

Prophets with Lying Spirit? Nigerian Prophets, Prophecies, and an Endangered Democracy

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Abstract

This paper is a theoretical empirical study derived from what has become a recurring decimal each time Nigeria is preparing for general elections. Our experience over the years has shown that electioneering processes in Nigeria comes with different prophesies about the eventual outcomes of the elections by prophets claiming to know the mind of God or having exclusive insights on the candidates whom God has chosen. Most of these prophecies are contradictory to some others, sometimes, implying that there are different gods responsible for revealing the prophecies to the prophets. These prophecies embolden the different aspirants that they are the chosen ones and hence boosts their expectations of victory at the polls, sometimes without carrying out the usual electioneering process of campaigning, having manifestoes and trying to win the electorates legitimately. Of further concern to us is that the belief in the prophecies trickle down to the electorates by influencing their choices. When their candidate eventually fails to win, then the elections are seen to have been tampered with and declared unfair. Most often, this leads to rioting, violence and attendant vandalisation of

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properties and loss of lives. The candidate who fails to win election goes to court and a process of unnecessary prolonged litigation ensues. Thus, virtually every elections end in contestation in court thereby making a mockery of election and the electioneering process. This tendency is what this paper interrogates, especially as it touches on endangering democracy in Nigeria.

Key Words: Democracy, Prophets, Prophecies, Elections

Introduction

In 1Kings 22, there is an interesting narration of two kings of Judah and Israel – Jehoshaphat and Ahab – who were preparing to go to war with Syria. During the preparation, the king of Judah asked that they inquired from the Lord the outcome of the endeavor. In vs. 6, the Bible says the king of Israel gathered about 400 prophets and inquired from them; “Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle or shall I forbear?” In one accord, all the prophets prophesied that the king should go to battle and “the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king” (vs. 6). However, the king of Judah was insistent that other prophets should be consulted to know the mind of God. Although the king of Israel was reluctant to consult the only remaining prophet – Micaiah – because he hates him; “for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil (vs. 8), but at the insistence of the king of Judah, the Prophet Micaiah was sent for.

From vs. 15, we saw Micaiah before the two kings of Judah and Israel and the same request was made to him; “shall we go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle or shall we forbear?” Interestingly, Micaiah prophesied as the 400 prophets had done earlier but the king’s answer to the prophet in vs. 16 carried certain implications. First, it seems that the king may have been aware that the 400 prophets were not of God or were not hearing from God, hence their prophecies could not be relied upon. Or secondly, by experience, he knew that even though Micaiah’s prophecies have always been contrary to the other prophets, nevertheless it was his that have been coming true. Thus, on being admonished, Micaiah prophesied and told the sequence of events that ensued in heaven from vs. 19-23. It is thus, Micaiah’s

narration of the events in heaven that constitutes the background of this paper, thereby drawing our attention to the fact that prophets may not prophecy truly and sometimes, God may permit a lying spirit to deliberately mislead in order to fulfill a certain purpose.

It is interesting to note that since the return to civilian politics and democracy, an incident not seen before in Nigerian politics has invaded it and this is the spate of prophecies that accompany elections, electioneering and the result of such elections, particularly presidential elections. Of equal importance is the recourse to religious leaders (Christian, Moslem, Spiritist and traditionalists), for rituals and prayers and for endorsement of certain candidature and victory at the polls. Thus, election periods in Nigeria have become characterised with various prophetic declarations and utterances, mostly often verging on the absurd. It seems that certain prophets and spiritualists have taken it as their primary vocation to make pronouncement as to who will win or lose election. Of course, these declarations and prophecies are made without recourse to any opinion polls of the people or done without such declarations emanating from any rigorous scientific analysis or methodology. This phenomenon merely signifies the increasing role religion now plays in the country, leading to spiritualising politics and politicising spirituality. It is also a non-coincidence that most of these prophets have a large followership and membership who could be swayed by their prophecies to vote for the candidates endorsed by their spiritual leaders. Thus, the spiritualisation of politics and the politicisation of spirituality have now turned the attention of the electorates from the conventional processes associated with acquiring state power and electing political leaders to the ability of the prophets, with the electorates rather focusing on the prophet's or religious leader's ability to preach, teach, dogmatise, and lead congregations. The belief on the infallibility of the prophet's prophecies depend on the electorates' perceptions of his moral uprightness, justness, and opposition to the corruption of those in political power. Great reliance is also placed on the prophets' charisma, ability to arouse, inspire, and stimulate a crowd

Based on this, religious leaders have constituted themselves as the 'fifth estate' of the realm, the power behind the veil, whose proclamations and endorsement of political leaders have become important rather than

the politicians' ability to perform or their past performance as index for election or re-election. The reliance on these prophets and their declarations drive home the fact that they are more trusted than the political leaders and the prophets, in turn, use this as a basis to gain relevance and even become activists in the political process. This, of course, is not solely peculiar to Nigeria alone as Acheampong (2018) has equally noted a similar trend in Ghana; that there has been a deliberate spiritualisation of politics by Pentecostal pastors in Ghana.

Prophecies have a long history in the Bible, where prophets were recognised and known by their prophecies. Prophecies present a prophet to the people as a man that hears from God, knows and is privy to the inner workings of God's mind as revealed to him by God Himself (Num. 12:6). As God Himself has revealed, the prophet that prophesy and it does not come to pass has not heard from Him and hence he is a false prophet prophesying from the flesh and not the **Spirit of God** – (Num. 18: 20&27). Thus, prophecy implies the ability to foretell the future, see and hear what ordinary men do not and cannot see or hear. Not only that, a close look at the prophets of old in the Bible shows a unique ability, given by God, to see into the past, interpret and explain present events and mysteries associated with dreams and even change the purpose embedded in the reality of an individual, institution or country. Succinctly put in the context of this paper, a prophecy would connote the rather unscientific manner of predicting or explaining electoral outcome, a feat mainly attributed (or which the prophets and their followers would want attributed) to a divine, transcendental, sacred or mysterious foreknowledge. The claim here is that the prophet has been given an exclusive insight to the eventual outcome of the elections and the winner has a divine backing and mandate from God.

Within a heterogeneous plural society, turbo-charged by several fault lines among which is violent struggle for state power, this phenomenon may portend serious implications for the democratic process. As acclaimed prophets lined up behind different political contenders from same or different political parties, the political climate not only become tensed up, but in reality create a public perception of blur lines between objectivity and neutrality. More important, is the threat of this phenomenon to democratic consolidation, whereby, candidates and their supporters may be forced to affirm these

prophetic declarations with dire consequences regardless of the actual outcomes of the elections. So far, adequate attention has not been given to the destabilising effect these prophecies can have on the democratic process and stability of the country. This is what provides the basis for the trajectory of this paper and to do justice to the narration, the paper is divided into five sections after the introduction. The second section, after the Introduction, deals with muddling through the conceptual confusion of what a democracy is, while the third section deals with a historical and descriptive analysis of the democratisation process in Nigeria. With these contextualisation behind us, the fourth section looks at the different instances of spiritualising the electoral process and just before the conclusion, we attempt to chronicle the prophecies into those that came true and those that did not. This paper is basically a descriptive, historical and empirical study, whose referent object is limited only to the presidential elections in Nigeria.

The Idea of Democracy

The concept of democracy is much broader than it being just another political form, a method of conducting government, of making laws and administering a state by means of popular suffrage and elected officials. Rather, it is the best means for realising human relationships and the development of human personality. It provides the key necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together. Thus, universal suffrage, recurring elections, responsibility of those who are in political power to the voters and other factors normally associated with democratic government are means that have been found expedient and necessary for realising democracy as the truly human way of living. Hence, no matter the failings of democracy as a political format, the idea and principle on which it rests are still accepted as better than all other political formats. The foundation of democracy rests in faith in the capacities of human intelligence and in the power of pooled and cooperative co-existence. The underlying idea and principle is that no man or set of men is wise enough or good enough to rule others without their consents. Implied in this idea is that everyone is affected by the social institutions of the state and therefore must have a share in producing and managing them. Democracy also rests on the doctrine of equality, albeit not equality of natural

endowments but equality as a legal and political doctrine. It is with this belief that scholars are apt to argue that democracy guarantee equality of treatment under the law and in its administration. Every individual within a state is therefore expected to be affected equally in quality even if not in quantity by the institutions of the state and should have equal right to express his judgment. Given the possibility of natural and psychological inequality and the potency of this to become means of oppression of the less gifted, democracy sets the law of equality of opportunity which allows for every individual to contribute and it is the value of each contribution that is assessed in the final pooled intelligence constituted by the contributions of all. The appeal of democratic government and the democratic faith is that every individual has the chance and opportunity to contribute depending on his capabilities and the value of his contribution is decided by its place and function in the organised total of similar contributions and not on the basis of prior status of any kind whatsoever.

In spite of the attractiveness of democracy in contrast to autocratic and authoritarian forms of government, scholars are not agreed as to how best to define the concept. However, democracy as a concept must be understood from two dimensions – structural and behavioural dimensions. The structural dimension stipulates that a democratic government must include a constitution and political parties as well as structures of government that incorporate the three arms made up of an independent judiciary, legislature and an executive. On the other hand, the behavioural dimension includes the critical attitudes and qualities found in the people but which underpins the proper conduct of a democratic political system. This has been referred to as the “civic culture”. Apart from the elements of tolerance of opposition and compromise that made up the civic culture, democracy of the Western liberal bourgeois type also has certain salutary effects. First is that it increases the probability that government will follow or be guided by the general interest. This is because, “how governments act is affected by the constitutional systems through which they emerge...and democracies will ensure that governments pursue policies in the general interest or for the common good” (Lively, 1975, p. 111). Thus, the dictates of democratic system therefore requires that government should submit itself to periodic assessment and renewal of mandate. Within the framework of alternative

choices, this implies that the government in power and which wishes to retain power must be responsive to the wish of the governed.

Second, the liberal democratic form of government also imposes some restraint on the state. The state's right is limited by certain constitutional provisions that assure the rights of individuals and groups in the society. Thus, in this regard, the "temptation of the political leadership to wield absolute power is restricted by the competitive nature of democracy" (Perry, 1969, p. 145). This probably provides us with one of the reasons that endeared liberal democracy to the bourgeoisie, and this is that it protects them from arbitrary state interference in their pursuit of and acquisition of wealth. Third is that competitive democratic system compels attention not just to the form of government but also to the substance of politics in as much as political parties compete on the basis of what they have to offer to the electorates. The fourth is that democracy provides the citizenry with more opportunities to get involve in political decisions. The literature on mass society and political participation suggest that citizens' participation in decision can be either as individuals or members of groups. It is only in this sense that representative democracy encourages "a belief by the masses that they exercise an ultimate self-determination within the existing social order... a credence in the democratic equality of all citizens in the government of the nation" (Anderson, 1977, p. 30). Finally, the primary concern of democracy with the formal political equality of all citizens, majority of whom are economically disadvantaged, provides for the economically advantaged and powerful groups to dominate and often times hijack the system thereby undermining the notion of political equality. Perhaps more than any other reason, this particular advantage made democracy quite attractive to the bourgeois. As Nairn, (1977, p. 13) has rightly observed; "the representative mechanism converted real class inequality into the abstract egalitarianism of citizens, individual egoisms into an impersonal collective will, what would otherwise be chaos into a new state legitimacy". However, the institutionalisation of mass participation in politics has thrown up what Przeworski (1986) has called the "institutionalisation of uncertainty".

In order not to join in the definitional crisis plaguing the term 'democracy', it may be necessary to distinguish between two types of conceptualisations of democracy – the minimal and the more elaborate

definitions. The minimal definition alludes to the fact that all modern and complex democracies are ruled by the elites (Verba et al, 1971, and Barnes et al, 1979). The implication of this is that government by the people is anachronistic, that the making of effective policy decisions is actually confined to a narrow segment of the population and that only a small fraction of the total population of modern political system possesses the requisite skills, knowledge, basic information and interest required for effective participation in political process and decision making. Lijphart (1984, p. 1) has also argued that a nation is democratic to the extent that it acts “in accord with the people’s preferences”. Combining these two minimal definitions, democracy can then be conceptualised in terms of elite responsiveness to the needs and demands of the people.

Schumpeter’s (1950, p. 269) definition provides us with a more elaborate one; that democracy is that “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote”. In explaining further, Schumpeter sets out four explicit conditions for the success of democracy in any country. These are (1) that the human material of politics (that is, the elite) should be of sufficiently high quality, (2) the effective range of political decision should not be extended too far, (3) government should be able to command the services of a well-trained bureaucracy of good standing and tradition, and (4) there should be democratic self-control (that is, the competing elite should tolerate each other’s rule and should resist the offerings of crook and cranks while the electorate, having made its choice, should refrain from interfering incessantly in the political actions of its representatives). Following the Schumpeterian tradition, therefore, Diamond et al (1988, p. xvi, and 1995, pp. 1-57) have argued that for a political system to be truly democratic, it must exhibit certain features which include (1) periodic competition among individuals and organised groups, (that is, political parties) for effective government positions, (2) a highly inclusive level of political participation in the process of leadership selection through an electoral process that does not exclude any social group, and (3) a level of civil and political liberties such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organisations, sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

An Overview of the Crises of the Democratisation Process in Nigeria

The process of democratisation in Nigeria started with the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern Protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914 and continued through the various colonial constitutions (Clifford 1922, Richard 1946, Macpherson 1951, Lyttleton 1954, and the Independence Constitution of 1960). The post-independence process of democratisation had also taken the form of constitution making and this includes the amendment to the 1960 constitution, the 1963 Republican constitution, the 1979, 1989, 1995 and the present one of 1999 constitutions. Thus, taking 1914 as our base, Nigeria has had eleven (11) constitutions in its bid to democratise. If we then accept with Osaghae (1999) that democracy is a process of continuous struggle and engagement to make the state (ever) more responsive and accountable to the citizenry which, in fact, makes the institutional requisites and processes more purposive and meaningful, then it follows that (1) democracy cannot be divorced from democratisation and (2) democratisation of the state is at the core of democracy. Viewed from this perspective therefore, democratisation becomes the process of establishing and consolidating a democratic government where it did not previously exist, or deepening democracy where it already exists. Thus, democratisation is a process of continuous renewal of democracy. For the purpose of space, we shall limit our discussion to the post-independence attempts at democratisation. It is interesting to note that post-independence attempts at democratisation and constitution making took place under the military regimes. It was not until 1999 till date that Nigeria had ever experience a civilian transition to another civilian government.

The process of democratisation in Nigeria had been fraught with a lot of challenges leading to military interventions in politics at various times. At independence, the inherited “Westminster model” that had worked for generations in Britain and which had constituted the backbone of British democratic system, suddenly became ineffective in Nigeria (Agara and Olarinmoye, 2009). The politicians, who have been ‘tutored’ in its use while under the tutelage of the colonisers, deliberately thwarted its implementation and effectiveness. For instance, the tradition of ‘question time’ in parliament which had been an effective instrument of ensuring accountability of government officials was the first to be stifled. Second was the short duration

in which the parliament sat for business. This was because the politicians abandoned the work of governing for other preoccupations such as contracts seeking and other means of illegal enrichment. This was further confirmed by records which have it that between 1960 and 1965, the Nigerian parliament only sat for about 38 days. Third was the fact that the question time session took an air of inquisition, an opportunity which members of the opposition exploited to ridicule and castigate the ruling party for inefficiency. Therefore, the majority of the ministers were unfavourably disposed to answering questions and that their continued absence from such sessions eventually led to its abandonment. The Public Accounts Committee, another control method, was rendered ineffective also as a result of almost similar reasons. Between 1960 and 1965, the effective functioning of the PAC was hampered by the uncooperative attitude of the senior public servants, the limited knowledge of the members concerning their responsibilities, the high turnover rate of membership and more importantly the preponderance of pro-government members on the committee including the chairman (Adamolekun, 1974).

The abandonment of most of the practices inherent in the Parliamentary system of government leaves us with only one conclusion, that the Nigerian elite were very interested in restraining the power of the state when they were not functional members of the state government under the colonisers, but very reluctant to have their own power restrained once they got possession of the state and its apparatus. Deriving from this, it becomes possible to locate the crisis of democratisation squarely on the shoulders of the elite and their reluctance to conduct themselves within the prescribed rules of the democratic game. These rules are intended to restraint and compel the elite to subject their performance to the judgment of the masses. This becomes possible in liberal democracies and perhaps difficult in Nigeria because as Mayer et al (1996, p. 40) have postulated, democracy seems to require a cultural context within which to operate, a cultural context in which the democratic format has acquired a deep-seated legitimacy that exceeds one's commitment to any given set of political outcomes. The Nigerian experience has shown that it is primarily because of class considerations and the distribution of material well-being, who gets what and how, that has generated a culture of intolerance thereby causing the

political elites to subvert all democratic tenets which have been held sacrosanct by elites in western liberal democracies. The crisis that was generated as a result of the elites' political intransigence led to the first military coup in 1966.

Since then, Nigeria had experienced military coups one after the other. Thus, virtually all of Nigeria's political architecture and restructuring have been undertaken under military oligarchic rule. This, to some extent, had added to the pathologies and paradoxes of democratisation in Nigeria. As Graf (1988, p. 169) has opined the incessant coups became "a reconsolidation of the military's corporate interests and factions." Under the different military regimes, particularly under Babangida, democratisation process suffered more crises of endless transition than under any other military regime. While the reasons given by Babangida for the annulment was contained in his broadcast to the nation on June 26 may not be our consideration here, the aftermath of the annulment generated a lot of political crises which stirred up the civil society groups, engendered state-sponsored acts of terrorism against people deemed as against the state, inter-group conflicts, general unrest and more importantly the emergence and proliferation of ethno-regional associations and militias groups. The political climate became so unbearable that Babangida, on August 27, 1993 had to 'step aside' and an Interim National Government (ING) under Chief Ernest Shonekan was formed.

However, this was short lived, as the ING was displaced by General Abacha on November 17, 1993. Under him, the process of democratisation started with the convening of the 19-member National Constitutional Conference Commission (NCCC), which suffered from a crisis of credibility and confidence. However, in the midst of the massive reprisals mounted by the state against persons and organisations deemed against his personal ambition, Abacha passed away on June 8, 1998. On Thursday 9 June, 1998, General Abdusalam Abubakar was appointed the new military Head of State. The process towards democratisation started with the establishment of a new electoral commission known as Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1998. By August 25, 1998, INEC had released a time table and conditions for parties' registration. By November 11, 1998, a Constitution Coordinating Debate Committee was inaugurated. After organising a number

of workshops, seminars and conferences, the constitution committee presented its report to the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) who after necessary amendments, promulgated into law, the 1999 Constitution on May 29, 1999. The local government election was concluded on December 5, 1998, the governorship election was finalised by January 9, 1999, while the Presidential election took place on February 27, 1999 with former military leader, Olusegun Obasanjo emerging winner, thereby leading to the emergence of the longest period of civilian government the nation had ever witnessed.

Spiritualising the Electoral Process

By electoral process we mean the entire gamut of activities that are connected with elections and electioneering. These, according to Agbaje and Adejumbi (2006, p. 32), involve voter registration, political campaigns, voting, the declaration of election results, and post-election petitions and complaints. Included also are the electoral law that guide and dictate the conduct of all parties and procedures to be followed by all the political parties in conducting parties' primaries to choose the various candidates that will be fielded for the actual elections. To date the country have had six national elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019) which do not include the various staggered elections in some states. In spite of the consistency of elections in Nigeria thus far, the experience has been a mixture of the good, the bad and the ugly; the ugly being the emerging tendency of spiritualising politics and politicising spirituality. As Ayantayo (2009) has noted, the spiritualisation of the electoral process has now linked election outcome to spiritually determined result, thereby forging a link between political events which cannot be isolated from the socio-cultural setting and the supernatural realm. This, therefore, creates an impression that success at the polls is not limited to nor is it tied to the wish or actions of the electorates but rather divinely predetermined at the supernatural realm to which only the prophets have access; thus, a recourse to the period of divine kingship. An atmosphere is thus generated where consideration of the wisdom, ideological soundness, manifestoes, foresight and personality of the political contestants are irrelevant and rendered so by divine intervention and choice from above.

This has become a basic characterisation of the political climate in Nigeria, particularly during elections where politicians now seek for divine nomination and rely more on the power of prayer and prophetic utterances to win elections. This has truncated the entire political process as known and practiced in the civilised world thereby rendering a nullity established and accepted democratic process that culminates in the election and selection of political leaders. The result is that reliance on the democratic process has been eroded and not given the level of seriousness and adherence necessary by both the politicians and the electorates. So, regardless of the level of sophistication that characterise an election, and/or the level of persuasion and appeal of the manifesto of the political party or its candidate, a contrary enabling environment is created where everything sacrosanct to the democratic process is of no value since the outcome has been settled in the spiritual realm. A wrong impression is thus generated that electoral issues are better settled spiritually through prayers, manipulation of angelic beings and the use of magic and occult, than relying on the wish of the people on the outcome of elections. Contrary to accepted norms of democratic process, a number of politicians now exhibit more reliance on the power of prayer or magic to win election than on good performance while in office.

It is interesting to note that Pentecostal pastors seems to be more or fully involved in this endeavor. New and more prophets from the Pentecostal fold are emerging at every election year with a self-sponsored mandate to be more actively involved in the electoral process. In Ghana, as in Nigeria also, Pentecostal pastors seem to have taken it upon themselves the need to sanitise the political space, through announcing the candidate that has the divine mandate, and 'in whom God is truly pleased.' In order not to be out-done by Pentecostal prophets, their counterparts from the Charismatic movement (Catholic, Anglican, etc.) have equal lent their 'prophetic' voices to the cacophony of divine utterances pervading the political climate. Although they evinced different agendas, they nevertheless pursued them with similar methods. For instance, the Pentecostal pastors see their mandate from God to deliver the political space from the clutches and control of perceived agents of darkness, the Charismatics interest in the political candidates is simply to repent from their sins in order to enable the nation

go through necessary deliverance process that will engender development and prosperity. On the contrary, the neo-prophets and pastors emerging from the so-called ‘one-man churches’ see their part as endorsing candidates for political offices by forecasting through prophetic declarations and revelation from God. While the prophetic declarations and the divine choice of candidates are not necessarily based on their fitness for political offices or any other empirical evidence that qualify them as the right candidate for the office, the neo-prophets/pastors have added another dimension to the spectacle by claiming that they have been endowed with a special or unique anointing from God that can change destinies and turn them from losers to winners of elections. Put differently, they stand in position of power and authority to negotiate with God to endorse and acknowledge their candidates. As Acheampong (2018, p. 119) has equally said, these neo-prophets/pastors have the divine given ability to even overturn any malevolent activities of spirit forces that may or have changed an individual’s or a country’s progress in life.

Although the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) are yet to openly endorse any candidate for political office, their restraint has not been sufficient enough to constrain their members from doing so. The rather aloofness of these two major bodies of Christians in Nigeria to politics is a reflection of their feeling of superiority from the mundane on one hand; on the other hand, it is to reflect their apolitical-ness and disdain for any worldly exercise including election. The message being passed across is that they are only concerned with evangelism and winning souls for Christ, while creating a spirit of oneness among the different denominations, and ensuring an enabling environment for propagating the ‘Good News.’

This apolitical-ness was to be short-lived as certain events within the country necessitated their being involved and vocal in the political terrain. These events were the joining of Nigeria to the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) in 1986 by the Babangida’s administration, the imposition of Sharia law in the twelve states in North Nigeria (Obadare, 2006; Harnischfeger, 2006), and the wanton indiscriminate killings of Christians in the north, particularly southern Kaduna. Of equal importance and perhaps immediate, was the monopolisation of virtually all elected and appointive

positions by Moslems; both in the north and south of the country. These acted as prompters for Christians, particularly Pentecostals, to get involved in politics.

Thus, religion, just like other factors became a source and reason for mobilisation to either gain or retain state power (Ezeibe & Ikeanyibe, 2017). The salience of religion becomes so pronounced that it captivates the political class and its hold and influence becomes all-embracing that as Toyin Falola, had opined, “no one can aspire to or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious” (Tar and Shettima, 2010, p.11). The situation in Nigeria today is such that religious influence in the Nigerian polity is well entrenched through the instrumentality of spiritual tools such as: prophecy, prayers, fasting, magical incantations etc. (Edewor 2008). Ojeifor (2016) has actually isolated the primacy of prayers and fasting as important to winning elections; overtaken only by prophecy. Prophetic declarations have thus become so frequently used and perhaps abused in Nigerian Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements that virtually every pastors are now prophets and quite a number of presidents in Africa have emerged through this in the 2000s (Yong, 2014, para.4).

The 2019 Presidential Election in Perspective.

Prior to the take-off of the democratisation process and the installation of democracy in Nigeria, the air-waves had been ignited by the rather notorious prophetic voice of one of the emergent neo-prophets/pastors, Tunde Bakare, as a lone voice in the wilderness against the military juntas, ruling Nigeria then. For instance, while majority of Pentecostal pastors limited themselves to preaching words of hope, endurance and a better tomorrow, in the face of the oppressive atmosphere created by the deteriorating conditions caused by the military, Tunde Bakare (who had repeatedly claimed that he was not a prophet) became prominent for his prophetic declarations against the military juntas. For instance, it was he that drew the public attention to the deception in the transition programmes of General Ibrahim Babandiga, when he prophetically declared that, “Is there no old man in MKO’s house to restrain him because once he begins, he will not come out alive” (Editor, *The Whistler*, 2017, para. 5). His declaration that SDP will fail, be cut off and swallowed up and the prophecy of Babangida’s sudden stepping aside

and the ascendance to power by General Sani Abacha, came as foretold along with the fact that eleven days after his prediction, the June 12 1993, presidential election was nullified by General Ibarhim Babangida. Tunde Bakare's prophetic declaration that "just before the killer will kill, he himself shall be killed-expect the night before miracle" (Editor, *The Whistler*, 2017), came true with the death of Abacha who had earlier signed the death warrant of those, including his deputy, General Diya, who were alleged to have conspired and planned a coup to oust him. Perhaps this, more than anything else, may have been responsible for endearing and causing a paradigm shift of the people to having a belief in the efficacy of prophecies. It also provided the opportunities for other prophets to cash in on the power and influence of prophecies over the everyday affairs of men. This more than any other thing else, led to the spiritualisation of politics and the politicisation of spirituality in the narratives of Nigerian politics and the electoral process. It also firmly situated, revealed and made more prominent the role of prophecies and the prophets in the future political events of the country in which Pentecostals and religious leaders now play prominent roles in determining, endorsing and influencing electoral outcomes in favour of their candidates.

The build-up to the 2019 presidential election witnessed many prophetic statements and utterances even when the Independent National Electoral commission (INEC) was yet to release the timetable for the election. Quite a number of the pastors and prophets had predicted the eventual winner and loser of the yet to be conducted presidential election. Of over seventy-three political parties that fielded candidates for the election, the bulk of the prophecies were focused on President Muhammad Buhari (APC) and his opponent, Atiku Abubakar (PDP). Many of the prophecies were as scandalous as to cause an uproar and ethnic conflicts. For instance in 2017, an Igbo, Prophet Emmanuel Chukwudi of King of Kings Deliverance Church announced the demise of the President even before the date of election. His declaration were so worded as to show the true intent of his declaration; to make him infallible, patronised and to gain popularity and attention.

Long time ago, I asked all to pray for their master, that he needed urgent prayers to avert the calamity of death at Aso

Rock, but they were lazy. **No one has bothered to reach me**, now see what is happening. **They don't want come for prayers**. Things will get worse. I said he will be president, today he has become president, I said he will die, see what is happening (Ogbeche, 2017), <https://dailypost.ng/2017/02/20/buhari-will-die-unless-not-called-god-prophet-chukwudi-claims/>). (Emphasis Mine).

The president's failing health had become an issue for Nigerians, particularly when he went for medical treatment in London for 104 days, thus, any prophecy concerning it may throw the entire country into jeopardy and the contestants to the throne into a frenzy that would have created tension for democracy and its consolidation. The prophecy that the president may not recover from his sickness and would eventually lead into his death put a great strain on the budding democracy and the resultant struggle for succession was likely to split whatever agreement may have been reached among the various contenders for the throne. In a rather pessimistic tone, Prophet Chuckwudi further stated that the vacuum created would lead to a scramble for power between the Vice-President and the military over who will succeed the president. Although this prophecy may have been triggered by the failing health of the president, but the aftermath led to people wondering whether the prophet actually heard from God or was manipulating the situation and preying on the fear of the people. Whatever, the reason, it succeeded in heating up the political environment and many conjectures that followed. In rather quick succession, others were quick to take advantage of the situation and the predicament which the country was thrown into to make more predictions as the table below shows.

Samples of Failed Prophecies				Samples of True Prophecies		
S/N	NAME	PROPHECY	SOURCE	NAME	PROPHECY	SOURCE
1	Apostle Johnson Suleiman	Tell Nigerians who wish to see democracy sustained, to pray for our leaders and work for peace, tell the leaders to pray and be honest with the people they are serving, otherwise, elections may not hold in Nigeria in 2019. That is what God has shown me.	The Vanguard, 2018. '2018: Prophet Omale gives 'Prophecy' on Buhari, Atiku, PDP, Others', https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/01/2018-prophet-omale-gives-prophecy-buhari-atiku-pdp-others/	Primate Elijah Ayodele	PDP will find it difficult to wrestle power from President Buhari come February 2019 election because they refused to do the right thing from the beginning. Unless they put heads together and do the right thing, APC will still come back.	Rasaq Adebayo 2018. 'Primate Ayodele makes fresh Predictions on winners of 2019 elections'. https://dailypost.ng/2018/12/23/primate-ayodele-makes-fresh-predictions-winners-2019-elections/
2	Prophet Onyekachukwu Okoli	I, Prophet Onyekachukwu Okoli, prophesied that a Yoruba man will emerge as the president of Nigeria in 2019.	Jannah, 2017. '2019 Election will not Hold"- Apostle Suleiman says in Fresh Prophecies', http://dailypost.ng/2017/09/20/2019-election-	Prophet TB Joshua	The election will be closely contested between the two leading political parties but I see Muhammadu Buhari winning	Fikayo Olowolagba 2019 'Buhari vs Atiku: How TB Joshua, Mbaka, Iginla, other's Prophecies on 2019 Presidential election

S/N	NAME	PROPHECY	SOURCE	NAME	PROPHECY	SOURCE
			will-not-hold-apostle-suleman-says-fresh-prophecies/			came to pass’, https://dailypost.ng/2019/02/27/buhari-vs-atiku-tb-joshua-mbaka-iginla-others-prophecies-2019-presidential-election-came-pass/3
3	Prophet Emmanuel Omale	I see a lot of challenges with the candidacy of p r e s i d e n t Mahammadu Buhari, as his acceptance requires a lot prayers... God says another Northern a c u r r e n t Governor and serving Minister amongst his close confidants will have a better acceptance.	Akubuiro, 2017. ‘Yoruba’ll Emerge President in 2019- Prophet’, http://sunnews online.com/yoruba-ll-emerge-president-in-2019-prophet/	Pastor Chris Omatsola	President Muhammadu Buhari is God’s mandate for 2019. God said he is giving President Buhari another opportunity to make History. Here is his opportunity to leave a legacy as he has always desired in his heart that Nigerian will never forget him.	Ibid

S/ N	NAME	PROPHECY	SOURCE	NAME	PROPHECY	SOURCE
4	Prophet Wale Olagunju	APC should forget about winning 2019 election for another government will emerge that will probe their government. God says 2019 election will be tougher than the 2015. God says should Atiku Abubakar contest the 2019 election, he will defeat Buhari hands down.	Ogbeche, 2017. '2017 Prophecy: Atiku will defeat Buhari in 2019; Nigeria will Split into 5-Prophet Olagunju'. http://dailypost.ng/2017/01/02/2017-prophecy-atiku-will-defeat-buhari-2019-nigeria-will-split-5-prophet-olagunju/	Rev. Fr. Ejike Mbaka	Among all the Presidential aspirants, Buhari stands in the best position in winning the presidential election...In all this, we urge Nigerians to vote President Buhari in order to complete his eight years tenure and after which he will hand over to younger candidate	Ifreke Inyang (2019)' Atiku vs Buhari: Fr. Mbaka finally reveals presidential candidate he will support', https://dailypost.ng/2019/01/02/atiku-vs-buhari-fr-mbaka-finally-reveals-presidential-candidate-will-support/
5	Pastor Samuel Akinbodunse	Please Nigerians warn Buhari that he is going beyond his boundary. That the Lord said his tenure is once and not twice. If not, he will not see the election o...if he made (makes) a mistake to campaign for elections, before they vote, he will die.	Adeniyi & Omogbolagun, 2019. 'Failed Prophecies on Buhari, Atiku Presidential Poll Contest', https://www.punditng.com/failed-prophecies-on-buhari-atiku-presidential-poll-contest/			

S/N	NAME	PROPHECY	SOURCE	NAME	PROPHECY	SOURCE
6	Pastor Simeon Akorede	God revealed to me that the incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari is not given the grace to govern Nigeria for a second term	(ibid)			
7	Prophet John Ogundele	You may be calculating in your mind that if Buhari doesn't become the president, then it will be Atiku because Obasanjo supports him. Let me tell you as a prophet of God that among Obasanjo, Atiku and Buhari and those who you think are influential (in the country), God said He had withdrawn power from them. None of them will get on to the seat of power.	(ibid)			

Source: Adapted from Ikem and Edafe (2019)

The table above presents a mere diagnostic samples of the prophecies for and against the two major contenders and the result of the elections. The right hand columns of the table reflects some of the prophecies that eventually came true because the prophets claimed to have seen it as revealed to them by God. Even though correct, such claims cannot be subject to any form of scientific verification. It borders on the mystical/religious mode or source of knowledge which, as Agara (2017) has shown cannot be accepted as a scientific source of knowledge. On the other hand, the left hand columns of the table reflects prophets whose prophecies came out as false, prophets who predicted that President Buhari was going to lose the election. While it may be clear that the result belied these prophecies, it also raised doubts about the veracity of the result released by INEC. For the believers in those prophecies, the prophecies must have ‘failed’ not because God did not say so or the prophets did not hear from God, but because the elections were rigged in favour of the incumbent. This raised the question; Is it possible for man to manipulate what God had enjoined, what God had decided? Num. 23: 19 emphatically says; “God is not man that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent; hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?” If we go by the infallibility of God, that His decision will always come to pass irrespective of what man may do, then it behooves on us to conclude either that God had not spoken to these prophets, that it is a case of a lying spirit or the flesh speaking, not God. Could it rather be the spirit of manipulation at work? The spirit of manipulation is the same as the spirit of witchcraft.

The implication of these prophecies is a major drawback on our democratic progress and its consolidation. The numerous prophecies in favour of Atiku may have embolden him and his supporters to deny the result of the election thereby raising contentions as to its fairness which was contested in court. A further implication is the suspicion thrown at INEC, that the electoral body may not have been fair and neutral in the conduct of elections. Thus, in situation where the neutrality and trust in the body saddled with the conduct of election is in doubt, then democratic consolidation and democracy may be impaired. This and many others are the insidious effects of prophecies and prophets on the democratic process.

People no longer rely on the outcome of elections as being fair but would rather rely on what the prophets have pronounced even if those prophecies sometimes contradict each other. People would rather believe prophets and their prophecies rather than trust the efficacy of the democratic process. It is frightful that no post-independence election ever conducted in Nigeria is devoid of rancor, court cases, contestations, wrangling, accusations and even violence. Violence has become an apparent condition for every elections in Nigeria.

Prior to the 2019 election, various prophecies have announced that the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan would win the 2015 election. However, this was not to come to pass. It may be safe to assume that the various prophecies toting Goodluck Jonathan as the eventual winner may have been responsible for and influenced the declaration by the leader of the Niger Delta militants, Asari Dokubo Tompolo that they were ready to declare war if the president was not declared the winner of the election. In addition, he threatened to cut off the oil and made governance problematic (The Nation Newspaper, January 25, 2015, <https://thenationonline.net/polls-tompolo-dokubo-others-threaten-war-jonathan-loses/>). Perhaps, if it were not for the peace agreement signed between the outgoing Jonathan and incoming President Buhari and mediated by the Nigeria's National Peace Committee headed by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, the transition would not have been bloodless. This is the effect of prophecies on the democratic process and its consolidation in Nigeria.

Conclusion

We conclude by stating that while the narrative of this paper may not be peculiar to the Nigerian situation alone, it is important to note that whether true or false, prophetic declarations that predicts the results of elections do not augur well for the democratic process in Nigeria. It not only trivialises age-long tendencies and accepted practices, it erroneously suggests that the electioneering process can be manipulated. It draws attention from the basis of voting; the candidate, party ideology, manifestoes and past performance; to refocus attention on things and issues that cannot be substantiated. On the other, a game of popularity and manipulation is being played. Unannounced is the insidious game of who is right or wrong in his

predictions, leading to the right prophet with the right prophecy acquiring popularity, more followership and perhaps patronage by the winning team and those who want to win in future elections. The bottom-line is that there is an abandonment of the greater good for the nation for the lesser good for the individual, in this case the prophet with the right prediction.

Whether right or wrong, the part played by these predictions in precipitating violence cannot be ruled out. This contributes to the loss of credibility and belief in the election process and the organisations saddled with the responsibility of ensuring a free and fair election. With these incessant predictions and prophecies is the crises of objectivity and neutrality which have coloured peoples' perception of the election process. Religious bodies and organisations such as CAN and PFN need to draw a line and caution their members. This is not denigrate the value of prophecy, or of God's ability to reveal the past, present and future to His people, yet this is to admonish the prophets to prophesy with wisdom so as not to create situation where violence reigns and God's own people are killed because of the outcome or non-outcome of such proclamations.

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