

Praise for *Faith and Politics in Nigeria*

"This book is an important contribution to understanding one of the greatest challenges in world affairs and demonstrates why Nigeria—because of its experiences with democratic federalism and building alliances across religious and ethno-regional lines can provide important models for other nations facing similar challenges."

—**Richard A. Joseph**, Northwestern University

"John Paden brings over forty years of deep experience in Nigeria to this masterful work, which argues that this incredibly complex nation deserves a central role in U.S. strategy on how to engage the Muslim world. He contends that Nigeria has a unique global role to play as both a potential model for inter-religious political accommodation and as a potential bridging player in global politics between the Christian-dominated West and the Muslim world."

—**Darren Kew**, University of Massachusetts, Boston

"Paden, America's foremost expert on Islam in Nigeria, provides an analysis of how Nigeria, with substantial Muslim and Christian populations, has mastered the task of keeping the country together. The author delves into the formal and informal federalism arrangements, the role of religious leadership, and the understandings about power sharing that explain this success while providing sound recommendations for what Nigeria must do to preserve this coexistence. This book is an outstanding contribution to our understanding of nation building."

—**Princeton N. Lyman**, Council on Foreign Relations

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NIGERIA
AS A
PIVOTAL
STATE
IN THE
MUSLIM
WORLD

John N. Paden



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200

Washington, DC 20036-3011

www.usip.org

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First published 2008

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Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standards for Information Science—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Paden, John N.

Faith and politics in Nigeria : Nigeria as a pivotal state in the Muslim world / by John N. Paden.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-60127-029-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Nigeria--Politics and government. 2. Nigeria--Foreign relations. 3. Religion and politics--Nigeria. 4. Political culture--Nigeria--Religious aspects. 5. Islamic countries--Relations--Nigeria. 6. Nigeria--Relations--Islamic countries. 7. Islam and state--Nigeria. 8. Nigeria--Ethnic relations. 9. Islam--Relations--Christianity--Nigeria. I. Title.

DT515.59.P35 2007

966.9054--dc22

2007044241

This book is dedicated to the unity of Nigeria.

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Foreword

In this slim and readable volume, John Paden draws on more than forty years experience living and teaching in Nigeria to examine how Nigeria fits into the emerging global context. With its population of more than 140 million and vast oil reserves, Nigeria maintains a dominant presence in Africa and holds a significance that extends well beyond the continent's borders. But Nigeria's regional and international import is derived not just from its sheer size and natural resources. It is also derived from its unique demographic composition: it has the largest concentration of Muslims west of the Persian Gulf and is by far the largest country in the world with an approximate demographic balance between Muslims and Christians. As Paden argues herein, if nothing else, the manner in which Nigeria manages its demographic diversity makes it a pivotal state both within the Muslim world and within the larger international community.

Recalling his earlier highly noteworthy research on northern history, culture, religion, and politics, Paden states that the key to understanding Islam in Nigeria—and therefore the place of Nigeria in the Muslim world—is to recognize the centrality of the Sokoto Caliphate. Indeed, history is a living presence in Nigeria. The Sokoto Caliphate, founded in the early nineteenth century by Usman Dan Fodio, continues to exert strong cultural influence in Nigeria and West Africa. Dan Fodio emphasized “justice”—including the removal of unfair taxes—and the need for Islamic education as a guide for the community. During the British colonial period in the north (1903–60), this caliphal system, including sharia law, was retained as the basis of colonial rule and there has been a continuous attempt to interpret this legacy by northern political and religious leaders ever since.

Paden argues that not only is the Sokoto Caliphate one of the largest pre-colonial political systems in sub-Saharan Africa but that it has also been part of the direct experience of fourteen of the thirty-six contemporary states in Nigeria. Furthermore, historical resistance to the caliphate has been part of the legacy of two additional northern Muslim states: Yobe and Borno. Three other states in the Middle Belt were part of the former Northern Region and are integral to the northern political scene. Thus, nineteen of the thirty-six Nigerian states are part of the former Northern Region. Additionally, in the southwest region, several Yoruba states identified with resistance to the Sokoto Caliphate in the nineteenth century, although Ilorin (in the north) is predominantly Yoruba. At present, the southwest is demographically about half Muslim and has a complex and unique relationship with the north.

After the return to civilian rule in 1999, twelve of the far-northern states returned to forms of sharia law—in criminal and civil domains. As Paden

states, this was seen as a controversial move in the north and among the country's various Christian communities (although non-Muslims are not subject to Islamic law). He argues that the sharia "issue" has since "normalized," that is was a nonissue in the 2003 and 2007 elections, and that it is unlikely to rear its head in the near future.

Paden also focuses on ethnoreligious balancing mechanisms within Nigeria, such as the power shift from the southwest to the north in the 2007 election. He notes that all three major candidates for president in the April 2007 elections were from caliphate states: Umaru Yar'Adua and Muhammadu Buhari from the "balancing state" of Katsina and Atiku Abubakar from Adamawa, which borders non-Muslim/indigenous lands. While Yar'Adua prevailed in the flawed election, the tone was set in many ways by Buhari, who, as leader of the major opposition party, emphasized the need for justice in the fight against corruption and education in the fight against poverty. His popularity at the grassroots level in the north was eclipsed by the power of the incumbent party, but subsequent court challenges to this election emphasize the "legal" tradition that is very much part of the northern/Islamic legacy.

Paden also details how in recent years the various major factions and geographic centers of the Muslim community in Nigeria have come together under the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA). (Its president is the Sultan of Sokoto, its vice president is the Shehu of Borno, and its secretary-general is a distinguished Yoruba legal scholar.) This "big tent" tries to be inclusive of Sufis, legalists, and traditional emirate authorities and of the obvious geographical nodes and networks: the caliphate states, Borno, and the Yoruba states. Although NSCIA is clearly an "establishment" organization, it has nonetheless occasionally acted in support of the radical elements in the north, such as during the debate on the polio vaccination issue. Paden also profiles two "outsider" groups that have challenged this establishment in the north, that is, the so-called Shiites and the so-called Taliban, both relatively small groups.

But the larger issue of Muslim-Christian relations is the theme of this volume, including the mechanisms, both constitutional and cultural, that have encouraged national harmony through a "people-of-the-book" approach. For example, the country's recent census did not include questions on religious or ethnic identity; the major political parties tend to balance their national tickets between north and south; ethnoreligious labeling of political parties is not acceptable; there is a presumed "power shift" or rotation of presidential power between northern and southern candidates; zonal or geographical surrogate identities are utilized to blur religious and ethnic identities; "federal character" principles in the constitution require a power-sharing approach to all federal executive appointments, including the cabinet; media coverage of sensitive religious issues and conflict increas-

ingly demonstrates an awareness of the need “not to cry fire in a crowded religious theater”; the national budget—funded largely by oil income—is shared among the states on revenue-sharing principles; a new federal capital has been built in Abuja to give proximate access to the six geographic zones; a national interreligious council has been established with twenty-five Muslim leaders and twenty-five Christian leaders—cochaired by the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the president of the NSCIA—that deals with interfaith relations at all levels.

Within the larger Nigerian context, Paden concludes that this balancing of ethnoreligious and regional diversity poses five challenges of nation building: (1) establishing a workable political system; (2) consolidating rule of law; (3) developing capacities for conflict resolution; (4) facilitating economic development; and (5) stemming corruption at all levels. He calls for a democratic federalism approach in meeting these challenges.

At the international level, Paden focuses on Nigeria’s role in West Africa, especially in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); in the broader African context, through the African Union; and in numerous international organizations. He examines the special relationship of Nigerian Muslims—who are almost entirely Sunni—with Saudi Arabia, both on a diplomatic and spiritual level. Yet the sensitive Muslim-Christian balance also relates to Nigeria’s ambiguous role in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Finally, Paden assesses the special challenge of improving U.S. relations with Nigeria’s Muslim community. In today’s world, what are the challenges of U.S. engagement with Nigeria in terms of military and security relations; diplomatic and political relations; economic, business, and educational relations; and cultural, religious, and nongovernmental relations? Paden argues that the United States needs to engage and normalize its relations with Nigeria at all levels, especially in the Northern States. It must not be pulled into the trap of relying on political actors in Abuja (or in the diaspora) to target “evil doers,” who are, in most cases, legitimate opposition leaders. He further cautions: do not allow the obvious needs of the oil industry to “wag the dog” and dominate all relations between the United States and Nigeria. Do not let the global war on terrorism poison relations with the 99 percent of Nigerian Muslims who are moderate and generally friendly to the United States. Come to grips with the need for a deeper understanding of Islam in West Africa, especially in Nigeria. Finally, he advises that the United States should set an example of tolerance between people of the book at home and abroad.

Overall, this volume will be of deep interest to Nigerians, Africans, and the broader international community. Once again, Paden has contributed to our understanding of a complicated, multilevel drama as Nigerian Muslims search for their position in the global arena and, at the same time, work to set

a positive example with their Christian countrymen. I strongly recommend this book to scholars, diplomats, and public-policy practitioners.

—Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari

A Nigerian scholar and diplomat, Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari is the current undersecretary-general of the United Nations for the Department of Political Affairs and special adviser on Africa. He formerly served as Nigeria's Minister of External Affairs and Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and taught at Ahmadu Bello University/ABU and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

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