Muslim Participation in Politics and Governance

The topic of discuss, “Muslim Participation in Politics and Governance”, has four basic terms which are “Muslim”, “Participation”, “Politics” and Governance. Therefore before going into the nitty-gritty of the topic, we shall look into the meanings and definitions of these terms in understanding how to steer the delivery of this paper.

The word, “Muslim” is derived from the word Islam. So, we may not appreciate the word “Muslim” without defining the word, “Islam”. The word “Islam”, is an Arabic word and it means peace, submission and obedience. The religion of Islam is the complete acceptance of the teachings and guidance of Allah as revealed to His Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wasallam). A Muslim, therefore, is one who believes in Allah and strives for total reorganization of his life according to His revealed guidance and the sayings of His Prophet. He also works for building human society on the same basis. "Muhammadanism" is a misnomer for Islam and offends its very spirit.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It also means peace, submission and obedience. It is acceptance and commit­ment to abide by the teachings and guidance of God. One of the beautiful names of God is As-Salam (The Peace). Islam also means to be at peace with God and His creatures. Being at peace with God implies complete submission to His will, Who is the source of all purity and goodness. Being at peace with His creatures implies living in peace within one's self, with other people and with the environment. Thus, Islam is a total system of living in peace. Islam is the same message and guidance which God revealed through all His Prophets to every people throughout the history of mankind. One who follows Islam is called a Muslim (an Arabic word which means, the one who submits to the will of God)[[2]](#footnote-2).

As for politics, David Easton (1953) defines it as “the authoritative allocation of values in the society” while, Harold Lasswell puts it as the being concerned with the issue of “who gets what, when and how”. In essence, it is about power distribution and allocation of societal values in the temporal[[3]](#footnote-3).These definition emanates from the western thinking of politics which dichotomises between the temporal and spiritual. The general trend in such conception is that politics is an activity that takes place in a particular environment that is geared towards the acquisition of power for the advancement of “good life” in the earthly world, one may add[[4]](#footnote-4).

In Islam, Politics has been defined as meaning the method of administering or organizing the society in such a manner that its interests and desires are realized. In simpler terms, politics means the rule of statecraft. It is the art of directing the affairs of the people in such a way of fulfilling the will of God which is geared towards advancing the good of all and prevention of evils as prescribed by God. What the common people mean by politics is not ‘real politic’, the concept with negative connotations, which is linked with chicanery, trickery, scam, and deception.

The social laws include civil, penal, commercial, political and international laws. Once we take a glance at the Qur’an, we discover that all kinds of laws in the world for the administration of society, and the management of international relations can be found therein. Apart from the fact that civil laws; decrees on marriage and divorce; laws on trade, transactions, mortgage, loan and the like can be found in the Qur’an (which proves that issues on statecraft, like enactment and presentation of laws for the administration of society are taken into account in Islam), a special right for the Prophet (s) has been stipulated in the Qur’an to enact laws and decrees on particular cases based on circumstances of time and space, and the faithful are duty-bound to act upon the laws issued by the Messenger of Allah (s). Allah says:

“A faithful man or woman may not, when Allah and His Apostle have decided on a matter, have any option in their matter.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

In this noble verse, the faithfuls have been deprived of the option to violate the decision of God and His Prophet (s). Thus, apart from the orders of God and fixed divine laws, laws enacted by the Prophet (s) are also binding on all those living within the jurisdiction of the Islamic government.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Conceptually, the word “governance” can be defined as the rule of the rulers, typically within a given set of rules. One might conclude that governance is the process by which authority is conferred on rulers, by which they make the rules, and by which those rules are enforced and modified. Thus, understanding governance requires an identification of both the rulers and the rules, as well as the various processes by which they are selected, defined, and linked together and with the society generally[[7]](#footnote-7).

Participation on the other hand has been defined as follows: “an act or instance of [participating](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/participate)”; “the fact of taking part, as in some action or attempt”:[[8]](#footnote-8) The action of taking part in something;[[9]](#footnote-9) the [fact](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fact) that you take [part](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/part) or [become](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/become) [involved](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/involved) in something[[10]](#footnote-10). For our purpose, it is the act of being involved and playing a role in a process for the purpose of pursuing or safeguarding one’s interest.

Going by the foregoing, Muslims participation in politics and governance means the taking part of Muslims citizens of a country in the process by which authority is conferred on rulers, who make rules and enforced and modified such rules with the aim of safeguarding or pursuing their interest. These rules are made into policies by which the decision of who gets what, how and when is determined.

As the popular politics that is played in the world today, particularly, our country is democracy, scholars differ as to what should be the attitude of Muslims in participating therein. Bellow is the opinions of a scholars[[11]](#footnote-11) on democracy:

“Democracy is a man-made system, meaning rule by the people for the people. Thus it is contrary to Islam, because rule is for Allaah, the Most High, the Almighty, and it is not permissible to give legislative rights to any human being, no matter who he is.

It says (rather, it is said) in *Mawsoo’at al-Adyaan wa’l-Madhaahib al-Mu’aasirah* (2/1066, 1067):

“Undoubtedly the democratic system is one of the modern forms of shirk, in terms of obedience and following, or legislation, as it denies the sovereignty of the Creator and His absolute right to issue laws, and ascribes that right to human beings. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

*“You do not worship besides Him but only names which you have named (forged) — you and your fathers — for which Allaah has sent down no authority. The command (or the judgement) is for none but Allaah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him (i.e. His Monotheism); that is the (true) straight religion, but most men know not”[[12]](#footnote-12)*

*“The decision is only for Allaah”[[13]](#footnote-13)*

“Secondly, the one who understands the true nature of the democratic system and the ruling thereon, then he nominates himself or someone else (for election) is approving of this system, and is working with it, is in grave danger, because the democratic system is contrary to Islam and approving of it and participating in it are actions that imply apostasy and being beyond the pale of Islam.

But as for the one who nominates himself or nominates others in this system in order to join the parliament and enjoin good and forbid evil, and establish proof against them, and reduce its evil and  corruption as much as he can, so that people of corruption and disbelievers in Allaah will not have free rein to spread mischief in the land and spoil people’s worldly interests and religious commitment, this is a matter that is subject to ijtihaad, according to the interests that it is hoped will be served by that.”

Some scholars are even of the view that getting involved in these elections is obligatory[[14]](#footnote-14).

Shaykh Muhammad ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked about the ruling on elections, and he replied: I think that elections are obligatory; we should appoint the one who we think is good, because if the good people abstain, who will take their place? Evil people will take their place, or neutral people in whom there is neither good nor evil, but they follow everyone who makes noise. So we have no choice but to choose those who we think are fit.[[15]](#footnote-15)

“If someone were to say: We chose someone but most of the parliament are not like that, We say: It does not matter. If Allaah blesses this one person and enables him to speak the truth in this parliament, he will undoubtedly have an effect. But what we need is to be sincere towards Allaah and the problem is that we rely too much on physical means and we do not listen to what Allaah says. So nominate the one who you think is good, and put your trust in Allaah.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

The scholars of the Standing Committee for Issuing Fatwas[[17]](#footnote-17) were asked:

“Is it permissible to vote in elections and nominate people for them? Please note that our country is ruled according to something other than that which Allaah revealed?”

They replied:

“It is not permissible for a Muslim to nominate himself in the hope that he can become part of a system which rules according to something other than that which Allaah has revealed and operates according to something other than the sharee’ah of Islam. It is not permissible for a Muslim to vote for him or for anyone else who will work in that government, unless the one who nominates himself or those who vote for him hope that by getting involved in that they will be able to change the system to one that operates according to the sharee’ah of Islam, and they are using this as a means to overcome the system of government, provided that the one who nominates himself will not accept any position after being elected except one that does not go against Islamic sharee’ah.”

They were also asked: “As you know, here in Algeria[[18]](#footnote-18) we have what are called legislative elections. There are parties which call for Islamic rule, and there are others that do not want Islamic rule. What is the ruling on one who votes for something other than Islamic rule even though he prays?”

They replied:

“The Muslims in a country that is not governed according to Islamic sharee’ah should do their utmost and strive as much as they can to bring about rule according to Islamic sharee’ah, and they should unite in helping the party which is known will rule in accordance with Islamic sharee’ah. As for supporting one who calls for non-implementation of Islamic sharee’ah, that is not permissible, rather it may lead a person to kufr, because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

*“And so judge (you O Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم) among them by what Allaah has revealed and follow not their vain desires, but beware of them lest they turn you (O Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم) far away from some of that which Allaah has sent down to you. And if they turn away, then know that Allaah’s Will is to punish them for some sins of theirs. And truly, most of men are Faasiqoon (rebellious and disobedient to Allaah).*

*Do they then seek the judgement of (the days of) Ignorance? And who is better in judgement than Allaah for a people who have firm Faith”[[19]](#footnote-19)*

“Hence when Allaah stated that those who do not rule in accordance with Islamic sharee’ah are guilty of kufr, He warned against helping them or taking them as allies or  close  friends, and He commanded the believers to fear Him if they were truly believers. He says (interpretation of the meaning):

*“O you who believe! Take not as Awliyaa’ (protectors and helpers) those who take your religion as a mockery and fun from among those who received the Scripture (Jews and Christians) before you, and nor from among the disbelievers; and fear Allaah if you indeed are true believers”[[20]](#footnote-20)*

And Allaah is the Source of strength. May Allaah send blessings and peace upon our Prophet Muhammad and his family and companions.”

The bottom line of the foregoing is that Muslims should define their participation in politics which is to ensure the commandment of what is good and prohibit evil. This is more so because if the righteous ones fold their arms and do not participate in politics, the evil ones will have a field day thereby making rules and policies by which the country, including the Muslims, is governed. This will lead to enacting devilish laws as gay and lesbianism. Thus, the evil of abstaining is obviously more than participating.

Besides, the provisions of Allah that

“O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result.”

Presupposes that muslims will participate in the act of electing or appointing their leaders so that they will be put in a position to be obedient to their rulers as Allah has commanded. This is because where evil persons or non-believers are imposed on them by others just because the muslims refrain from participation in politics, they may be put in a difficult position of having to disobey at the pain of punishment. This could be gleaned from the repressive policy of the Chinese government clamping down on muslims in the Xinjiang district, where Muslims are 58% of the population, banning them from observing the Ramadan fast[[21]](#footnote-21). This is what is to be expected where the non-believers have the upper hands which can happen in a muslim majority country like ours where we stay aloof from the process of politicking.

Allah SWT says “Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity.”[[22]](#footnote-22) This is supported by the noble prophetic parable of the companions of the ship as follows:

An-Nu’man ibn Basheer reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “**The parable of those who respect the limits of Allah and those who violate them is that of people who board a ship after casting lots, some of them residing in its upper deck and others in its lower deck. When those in the lower deck want water, they pass by the upper deck and say: If we tear a hole in the bottom of the ship, we will not harm those above us. If those in the upper deck let them do what they want, then they will all be destroyed together. If they restrain them, then they will all be saved together**.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

The Muslims are the ones at the upper deck in the ship of the society while the others are the one in the lower deck. If the Muslims should fold their hands and do nothing thereby giving a free rein to the others to display their licentiousness or debauchery, evil will be the order of the day and the whole society will be engulfed by its consequences. Allah says

“And fear a tumult or oppression, which affecteth not in particular (only) those of you who do wrong and know that Allah is strict in punishment”[[24]](#footnote-24)

The situation is that Muslims are not participating as expected in the political process in Nigeria. Although we have those who aspire among Muslims, but they need a structure that can ensure that only the righteous get to political offices. Our mosques are veritable means of achieving this but we rarely put them to use.

Muslims must therefore get organised, join political parties and help to shape the views of politicians. That way, politicians in the country can discard the politics of chicanery, trickery, scam, deception and violence that characterises politics in the polity. Muslims should endeavour to join Community Development Associations in their respective communities and be opinion leaders therein. Another way of being politically relevant in the society is to float or participate in Non-Governmental Organisations. This way we can shape opinions and values in the society and be that people whom Allah SWT described as

“You are the best of persons evolved for mankind enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah ...”[[25]](#footnote-25)

Where we have many upright Muslims in politics, they will be able to set the exemplary examples as contained in their Holy Book and which they have learnt from the Prophet Muhammad (S) as the best of Mankind charged with the reform of not only politics but the world.

FEAR OF GOD AND BELIEVE IN CHAPTER 3, VERSE 25-26.

PEDIGREE OF CANDIDATES RATHER THAN PLATFORMS

ESCHEW PAROCHIAL CONSIDERATIONS

KNOW THE POWER OF ALLAH

PRAY FOR SUCH POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

IF BAD LAWS ARE MADE, YOU ARE BOUND TO OBEY

PROCESSES

JOIN A POLITICAL PLATFORM

ENJOIN WHAT IS GOOD.

ASSIST IN DELIVERING GOOD PEOPLE OR CONTEST

REGISTER TO VOTE AND VOTE ON GENERAL ELECTIONS

MONITOR PROGRESS AND DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY

RECALL PROCESS.

CONCLUSION.

BE AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF ISLAM.

CHALLENGES

1. <https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Islam_in_Concept.pdf> (visited on 2/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://islamicbulletin.org/free_downloads/new_muslim/what_is_islam.pdf> (visited on 2/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences Vol.2, No.2, pp.59-68, April, 2014 Published by European Centre for Research Training and Development UK ([www.ea-journals.org](http://www.ea-journals.org) (visited on 2/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Qur’an, Chapter 33 verse 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi quoted in <https://islam.stackexchange.com/questions/12516/what-is-the-definition-of-politics> (visited 2/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/EXTMNAREGTOPGOVERNANCE/0,,contentMDK:20513159~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:497024,00.html> (visited on 2/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/participation> (visited on 2/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/participation> (visited on 2/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/participation> (visited on 2/6/2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://islamqa.info/en/107166>: Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa’imah (23/406, 407): Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn Baaz, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzaaq ‘Afeefi, Shaykh ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Ghadyaan, Shaykh ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Qa’ood.  [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Qur’an, Chapter 12 verse 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Qur’an, Chapter 6 verse 57 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. From Liqaa’aat al-Baab al-Maftooh, no. 210: <http://www.ibnothaimeen.com/all/sound/article_16230.shtml>  [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Standing Committee for Academic Research and Issuing Fatwas: Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn Baaz, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzaaq ‘Afeefi, Shaykh ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Ghadyaan: Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa’imah (1/373). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. And for our purpose, Nigeria [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Qur’an, Chapter 5, verse 49-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Qur’an Chapter 5 verse 57 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/ramadan-2017-china-xiniang-uyghur-muslim-holy-month-islam-fasting-a7765836.html>; http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/ramadan-2017-china-xiniang-uyghur-muslim-holy-month-islam-fasting-a7765836.html (both visited on June 2, 2017). The Chinese government imposed its customary ban on civil servants, teachers and students from fasting during Ramadan in a mainly Muslim region in Northwest China in 2016. In the Xinjiang region where Muslims form 58 percent of the population, restaurants have been ordered to keep normal operating hours. While the majority of Muslims fast from dawn to dusk during the holy months, the Chinese Communist party is officially atheist. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Qur’an Chapter 3 verse 104 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Source: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2361 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Qur’an Chapter 8 verse 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Qur’an Chapter 3 verse 110 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)