understand the workings of democracy and its processes to avoid the awkward encounters with politicians, the state and other stakeholders in the process of democratization. It is therefore apparent that part of the challenging issues bedeviling the strategies of Izala in the process is the lack of adequate understanding of how democracy works.

It is suggested that in as much as we want peace the religious organizations must be close to the government. This would undoubtedly make the state have a broader understanding of the needs of the populace because Izala is very close to the downtrodden in the northern Muslim dominated vicinities as the tribune of the people. Moreover, the closeness would allow for closer monitoring of their strategies and activities to counter any religious extremism like Boko Haram. According to informants A2, A5, A8, B2, C1, D1, D2, and D3 the religious group should be brought closer to the government to checkmate their activities. This would do away their feeling of alienation in some quarters. Obadare observed that:

“...faith-based organizations in the country are increasingly dissatisfied with their presumed marginality in a secular social order, leading to tensions in the public domain. Because they use a wide range of strategies to make their impact felt, it is suggested that such organizations inspire an intense religious rivalry with implications for all involved — religious organizations, adherents, and the state [43]."
Finally, it would also be a very good strategy for *Izala* to initiate a collaborative strategy of joining hands with other religious sects particularly *Dariqa*. This is when it comes to the issue of election or anything that can better the lots of the people since they are all doing it for Allah's sake. This would indeed, enable more contribution to the choice of a good and capable people to develop our society. In short, *Izala* should focus more on being an institution of Islamic civil society and serve as a tribune of the ideals of societal development in the areas of good governance, social justice and protection of civil rights of all and sundry devoid of any religious affiliation.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, it could be deduced that despite the centrality of *Izala* Islamic civil society association in the democratization process of Nigeria, few articles have concentrated on its political activities. Specifically, since its establishment in the mid-1970s, fewer articles have provided a theoretical reflection on its strategies and the challenges bedevilling them in the democratization process. This study offered critical and challenging issues affecting the strategies used by *Izala* in the democratization process of Katsina State. It has revealed that the pulpit campaign and preaching strategy is faulty because of the derogatory and abusive utterances of some of the *Izala* ulamas. Again, it has also established the problem of marketization of religion in politics as a challenge to the organization itself, thus suggested for devising a strong means of economic survival for the *Izala* group and its ulamas. Thirdly, it has found out that religious identity politics negates the principles of democracy and made polarization of society possible in a multi-religious environment like Nigeria. On this note, the study suggested for the avoidance of religious identity politics for a strong and united society. The study has also found legal challenges as impediments to the strategies of *Izala* in the process of democratization. Without denying neither the relevance nor the importance of other Islamic civil society organizations in the process, the study found out that *Izala* has had a social strength to offer a valuable contribution to the development of democratic process if it refined its strategies as suggested by the study. Finally, a study of other Islamic groups strategies, challenges and roles in the democratization process would be of immense importance to literature on political Islam.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

5. Olayiwola AOA. *The Polytomy of Islam in Nigeria-Emanation, Implication and Possible Rectification, Ph.D. Thesis (unpub.)* Submitted to the School of Post-Graduate Studies and Religious Studies Department, University of Jos, Nigeria; 1997.

11. Adam J. The role of JIBWIS in the Development of Arabic and Islamic culture in Jos, MA-Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Arabic Studies, in Partial Fulfillment for the award of Master of Arts Arabic, University of Jos, Nigeria; 2005.


40. Creswell JW. Educational research, planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln; 2012.


[Accessed: 27th-10-2018]


© 2019 Umar et al.; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
http://www.sdiarticle3.com/review-history/46545