

# **Original Research Article**

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

### **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 in the democratization process of Katsina State-Nigeria with a view to proffer solutions. This problem has been militating against the efforts of Izala Islamic civil association towards improving the quality of democratic ideals in the country. As a case study qualitative research enquiry, it was conducted through an in-depth semi-structured interview with 18 key informant's experiences. Analysis of data was conducted using NVivo 12 which significantly aided in the coding, categorization and data management that produced the themes and sub-themes. The study found out that there are myriads of problematic issues related to the strategies used by the organization which negates their strategies in the democratization process. Furthermore, the study has identified the various ways in which such strategies could be strengthen for the Islamic organization to give positive impact towards the advancement of the democratization process in the State. This research presents a conceptually yet empirically supported framework to describe the strategies of Islamic civic association in the democratization process of the state. In effect, therefore, the lingering Izala strategies crises in the democratization process was explored and analyzed. The study is particularly useful for religious civil societies, politicians, policy makers, and researchers by identifying and proposing the ways in which the state, political parties, religious organizations and other stakeholders should conduct and relate in a democratic society. The analysis points toward the potential for change in the strategies of Izala Islamic civil society in democratization.*

**Keywords:** Islamic Civil Society, *Izala*, Islamic Religious Groups, Religious Associations, Strategy

### **Introduction**

Whenever a gap is discovered between socio-political actors and any other stakeholder on what is happening in a democratization process as against what ought to be

happening, several complications must exist. In this regard, scholars in the field spot the problem and carry out explorative investigations to find out the facts related to such a social phenomenon. The nature of the problem determines the process of finding solution to address it-which is the key task of the policy-makers and the relevant stakeholders as well. 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. 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 (Diamond, 1994; World Bank, 2013). 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 association neglecting the religious ones particularly Islamic civil society associations who have now been at the forefront in the Muslim dominated societies of Asia and African regions. *Jamaa'tu Izalatil Bid'a wa'iqamatis-sunnah* (JIBWIS) is an Islamic civil group in Nigeria (popularly known as *Izala*) which has a tremendous influence on politics, economy and almost the entire life of most northern Nigeria's Muslims. Several studies were conducted on *Izala* (Yandaki, 1990; Olayiwola, 1997; Gurawa, 2000; Muhammad, 2001; Anka, 2002; Kane, 2003; Gwarzo, 2003; Adam, 2005; Abdulkadir, 2006; Sounaye, 2009a; Sounaye, 2009b; Nolte, Danjibo and Oladeji, 2009; Amara, 2011; Gwadabe, 2011; Sounaye, 2012; Amara, 2014; Sounaye, 2014; Bashir, 2016 & Sani, 2017), but however, the strategies used by *Izala* in democratization were overlooked despite the concerns that surrounded its political activities. Most of the studies concentrated on either the historical evolution, *Izala* splits or roles in good governance. The problem of the study stems from its attempt to examine the reasons leading to the conflictual relations between the *Izala* Islamic civil society, the state as and other stakeholders in democratization of Katsina State. For instance, Yamadi (2011) has reported Katsina State Governor cautioning the *Izala* leaders in the state to conduct themselves appropriately or face the wrath of the law. And, according to the report, it

was the complications associated with the strategies they used in the democratization of the state that culminated into frictions between the two stakeholders. Therefore, 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 (Sarkissian & Özler, 2013). Consequently, attention is needed in studying the strategies of this Islamic civic group as well as the challenges confronting it in the democratization process. At this juncture, it is instructive to note that Huntington's argued that though elections is the central ingredient of democratization, but the process has been lengthened to include any other democratic ethics that are geared towards improvement of human good life in the society (See Terry Karl cited in Clark & Joe, 2001). Thus, state along with CSO's are inextricably linked with the process of improving the quality of life for the people are in the process of democratization.

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 span the broad gamut- from socio-economic to political issues of the State. Clearly, there is no doubt that the *Izala* religious group have made some progress in some varied areas. However, it would be quite premature to raise any banner as a sign of exuberance. Alternatively, the best option is to 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, there is the imperative for *Izala* to abandon the failed and problematic strategies for effective development of democratization in the state. The strategies of the *Izala* in democratization of the State as founded by the study includes political strategies (strategy of inclusivity in governance; strategy of aligning with a political party; strategy of election monitoring and discussion and dialogue strategy); religious

strategies and the socio-economic and peaceful protest strategy for gradual social change

Interestingly, the foregoing brought to fore the significance of Islamic civil society organizations as key actors in a democratization process. However, despite the centrality of *Izala* in democratic experiment, limited research has been conducted on their strategies as well as how their challenges could be refined and strengthened in the process of democratization. This lack of studies among non-party actors in democratization process is even more blatant when it comes to theoretical contributions (Brack & Weinblum, 2011 citing Ionescu and de Madariaga, 1968 & Neunreither, 1998). Moreover, despite their roles in the democratization process the results are not always satisfying (Takakuwa, 2017). It is against this background that this study explored, examined and suggest some solutions to the faulty strategies of *Izala* in the democratization processes of Nigeria. Hopefully, it will contribute to the strengthening, refining and building a strong inter-groups and state relations for effective and efficient working and enjoyment of democratic dividends by the citizenry as well as a prosperous and stable organizational goals achievement of the *Izala*. Following the introduction, the paper reviewed previous literature on *Izala*. The third part dealt with the methodology employed by the study. The third part of the paper analyzed the challenges confronting *Izala* strategies in the democratization. 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 conclusion.

## **Literature Review**

*Izala* has been in existence for about four decades, but however, received little attention by scholars especially in relation to the strategies the group employs in politics or democratization process. Despite the inadequacy of literature on *Izala*, some scholars have studied it from various perspectives as reviewed below. Among the few studies Yandaki (1990) historically explored *Izala* movement in Northern Nigeria up to 1989. The study had exposed the reasons for the evolution of *Izala* and the procedural stages it went through before attaining the reckoning force of attacking the two dominant Sufi orders in northern Nigeria. In addition, the study dealt with the relationship of *Izala* to

*Salafiyya* and *Wahabiyya* as well as the movement's relationship with the state and the rest of the Muslim population of Northern Nigeria. This, indeed, is an area which is virgin in academic circles as the group has become a reckoning force in the political scene of Northern Nigeria. However, the study did not deeply focus on the political modus operandi of the group especially as it emerged during the eve of the Second Republic and played prominent role in the democratization process. Studying the strategies of *Izala* in the political development of the country would have given a broader picture on the way it contributes to the democratization process of the country. Likewise, Olayiwola (1997) analyzed the lingering disagreement between the *Sufis* and *Izala* beginning from its formation, propagation and consolidation and finally concluded that it was its internal challenges that eventually led to its split into two dominant camps. It is therefore observed that the study did not look at the movement from its political point of view as proposed by this research which is also necessary in understanding its trajectories.

Moreover, Gurawa (2000) studied the reasons for the division of *Izala* into two separate entities as well as its reconciliatory moves. This study has comparatively demonstrated an analysis of the activities of *Izala* which clearly showcases the nature of leadership struggles in an Islamic movement but failing to explore the how the movement conducts their activities in democratization process which is also seen by many scholars as one of the reasons for their squabbles. It is important to note the fact that most studies on *Izala* are either on the internal challenges, evolution or on some prominent figures within its circle as conducted by Muhammed (2001) who studied the biographical orientation of the founder of *Izala* (Sheikh Isma'ila Idris Jos) emphasizing on his *da'awa* [preaching]. The study lay bare the position of the Sheikh on so many important issues in his relations with some Islamic ideologies ranging from his attacks on *Sufis* pertaining *Maulud* [Prophet's birthday celebrations] freeing people [especially women] from Jinns to eating of animals slaughtered by the *Sufis*. In the same vein, Anka (2002) conducted his study by using a case of Zamfara state's *Izala* chapter's evolutionary stages and found out that the movement was heavily embraced by the youth at its initial inception

which had resulted in social conflicts within families and between other religious sects. The study had also concentrated on the reasons behind the conflicts between the *Izala* and other *Sufi* groups. Thus, it is of greater importance to have delved into the political issue to understand the strategies the *Izala* group use in the politics of the day as a social force in a modernizing and democratizing society. Looking at it from such a perspective is significant for it has become the voice of the masses of Northern Nigeria. 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 of the movement as against Kane (2003) who viewed the organization as a modernizing force which implicitly encompasses some elements of democratization. Kane (2003) viewed *Izala* as an agent of modernization in post-colonial Nigeria as well as mediator of social change and an expression of ideology of modernity in contemporary Nigerian context. Moreover, the study contextualized *Izala* religious group having a westernized egalitarian vision and modernity in the social order and religion of Kano State. It therefore sees *Izala* as an agent of modern social change in Muslims societies. In this way *Izala* is an Islamic reform movement which championed the reformation of socio-religious practices and to some extent political struggles like other modern Islamic movements. The attention was focused on the *Izala* movement in Kano and observed that *Izala* acceptance of modernity had ossified and relegated the old *Sufi* order to the background. Thus, he however, suggested that further research shall be conducted on religious movement in sub Saharan African; as there is limited concentration of scholars in that regards. Unlike other previous studies on *Izala*; Kane's study denotes the mode of operation of the group in relation to how they perceived and accepted modernity, as an agent of change; but did not in any approach look specifically at *Izala*'s strategies in the democratization process which is a major dynamic determinant of the character of socio-economic, cultural and religious modernization processes. This begs for further in-depth examination of the group role and strategies in modernized political arrangement such as democracy.

Once more, in one of the classic study conducted by Gwarzo (2003) which was an empirical analysis of the activities of Islamic civil societies in north-western Nigeria with special reference to Kano state. It succeeded in exploring and describing the various ways in which these civil societies interact with the state not minding exploring the strategies they use in such interactions. The study suggested for further research on Islamic civil society groups in the northern part of Nigeria, yet there is need for studying these groups in relation to democratization processes which this investigation intended to explore. Based on this gap, it become pertinent to look at Islamic civic groups from the political point of view, particularly the strategies they employ in democratization process that will uplift the condition of the populace. For instance, Adam (2005) had made a significant landmark in the literature of *Izala* in Nigeria by studying its contribution in Jos with reference to the provision of Islamic schools. The study comparatively examined different types of schools established by the *Izala* and their impact to Islamic and Arabic scholarship in Jos communities. This is in congruence with the study conducted by Abdulkadir (2006) where he argued that *Izala* movement in Bauchi state has gone far beyond the religious platform and extended to socio-economic and political landscape of the state. These two studies had clearly indicated the contributive role of *Izala* in almost all aspect of human endeavors. This calls for the further understanding of the strategies of *Izala* in helping to democratize society in which they operate as a civic group; as democratization is beyond the realm of mere electoral democracy.

Equally, Sounaye (2009a) highlighted the experiences of Muslim actors accused of intrusion into the political realm in Niger republic despite the secularity of the. The study laid bare the fact that because of the importance of Islam, Niger republic has never achieved a regime without an input of Islamic groups who are intensely in socio-political activism but overlooked the strategies they used in the political arena. Interestingly, Sounaye (2009b) further solely studied *Izala* movement in Niger Republic and establish its prominence into a socio-religious authority. It succeeded in exposing various strategies employed by the *Izala* in diffusing its doctrinal ideology in Niamey

which include 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 are being discussed via these means which are 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 is limited to the main religious organizational operations of the movement. It did not extend to the strategies used by the group in politics or democratization which is also vital in addressing the challenges confronting both the group and other stakeholders.

Additionally, Nolte, Danjibo and Oladeji (2009) in their case studies (Kano, Oyo and Anambra states) of relationships between Nigerian state and religious organizations with particular reference to Islamic and Christian groups' contributions and challenges towards democratization. The study extensively employed secondary sources of data supported with qualitative interviews with the selection of Muslim, Christian groups and government. It was revealed that the government sees the religious organizations as political mobilizing agents and therefore incorporated specific ones for political reasons. Similarly, it also laid bare the roles played by the religious groups in relation to good governance, development and pro-democracy activities. And that the only reason for inclusion or otherwise of religious groups in government is because of their influence at the grassroots politics to gain support of either a candidate or a specific program. Amara (2011) also studied the *Izala* movement from its formation, consolidation and transformation. The study excelled in exploring the reasons behind its splits 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. Similarly, Gwadabe (2011) in his study on *Izala* linked the cause 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. 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, but however failed to look at the role of the group in respect of democratization process of



northern Nigeria. To this effect, therefore, it seems the study heavily concentrate in the castigation of the movement picturing it to be a curse in all ramifications not minding looking at especially its efforts in terms of its contributions to democratization of the country which it championed beginning from the Second Republic. This was a period when its leading figure publicly preached the importance of politics more than even a prayer which is believed to be the second major cardinal pillar of Islamic religion. Again, Amara (2014) in a recent study analyzed *Izala's* active part in the implementation of *Sharia* [Islamic law] in the twelve states of Nigerian federation. 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. Its relationship with the *Sufi* groups was captured by the author and how it relates with the politics class to have engineered the re-implementation of *Sharia* which began with Zamfara state under Governor Sani Yareema in 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 dealt with is the strategies the *Izala* followed in the process. Still, in another study conducted by Sounaye (2014) where he investigates how *Izala* produced small media cassettes and CD's during the *wa'azin kasa* [international preaching] in Niger Republic, and its role in publicizing the discourse of *Izala* among their adherents. The study was conducted via a fieldwork in which participant observation and interviews were conducted. The study revealed that Sunnah small media played a significant role in spreading *Izala* movement especially in the establishment of new type of authority in the society they operate.

Also, Bashir (2016) examines the role of *Izala* religious society in relation to good governance in Nigeria relying on the secondary sources of data and concluded that they contribute positively especially for preaching peace and development of the country. Moreover, the study further revealed that religious groups including *Izala* have become significant in governance for various roles they play in the country. The study had tried to pinpoint some of the superficial role of *Izala* in Nigeria. In this wise, the study would have been richer if it had explored the strategies used by the group. And, more concretely, an empirical study would be more appropriate to in-depthly explore the

strategies they use in conducting the role of promoting democratic governance which is nearly the same with the intention of this research. Finally, a recent research conducted by Sani (2017) on the impact of democratic government on some Islamic *da'awah* organizations in Katsina State from 1999 to 2016. It pointed out some negative impact of the government on *da'awah* organizations (*Izala* inclusive) which led them to deviate from their primary duties which is *da'awah* and engaged themselves into full-fledged politics. The research becomes very important because it encompasses a very vital area in the field of contemporary theories of politics and government. A descriptive research method was applied during the research. It finds out that all the Islamic associations are mired in politics because Islam is not against any contemporary theories of politics and governments if it is conducted in accordance with the general guidelines of Islamic laws. It is therefore pertinent to note that the research was restricted and limited itself to only the negative impact of politics on Islamic organizations without exploring the strategies these groups used in politics or democratization. On this note, the study should have studied the strategies used by such Islamic organizations to the development of politics and or democratization in the state. That would have clearly brought out a clear picture of how these Islamic groups activities in Katsina state politics affects democratization process both negatively and positively. It is in view of these literature gaps that this study intended to examine the strategies use by *Izala* in the democratization process of Katsina state with an idea to investigate both its negative and positive impact beginning from 1999 to 2017.

However, for about four decades since the establishment of *Izala*, it has remained largely unexplored particularly in relation to its involvement in politics or in either way democratization process. 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 (Sounaye, 2012). Some few were related to the manner through which it was established or how and why it splits and later re-unite among others. The reason for the neglect might be due to the misleading assumption that the group is simply a religious association without minding its political influence and role.

## **Methodology**

The paper used a qualitative methods of 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 (Yusuf, Kamarul Zaman & Knocks, 2018; Braun and Clarke 2013). In fact, it is the best way of exploring and understanding of human perceptions. Hence, purposive sampling approach was employed for the fact that the informants were more able to offer rich and relevant data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2012). Therefore, using the maximum variation sample from purposive sampling technique, 18 key informants were recruited for the interview. To this effect, suitable 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 the table 1 below.

**Table 1: The Code and the category of Informants**

<b>Code</b>		<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Frequency</b>		
A	<i>Izala</i> Leaders	8
B	Politicians	5
C	Civil Society Leaders	2
D	Academics	3
	Total	18

Source: Field Work, 2018

The reasons for selecting these informants is because they have broad ideas and experiences in the *Izala* religious groups political activities in the democratization process of the state. They were interviewed to get the most reliable and first-hand data on the organization's strategies in the democratization process from 1999 to 2017. The data were analyzed after transcription, coding, thematic organization and representation. The paper approach is interpretative in nature.

## **Findings and Discussions**

This section focused on the analysis and discussion of the findings of the research which is pointed at the ways of addressing the pressing issues bedeviling the strategies of *Izala* Islamic civic association in the democratization process of Katsina State from 1999 to 2017. Several issues were discussed in relation to the challenges that are militating against the strategies of *Izala* in the democratization process and how they can be refined, were objectively analyzed and discussed. The diagram below shows the informants responses word cloud as processed by Nvivo 12.

Figure 1: Informants' Responses Word Cloud



Source: Nvivo 12

## The Challenges

The study unraveled several challenges bedeviling the *Izala* religious organization in relation to the strategies they use 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 engages in patronage seeking for their own selfish comforts in many occasions. Religious leaders unscrupulously mishandle religion for their own personal fortune from the politicians or government (Ngaski, 2018). Though many are of the view that religion and politics cannot be separated. But,

incorporating religious groups in politics damages the original intent of such groups. This tendency made politics to damage religious groups such as the *Izala* in Nigeria; thus, separation is the best option in order not to later damage the former (Meesua & Edet, n.d). Consequently, Obadare (2007) observed that the large number of these religious groups were merely established for selfish private accumulation. Similarly, legal impediments impediment is a daunting challenge to *Izala* in the democratization. Indeed, some of the informants interviewed have attested to the fact that the group's strategies in the advancement of democracy is limited by the constitution of the country (Personal interview with informants A1, A3, A4, A8 & B4). The constitution has categorically frowned at involvement of any group or association in political activities other than a political party in 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 votes for any candidate or political party in the country (1999 Constitution of Nigeria). This constitutional restriction scuttles the strategy of campaigning for a credible candidate with fear of God engaged by the *Izala* to boost democratic ideal in the society, even though they do preach in mosques but with so much criticisms and sometimes intimidations especially if they go against government candidates.

In addition, the *Izala* derogatory and abusive speeches in mosques and conferences; negatively affects its strategies in democratization. It has been a tradition of the *Izala* religious 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). This strategy sets *Izala* against most Muslims and non-Muslims alike who are not comfortable with the approach. It is a mode of preaching for good governance which is characterized by rudeness and name-calling by some of its most vocal preachers. Emirs, traditional scholars and ordinary people were not spared in such strategy of fighting against anything antithetical to democracy and its processes. However, their public utterances pitch the state against them in form of death threats, arrest and detention in so many occasions; though it is an advocacy for justice in the democratization process, but the strategy is defective to the group and its members (Personal interviews with informants A1, A2, A3, A4, A8, B2 & C1). It is a renowned

fact that some of its members were murdered brutally because of political activism and participation. This can be exemplified by the murder of one of the famous *Izala* cleric in Kano-Sheikh Jafar Mahmoud Adam for criticizing political leaders (Hassan, 2009).

Moreover, financial constraints have also been adduced to be among the challenges confronting the strategies of *Izala* in the democratization process. It has been lamented by some of the informants that lack of strong financial base and support is militating against their democratization advocacies in the state (Personal interviews with informants A1, B1 & D2). More so, it has also been attested by many informants that, one of the problems 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). Not only that many civil society organizations do not have adequate knowledge to operate in the field of their interest (Khosravi & Fard, 2016). Indeed, most of the religious civil society associations lacked the requisite knowledge of democratization process. *Izala* civic association thus 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). Finally, religious politics is also a great cancer to the strategies of *Izala* in democratization. No matter how good the intention of the *Izala* group in the democratization; once it is colored with religious sentiments it faulted the ideals of the process. This has been bequeathed by colonial antecedents which extends to the post-colonial religious establishments of the country (Onapajo & Usman, 2015). The religio-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 continued rivalry, violence and struggle for superiority between various ethno-religious groups (Sampson, 2014). This, categorically remained one of the illness 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). The obnoxious trending phenomenon has been more prevalent among the adherents of the two most dominant religions in the country-Islam and Christianity.

## 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 in whatever human endeavor including democratization. Nwokoro and Chima (2018) quoted Adams Smith saying thus:

“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 (Nwokoro & Chima, 2018:8)”.

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 (2018) posit that religious groups in any society provide a level playing ground for the real business ground that aided socio-economic and political development which is the hallmark of democratization process. 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 improvement 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 endeavor 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. 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 is 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 ulamas [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* Ulama must be considerate 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 (2013) sees as a danger and a poisonous trigger of violence. Coady argued thus:

*“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 (Coady, 2013:14)”.*

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 abusive and 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 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 democratic enterprise. According to Obadare (2007) religion is a private enterprise which ought not be allowed to entrench into the political realm despite its assumed propriety of the truth. On this note the informants had responded that this strategy employed 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 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 apprehensive about the religio-political strategies of *Izala* in the process. Meesua and Edet (n.d) believed that immediately after independence there were 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. In contrast to such conception, Adogame (2006) argued that it is more understandable if it is regarded as the politicization of religion and regionalization of politics. On this note, Kukah (1993) observed that no politician in Nigeria aspiring for political office would not pretentiously align himself with any religion or religious group. So, both faiths and their associations engaged in religious politics as a strategy to gain political sympathy from their adherents. And, this scenario according to Bujra

(2006) made the two dominant faiths in Nigeria to be locked in a ring for fierce competition or war to capture power. It could be observed that this is a serious issue that affects the strategies of religious associations including *Izala* in the democratization which requires immediate answer for, it is trembling, the corporate survival of the polity. This made some Informants to suggest for a complete detachment of these sort 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 organization in Nigeria's democratization process is the linkage they have 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. Obadare (2007) has aptly cited Akinrinade (2000) where he averred that:

“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 the Saudi Arabia based World Assembly of Muslim Youth, the Kuwaiti 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 many Nigerian youth to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in pursuit of educational and professional opportunities (Obadare, 2007:148)”.

The knowledge of both politics of Islam and that of western liberal democracy is paramount to not only to the *Izala* group leaders but also to anybody or group that want 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 state 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 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 broader understanding of the needs of the populace because *Izala* is very close to the downtrodden in 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. Obadare (2007) viewed 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 (Obadare, 2007:149)”.

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* when it comes to the

issue of election or anything that can better the lots of the people, since it is 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.

## **Conclusion**

It should be conclusive from the foregoing analysis that despite the centrality of *Izala* Islamic civil society association in the democratization process of Nigeria, few articles have concentrated on it. Specifically speaking, since its establishment in mid 1970s less articles have provided a theoretical reflection on its strategies in the democratization process. Moreover, most of the recent articles have analyzed it from evolutionary perspectives; relationship with Sufi; its split into two camps; its role in good governance among others. Starting from this notable observation, this study offered a critical state of the strategies of the *Izala* in democratization and found out the challenging issues affecting these strategies hence proffered the way forward. Thus, without denying neither the relevance nor the importance of other Islamic civil society organizations in democratization, the study found out that *Izala* have had a social strength to offer a valuable contribution to the development of democratic process if it refined its strategies as suggested by this study. Finally, a study of other Islamic groups would be of immense importance to address the frictions that may likely erupt between non-secular civic groups and other democratization process stakeholders such as political parties.

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