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Da'wah, Sustainable Democracy, and National Development: An Islamic Ethical Framework for Political Participation in Lagos State

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ABSTRACT: Islamic religious scholars are entrusted with the responsibility of guiding the Muslim community toward righteousness in all aspects of life e.g. spiritual, social, economic, and political. In Nigeria, and particularly in Lagos State, the democratic process has been undermined by unhealthy political practices, including electoral violence, political imposition, and inadequate stakeholder consultation. These issues have contributed to widespread political apathy and disengagement among citizens. This study examines the role of Islamic propagation (*Da'wah*) as a potential instrument for promoting sustainable democracy and fostering national development. Employing a qualitative methodology and meta-analytical approach, the paper draws on Qur'anic injunctions and the Prophetic tradition to highlight Islamic ethical principles relevant to governance, civic responsibility, and political engagement. Through a contextual analysis of Lagos's socio-political environment, the study argues that the absence of moral and spiritual guidance has significantly contributed to leadership crises and declining public trust in democratic institutions. It proposes *Da'wah* as a moral framework capable of addressing electoral misconduct, political disengagement, and governance failures. The paper concludes by recommending the integration of religious ethics into civic education, the promotion of interfaith dialogue, and the strengthening of partnerships between religious institutions and government bodies to enhance democratic participation and national development.

KEYWORDS: *Da'wah*, Sustainable, Democracy, Sustainable Democracy, Development

INTRODUCTION

Islam is a comprehensive faith that addresses all aspects of human life with no exception of spiritual, social, economic and political but with divinely ordained guidance. Rooted in the main primary sources of *Shari'ah* (i.e. the Qur'an and Hadith), the religion imposes on its adherents the responsibility of inviting others towards righteousness and moral rectitude in all facets of life. This responsibility is highlighted in the following Qur'anic text where Allāh (SWT) says: كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ 'You are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong'. (Qur'an 3:110).

In the cited verse Allāh (SWT) did not only elevate the status of the Muslim *Ummah* as the best community raised for humanity but also underscores a divine obligation, towards engaging in moral advocacy (*Da'wah*) for the betterment of society. Hence, the concept of *Da'wah*, derived from the Arabic verb "*da'a*" means "to call" or "to invite," encapsulates the act of inviting people (both Muslims and non-Muslims) towards the understanding and practice of Islam. According to Hafeez, as cited in Sule *et al*, *Da'wah* is "an act of inviting others to adopt Islam and/or to practice their religious commitments accurately and ardently".¹ This definition emphasises that Islam, as a system, encourages actions rooted in justice and peace.

Meanwhile, following her creation in 1967 with five administrative divisions known as (*IBILE*) namely; Ikeja, Badagry; Ikorodu; Lagos Island, and Epe respectively, Lagos State has experienced a range of socio-political challenges. Among these, political crises stand out as a recurring issue across all the divisions. These unhealthy political manners among the Lagos residents under the guise of democracy include such practices like electoral violence, imposition of candidates, political intimidation, and voter apathy has marred the democratic process. These actions undermine public trust and discourage meaningful political participation, ultimately threatening the political stability and democratic sustainability of the state.

Against this background, this study seeks to examine the potential of Islamic propagation (*Da'wah*) as a viable mechanism for addressing the political dysfunctions prevalent in Lagos State. The aim is to explore how *Da'wah*, (when properly implemented) can foster moral consciousness, encourage active civic engagement, and promote the emergence of God-fearing and accountable leadership. Thus, the study argues

that integrating Islamic ethical values into political education and participation could contribute significantly towards restoring public confidence and enhancing democratic governance in Lagos State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive, and contextual approach to explore the role of Islamic propagation (*Da'wah*) in promoting political stability and sustainable democracy in Lagos State, Nigeria. It utilised a meta-analytical review of literature, historical analysis, and textual interpretation of Islamic sources. Primary Islamic texts (Qur'anic verses and authentic Hadith) were examined for principles related to governance and social justice, and these were contextualised within Lagos State's political realities. The study also drew on academic publications, policy documents, and historical socio-political records to provide a comprehensive understanding of democratic challenges and public disengagement in the sub-region.

Understanding Democracy as a Political Mechanism for Governance: An Overview

The term Democracy is often described as a cultural system sustained through active public participation.² According to his scholarly submission, the strength of democracy lies in its design to limit the potential abuse of power and in its commitment to keeping governance as close to the people as possible. Perhaps it is for this reason, among others, that democracy is considered the most central and dominant political system in global affairs, especially in the developed world.³ Thus, as a cultural system, democracy is shaped by the people, their environment, and the legal frameworks governing their societies. From another perspective, Williams in his lexicon description: *Dictionary of English Language*, defines democracy as a political term that reflects respect for human rights and an attitude toward life rooted in civilisation and cultural values.⁴ These rights include access to education, freedom of association, the right to vote, and the right to be voted for.

Etymologically, as cited by Oseni *et al*, the word democracy originates from the Greek term *demokratia*, a compound of *demos* (people) and *kratos* (power or rule).⁵ Hence, according to Atte and Haruna, democracy refers to "rule by the people" or "power belonging to the people".⁶ This according to Kiramat and Khalil is a system of government wherein the masses are fully in charge of governance through direct or indirect (i.e. by their chosen elected) representatives.⁷

Meanwhile, within a democratic system, every adult citizen possesses the right to vote for their preferred candidates and to contest for public office.⁸ While democracy has been defined in numerous ways, one of the most widely accepted definitions remains that, it is a government in which everyone has a share.⁹ Aristotle, as cited in Kiramat and Khalil, viewed democracy as a political system governed by the indigent rather than the wealthy elite.¹⁰

Looking at the various allusions, the term democracy is expected to function as a social contract between the government and the governed, fostering a coordinated and just society. This notion is supported by scholars like Rainer and Ingrida, who describe democracy as a government legitimately endorsed by the people through elections and constitutional frameworks.¹¹ However, to sum up the various definitions and submissions of the learned individuals, democracy can be conceptualized as a system of governance formed in accordance with principles of popular sovereignty, majority rule, and civic participation. It is a political structure that reflects the supremacy of the people's will through lawful, organized mechanisms. That is, a political system that actualized popular power through political structures that are based on mass participation and political sovereignty.

According to Osondu, democracy is expected to be a universally acceptable political system founded on the principles of law and order, regulating social norms and practices.¹² It is characterized by three main features: the supremacy of the people's power, freedom of expression, and open access to political office for all citizens.

Conceptualizing *Da'wah* (Islamic Propagation) and its Roles in Electoral Education

Da'wah is an Arabic term commonly translated as Islamic propagation. It literally means "calling" or "inviting" individuals to enter the fold of Islam wholeheartedly. Scholars agree that *Da'wah* involves the formal transmission of the message of Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims. More specifically, it refers to the re-education and spiritual guidance of non-practicing Muslims and the invitation of non-Muslims to the understanding and worship of Allah.

Technically, Oseni and Balogun postulate Islamic propagation (*Da'wah*) as "the conveyance of divine instructions (of Islam) to non-Muslims, inviting them to the path of Allah."¹³ In other words, *da'wah* refers to calling and inviting non-Muslims to Islam as well as to its practice. Similarly, Yahya in Oseni and Baogun explains *Da'wah* as both a call to non-Muslims and an invitation to Muslims to practice Islam with sincerity and correctness.¹⁴ It is, therefore, a comprehensive process of guiding individuals toward the knowledge of Allah and their obligations to Him.

To scholar like Ibn Taymiyyah cited in Bello and Abdulmumini, the term *da'wah* means calling to the belief in Allah and what the Prophets came with by accepting all they said and total obedience to the divine instructions.¹⁵ According to them, the obligation entails teaching and ensuring the correct observance of the messages of Islam to people through words and actions. Perhaps the reason why Muhammad al-Ghazali cited in Adediran referred to *da'wah* as 'a perfect program that consists of "a comprehensive program that includes all the knowledge necessary for humans to understand the purpose of life and walk the path guided by divine truth."¹⁶

However, going by the foregoing definitions and submissions of various scholars on the concept of Islamic Propagation (*Da'wah* in Islam), its main objectives is not only to invite people (Muslims and non-Muslims alike), to understand the worship of Allāh as expressed in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), but to equally inculcate in man an acceptable culture that will inform them of their roles on earth as Allah's vicegerents and agents of positive change, towards ensuring political stability which will in return give birth to national development and sustainable democracy.¹⁷ This is in consonance with the text of the glorious Qur'an where Allāh (SWT) refers to man as best community on earth: *كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ* 'You are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong Q3:110

Thus, this divine mandate implies that Muslims are expected to promote good governance and moral consciousness across all spheres of human life, including politics, by obeying Allah's command to spread Islamic awareness and values. Political engagement, far from being excluded, is regarded as an essential area where Islamic ethics must be upheld, and this responsibility is held in high esteem by the entire Muslim Ummah As Allāh (SWT) commands in the Qur'an: "وَادْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تُكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ" "...call to your Lord and do not be among the polytheists." (Qur'an 28:87). This emphasises the obligation of Muslims to spread the message of Islam, including its political and ethical dimensions, using peaceful and appropriate methods.

Objectives of *Da'wah* in Islam as means of Electoral Education

Among other aim and objectives of Islamic propagation (*da'wah*) according to Abu 'Iyad as-Salafi (an online source), is to ensure and accomplish the following:

- i. Returning to the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah, and understanding both according to the methodology of the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (Qur'an 4:115);
- ii. Clarifying true Islamic teachings, refuting misconceptions and deliberate misrepresentations, and defending the image of Islam;
- iii. Educating Muslims to practice their faith sincerely, embodying its ethics and values in daily life (Qur'an 103:1-3);
- iv. Reviving Islamic thought in line with core principles while discouraging blind adherence to schools of thought and sectarian loyalties (Qur'an 3:103);
- v. Providing Islamic solutions to modern societal challenges and striving to establish a society governed by divine law (Qur'an 5:49).¹⁸

These stated goals makes it clear that *Da'wah* is not limited to spiritual matters alone but includes social, cultural, and political reformation. The intention is not necessarily to convert non-Muslims but to inform, educate, and morally guide individuals in ways that lead to peaceful coexistence and democratic accountability. Hence, effective *Da'wah* can enhance electoral awareness, promote civic responsibility, and cultivate leadership rooted in Islamic ethics. As Adetona notes, *Da'wah* driven solely by conversion motives can become aggressive and alienating.¹⁹ Instead, it should be seen as a divine mandate to be carried out with wisdom and compassion. The Qur'an states: وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّنْ دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ 'And who is better in speech than he who invites (people) to Allāh and does Righteous deeds and says: 'I am one of the Muslims'.Q41:33

This verse highlights that *Da'wah* must be accompanied by righteous conduct and humility. In the context of electoral education, this means engaging the public with ethical messages, encouraging active participation, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for national development and democratic sustainability.

***Da'wah* and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria: The Lagos State Experience**

The term sustainability carries diverse meanings across various disciplines and contexts. Etymologically, it is derived from the Latin "*sustenerere*", which implies "under or beneath," and "*tenere*", which means "to hold", connoting the act of supporting or upholding. To scholars like Bello, sustainability implies the support or reinforcement given to something an idea, process, cause, or institution to ensure, through deliberate and continuous effort, that it remains relevance and continues to exist.²⁰

According to Adeyemi *et al.*, quoting the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), sustainable development refers to "a principle of development whereby societies must meet their present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs."²¹ Building on this scholarly view, Stiftung conceptualises sustainable democracy as a political system in which state power is balanced by strong, competing interests capable of strengthening democratic institutions.²²

In essence, a sustainable democracy depends on resilient institutions, functional governance structures, and meaningful citizen engagement and participation. These elements collectively support civic development, institutional capacity-building, and the democratisation of critical political and governance processes, including the activities of social movements, civil society organisations, political parties, security agencies, electoral bodies, and local governments. According to Stiftung, achieving this form of democracy requires a careful balance between state authority and countervailing forces that might otherwise impede democratic consolidation.²³

On the contrary, from an Islamic perspective, all aspects of creation (i.e. everything on the earth), including socio-political structures are divinely ordained for the benefit of humanity. Islam teaches that the earth and everything within it is a trust (*amānah*) from Allah, accompanied by responsibilities and ethical obligations. This extends to governance, i.e. political and social order should serve the collective good, guided by moral principles derived from divine revelation.

Therefore, the nature of Lagos State, being formerly Nigeria's capital and now its economic nerve centre, exemplifies a pluralistic and highly diverse society. Its economic prospects and strategic location have attracted the influx of people from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. While this diversity drives innovation and dynamism, it has also produced a number of socio-political challenges, such as political intimidation or bullying, candidate imposition, lack of inclusive consultation, voter apathy, and insecurity. Scholars often link these issues not simply to political competition but to broader systemic gaps which includes insufficient moral or ethical guidance from religious leaders and propagators (*du'āt*), whose role traditionally includes offering counsel grounded in Islamic ethical principles.

However, in a scholarship study carried out by Onakoya and Hassan, the authors argue that reports of intimidation, threats and harassment of some groups of residents following the February 25 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Lagos State reflect deeper systemic weaknesses within Nigeria's political culture.²⁴ Their analysis draws on accounts of physical attacks, threats, denial access to social services and restrictions on civic duties, which they interpret as manifestations of longstanding political tensions, rather than isolated reactions to the performance of particular political candidates.²⁵ They therefore recommend that security agencies and community leaders within Lagos state and across the South-West act decisively to prevent the escalation of such dangerous and inflammatory patterns and foster a more inclusive and tolerant political environment.

Meanwhile, sustainable democracy and political participation are inherently interdependent; neither can be fully realised without the other. Thus, Democracy which George in his study: Democracy and the Muslim World, describes as both a value system and a method of governance, requires the active involvement of citizens, either directly or through elected representatives.²⁶ Participation in this context, encompasses the various ways individuals express their views and influence political, economic, and social decisions. Research also indicates that

the breakdown of effective communication system, coupled with the absence of spiritually informed ethical engagement among political actors in Lagos State, contributes to widespread of political apathy and perceptions of socio-political insecurity. Such conditions undermine democratic sustainability, as effective democratic practice depends on robust institutions, credible structures, and active citizen involvement in politicking.

As a globally recognised political system, democracy is acknowledged for upholding core values such as human dignity, fundamental rights, justice, and collective welfare. It extends beyond periodic elections; it is grounded in ensuring that all voices are not only count but heard and that decisions reflect the collective will. Thus, in the Nigerian context, particularly within a complex and culturally heterogeneous State like Lagos, the integration of Islamic ethical principles through *Da'wah* may offer a constructive pathway for fostering responsible leadership, strengthening social cohesion, promoting peace, and supporting the long-term sustainability of democratic governance.

***Da'wah* and Role of *Dā'ī*: Its implication on Sustainable Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria**

Al-Jami' Channel for Qur'ānic Sciences, an online source postulate Islamic *da'wah* as the process of inviting people to the way of Islam. This religious act according to the article is basically categorised and discharge in three different stages for the purpose of promoting Islam, these include; inviting people to Islam by conveying the message to them, secondly, is by teaching Islam in its pristine form to the people who had already accepted the message, and the third stage is helping people to implement Islam in their lives.²⁷ Therefore the socio-political implication of these identified of *da'wah* is that Islamic propagation is not directed only to non-Muslims in politics but to Muslims as well, at various levels of knowledge and *Iman*.

As earlier mentioned, there are three pillars of *da'wah*. Of the three pillars of *da'wah*, the first is the caller to Islam, i.e. the *dā'ī*. The second pillar is the audience of the message, (the people who are being called to Islam), and the third pillar is the message itself, what the *dā'ī* is calling to, i.e. Islam. From these analyses, and as earlier mentioned, the *da'ī* is therefore central to this process. The individual are not only responsible for delivering the message but also for teaching and guiding others toward implementing Islamic values, such as *shūrā* (mutual consultation), *al-mas'uliyah* (accountability), etc. which are vital for good governance and political justice.²⁸

Historically, Prophet Nūḥ (AS) was the first *dā'ī*, and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) serves as the model *dā'ī* for the current *Ummah*. This underscores the fact that calling people to the path of Allah (SWT) is among the most honorable roles in Islam and carries immense spiritual reward. Thus, in the quest to guarantee an all-inclusive and security threat-free electoral processes, that will foster not only a credible election where every stakeholders will be freely participating in the decision making processes without bully or molestation but uniting every citizenry with a preconceive intention of national development and sustaining the growing democracy in the land, the caller (*dā'ī*) should endeavor to carry out the following roles:

i. Mutual Consultation (As-Shura):

The term mutual consultation refers to the process of seeking advice and exchanging opinions with others before making a decision, thereby fostering collaboration and collective wisdom. This principle was fully observed during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), as he himself regularly consulted his companions on all matters, whether social or spiritual. The Prophet recognized the youth as a strategic resource and vital decision-makers within society. He therefore encouraged the inclusive participation of both the young and the old in decision-making processes on issues affecting their socio-political and spiritual lives. This principle was applied by the Holy Prophet (SAW) in both his private and public affairs, and it continued to be fully upheld by the early rulers of Islam.²⁹

ii. Implementation of Core Principles of *Da'wah*:

Here, a *da'ī* is required to admonish or reawake people on their individual civic responsibility to the community with the scriptural provision of the fundamental principles of *da'wah*, as entrenched in the Qur'an, which include the use of wisdom (*hikmah*), good counsel (*maw'izah hasanah*), and engaging in dialogue in the best possible manner, avoiding harshness or compulsion.³⁰

iii. Periodical/Regular Lectures:

The *dā'ī* should conduct regular educational and counseling sessions for both the electorate and political actors. These sessions should aim to awaken their awareness of their responsibilities as vicegerents of Allah, particularly in dealing with others justly and upholding ethical *dā'ī* governance.

iv. Moral Uprightness:

A *dā'ī* is expected to embody the values he/she preaches, such as honesty, humility, patience, and kindness, both before, during and after the electoral processes, so as to serve as a living example of the Islamic way of life to other Muslims and non-Muslim alike,

v. Giving Muslims the Benefit of the Doubt:

The *dā'ī* should approach fellow Muslims with a spirit of goodwill and give them the benefit of the doubt. By showing respect and humility, he fosters openness, allowing people to receive and accept the true message of Islam more readily.

vi. Mixing and Isolating Appropriately:

The *dā'ī* should engage with people when his presence can be beneficial and uplifting. However, he should also know when to withdraw, especially when social interaction may compromise his values or effectiveness. While social engagement is commendable, isolation is preferable when continued interaction risks undermining his credibility or influence.

vii. Striving for Justice and Trusting in Allah:

The *dā'ī* should exert his utmost effort in pursuing just and righteous causes, entrusting the outcome to Allah (SWT). As stated in the Qur'an: Allah says: *وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ الَّذِي يَرَاكَ جِئْنَا بِكَ* "And put your trust in the Almighty, The Most Merciful, Who sees you when you stand up" (Q26: 217-218).

viii. Safeguarding and Fulfilling the Rights of Others:

The *dā'ī* must not only safeguard the rights of individuals in society but also strive to fulfill them. This includes advocating for justice, fairness, and the preservation of human dignity in both public and private life.³¹

RECOMMENDATION

- Integration of *Da'wah* as a concept into Civic Education in the National Curriculum: The need for its inclusion in the national curriculum is to help to promote religious education that accentuates the significance of civic responsibility of every citizenry, in order to foster peaceful coexistence and patriotism.
- Periodical Interfaith Dialogue for Peace and National Unity: There should be established regular interfaith forums to encourage mutual respect and collaboration among religious and ethnic groups on national issues.
- Establishment and implementation of Islamic propagation centers: Dedicated centers for religious and moral education should be set up across Lagos State's five administrative divisions to restore public trust and enhance civic engagement.
- Government-Religious Institution Collaboration: Governments at all levels should develop policy frameworks for partnering with faith-based organizations, promoting ethical leadership through capacity building and values-based governance., so as to stimulate ethical leadership that will instill values of justice, transparency, and accountability among public officeholders through Islamic *da'wah*.
- Episodically Religious Propagation/Education: Islamic scholars and propagators should provide continuous religio-political education and respond to current political issues, helping to foster civic responsibility and support good governance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined *Da'wah* (Islamic propagation) as a strategic tool for promoting ethical political participation and sustainable democracy in Lagos State, Nigeria. Rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, *Da'wah* extends beyond religious duty towards fostering justice, accountability, and communal responsibility, principles essential to good governance. While Islam may not align fully with Western democratic models, it emphasises consultation (*shūrā*), leadership accountability, and public participation, offering a framework for democratic values. As regards the *shūrā*, the principle advocate due consultation rested on values of truth and faith being a divine commandment of Allah (SWT) entrenched in the glorious Qur'an: ... and consult them in the affairs. Then, when you have determined, then put their trust in Allah. Allah loves those who put their trust in Him' Q3:159.

Furthermore, given challenges such as political apathy, electoral malpractice, and poor leadership in Lagos, the study recommends establishing moral and *Da'wah* centers across its five divisions. These centers could restore public trust, promote civic responsibility, and enhance political engagement. Ultimately, the research concludes that *Da'wah* can serve as a transformative moral and educational force in shaping a just, accountable, and participatory democratic culture in Nigeria.

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