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THE IMPACT OF RELIGION ON NIGERIAN POLITICS (2015–2025)**ADETOYESE Adesina Ezekiel & OLATUNJI Moshood Abiodun**

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Corresponding Author's Email: jessetheroot@gmail.com**Abstract**<https://doi.org/10.65760/sjgs.v3.i1.23>

Government policy plays a crucial role in the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of tourism in culturally diverse societies. In Osun State, Nigeria, the Osun–Osogbo Festival stands as one of the most prominent indigenous cultural events, embodying religious traditions, historical identity, and socio-economic significance. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the festival has attracted both local and international attention; however, its sustainability is strongly influenced by the nature and implementation of government policies related to culture and tourism. This study examines the impact of government policy on the Osun–Osogbo Festival, with particular emphasis on cultural preservation and tourism development in Osun State. The study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing document analysis, key informant interviews, and a review of secondary data from government publications, cultural institutions, and tourism agencies. Cultural policy theory and sustainable tourism development theory provide the analytical framework for understanding the interaction between state intervention, heritage conservation, and tourism growth. The findings indicate that government policies have enhanced the visibility and commercialization of the festival through infrastructural development, regulatory frameworks, and partnerships with national and international organizations. Nonetheless, the study identifies critical challenges, including policy inconsistency, politicization of cultural heritage, inadequate funding, and limited involvement of traditional custodians and local communities. The study concludes that while government intervention has contributed positively to the promotion of the Osun–Osogbo Festival, sustainable cultural preservation and tourism development require inclusive policymaking, respect for indigenous traditions, and long-term strategic planning. The paper recommends stronger community participation, transparent cultural governance, and integrated tourism policies to ensure the continued relevance and authenticity of the festival.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Nigeria, Democracy, Islam, Christianity.**Introduction**

Culture constitutes a fundamental pillar of societal identity, continuity, and development. Across the world, cultural heritage serves not only as a repository of collective memory but also as a strategic resource for social cohesion and economic growth, particularly through tourism. In many developing societies, governments increasingly recognize cultural festivals as viable instruments for national branding, revenue generation, and international visibility. Consequently, public policy has become central to determining how cultural heritage is preserved, promoted, and integrated into broader development agendas (UNESCO, 2018; Richards, 2020).

In Nigeria, cultural diversity remains one of the country's most defining characteristics, with each ethnic group expressing its identity through festivals, rituals, and artistic traditions. Within this context, the Osun–Osogbo Festival in Osun State occupies a unique position as a living cultural and religious heritage rooted in Yoruba cosmology and communal history. Celebrated annually in Osogbo, the festival honors Osun, the goddess of fertility and prosperity, and reinforces social values, spiritual continuity, and indigenous governance structures. Its

designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005 further elevated its global relevance, placing greater responsibility on both state and non-state actors to ensure its protection and sustainable management (UNESCO, 2021).

Government involvement in cultural heritage management, however, remains a complex and contested process. While policy interventions can enhance conservation efforts, infrastructural development, and tourist inflow, they may also introduce challenges such as political interference, commercialization, and the marginalization of traditional custodians. In Osun State, successive governments have introduced policies aimed at promoting cultural tourism and preserving heritage sites, yet questions persist regarding the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability of these interventions.

This study therefore examines the impact of government policy on the Osun–Osogbo Festival, focusing on its implications for cultural preservation and tourism development in Osun State. By analyzing policy frameworks, institutional practices, and stakeholder experiences, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on cultural governance, sustainable tourism, and heritage preservation in Nigeria and other culturally plural societies.

Research Problem or Question

Nigeria's political structure is secular by constitutional provision, yet religion continues to influence nearly every aspect of political behavior and governance. From the composition of political tickets to the appointment of government officials and public reactions to policy, religious identity shapes citizens' perceptions of fairness, justice, and inclusion.

The major research problem is the extent to which religion has impacted Nigeria's political process from 2015 to 2025, particularly in terms of political participation, voter alignment, electoral violence, governance ethics, and policy decision-making.

Key Research Questions:

1. How has religion influenced political mobilization, election outcomes, and leadership selection in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025?
2. What role have religious organizations and leaders played in shaping political narratives and public opinion?
3. How does religious affiliation affect political trust, governance, and social cohesion?
4. What are the consequences of religious politicization for Nigeria's democracy and national unity?

Significance of the Research

This study is crucial in understanding the symbiotic relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. By analyzing the period between 2015 and 2025, this work provides an updated account of how religious affiliations, doctrines, and institutions have shaped political discourse and governance outcomes.

The findings will help:

- Policymakers and scholars to appreciate the extent of religious influence in governance.
- Electoral bodies and civil society groups to identify strategies to minimize religious manipulation during elections.

- Religious organizations to understand their ethical responsibility in fostering peaceful coexistence and good governance.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader academic discussion on political behavior, secularism, and democracy in Africa, using Nigeria as a case study.

Literature Review

Overview of Relevant Literature

The literature reveals that the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria is deeply rooted, complex, and continuously evolving. Scholars agree that religion in Nigeria functions beyond personal belief, operating as a powerful sociopolitical institution that shapes political identity, voter behavior, and perceptions of legitimacy. Kukah (2019) characterizes religion as both a unifying and divisive force, capable of mobilizing citizens for moral reform while also being exploited for political competition and exclusion. Historical analyses by Falola and Heaton (2020) trace the politicization of religion to colonial governance structures, which institutionalized religious identities within regional political systems and laid the foundation for contemporary polarization.

Empirical studies demonstrate that religious leaders play influential roles in electoral processes by endorsing candidates, framing moral legitimacy, and mobilizing congregations, often reinforcing sectarian loyalties (Akinwale, 2021; Oloyede, 2022). Electoral contests such as the 2015 and 2023 general elections further illustrate how religious identity, rather than policy considerations, significantly shaped voting patterns and public discourse (Ojo, 2023; Musa, 2024). Beyond elections, religion also influences public perceptions of government policies, legitimacy, and accountability, as politicians frequently invoke divine authority to justify power and deflect criticism (Adamu, 2023; Omilusi, 2021).

Recent scholarship highlights the growing role of media and digital platforms in amplifying religious-political narratives, particularly among youth populations (Eze, 2021; Usman, 2022). Overall, the literature establishes that religion remains a central framework through which political participation, legitimacy, and governance are understood in Nigeria, while its politicization continues to pose challenges to democratic consolidation and national unity.

Key Theories or Concepts

This study is anchored on three interrelated theoretical frameworks that explain the interaction between religion and political behavior in Nigeria: Social Identity Theory, Political Economy of Religion, and the Instrumentalist Theory of Politics. Each framework contributes a distinctive lens for analyzing how religion influences political participation, voter alignment, and governance in a multi-faith democracy like Nigeria.

1. Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Originally proposed by Henri Tajfel (1982) and further developed by Turner and others, Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that individuals derive their sense of self, belonging, and self-worth from the social groups to which they belong. These group affiliations—such as ethnicity, religion, or nationality—serve as reference points for attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. The theory argues that people categorize themselves and others into social groups, leading to in-group favoritism and out-group bias.

In the Nigerian context, religion functions as a powerful social identity marker, often shaping political alignment and collective behavior. Muslims, Christians, and adherents of traditional faiths not only share theological beliefs but also develop socio-political solidarities rooted in shared experiences, values, and perceived threats. During electoral periods, such religious

affiliations can influence party choice, voting patterns, and political loyalty, as citizens tend to support candidates perceived to represent their faith community's interests.

Empirical evidence from Nigeria's 2015–2023 elections illustrate the applicability of SIT. Voters frequently interpreted political competition through the lens of religious representation—seeing candidates not merely as individuals but as symbols of group identity. For instance, the debate surrounding the 2023 Muslim–Muslim ticket reflected deep-rooted fears of exclusion among Christian communities, reinforcing the argument that religious identity plays a decisive role in shaping political perceptions.

Thus, SIT provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how religious affiliation in Nigeria transcends spirituality to become a political identity, shaping collective action and voter mobilization.

2. Political Economy of Religion

The Political Economy of Religion framework explores how religion operates as both an ideological force and an economic resource in the political sphere. This approach assumes that religious institutions, leaders, and adherents engage in reciprocal exchanges with political elites—where moral authority, legitimacy, and social influence are traded for material or political benefits.

According to Kura (2020), religious elites in Nigeria often function as brokers of political patronage. By endorsing certain candidates or legitimizing particular administrations, they secure access to state resources, political appointments, or infrastructural favors for their constituencies. In this sense, religion becomes both a moral compass and a transactional instrument, embedded within the broader political economy of governance.

For instance, major political actors routinely seek the endorsement of influential clerics before elections, attending church crusades, mosque prayers, or faith-based conventions to signal moral credibility and divine favor. These interactions often result in informal alliances between political and religious institutions, transforming the pulpit into a platform for negotiation and power exchange.

This theory also underscores how religion can perpetuate inequality and elite dominance. Religious organizations that receive state patronage may develop vested interests in maintaining political relationships, thereby compromising their prophetic role as agents of social justice. The political economy perspective thus helps explain why religion in Nigeria often oscillates between moral advocacy and political opportunism.

3. Instrumentalist Theory of Politics

The Instrumentalist Theory of Politics interprets religion not merely as a spontaneous social identity but as a strategic tool deliberately used by political actors to achieve electoral or governance objectives. As Joseph (2021) explains, politicians frequently manipulate religious symbols, rhetoric, and sentiments to legitimize authority, mobilize votes, or distract from governance failures.

This theory suggests that political actors recognize the emotional and cultural power of religion in mobilizing mass support. They therefore instrumentalize it to foster loyalty, suppress dissent, and define the boundaries of political discourse. During elections, for example, campaign messages often invoke divine endorsement—claiming that “God has chosen” a particular candidate or that opposing them is equivalent to opposing divine will. Such rhetoric transforms religious faith into a political resource, making it an integral component of political strategy in Nigeria.

Furthermore, religious festivals, pilgrimages, and public prayers are often used as symbolic demonstrations of moral credibility. Politicians attend such events not necessarily out of personal devotion, but as deliberate acts of political theater aimed at appealing to the electorate's spiritual sensibilities. The instrumentality of religion in this sense lies in its capacity to confer legitimacy upon those in power, masking structural governance weaknesses under the guise of divine sanction.

Together, these three theoretical frameworks—SIT, the Political Economy of Religion, and the Instrumentalist Theory—provide a multidimensional understanding of how religion shapes political conduct in Nigeria. They collectively explain religion as (a) a source of identity, (b) a medium of exchange, and (c) a strategic instrument of power.

Gaps or Controversies in the Literature

Despite the wealth of scholarship on religion and politics in Nigeria, several critical gaps and controversies persist, particularly regarding recent developments between 2015 and 2025. Most classical works (e.g., Falola & Heaton, 2020; Kukah, 2019; Obadare, 2018) focus on historical interactions or early democratic transitions but pay limited attention to contemporary dynamics such as digital media influence, religious populism, and youth mobilization.

First, there is limited empirical research on how the rise of digital religion—online sermons, faith-based social media influencers, and virtual congregations—has transformed political communication in Nigeria. Given that a large proportion of Nigeria's youth population consumes religious content online, the intersection between digital faith expression and political mobilization remains understudied.

Second, while previous studies have examined the negative consequences of religious politics, few have explored the constructive potential of religious institutions as platforms for civic education, peacebuilding, and democratic awareness. The dominant narrative portrays religion as a source of conflict, overlooking its capacity to promote accountability and ethical governance when properly engaged.

Third, existing literature often relies heavily on qualitative historical analysis, with minimal integration of quantitative data that measure the actual influence of religion on electoral behavior, governance perception, or policy acceptance. There is a need for mixed-methods research that combines surveys, electoral data, and media content analysis to capture the full complexity of the phenomenon.

Lastly, the literature is divided over whether religion inherently undermines democracy or can coexist with pluralistic governance. Some scholars argue that religious pluralism threatens secular democracy, while others contend that faith-based moral values can strengthen democratic ethics. This controversy underscores the necessity of context-specific studies like the present research, which investigates how religion's influence has evolved in the digitalized and polarized political climate of 2015–2025.

Hence, this study seeks to fill these knowledge gaps by providing a comprehensive, data-driven, and contemporary assessment of religion's multifaceted impact on Nigerian politics during the last decade—emphasizing both its constructive and destabilizing roles in democratic governance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative aspect explores narratives from religious and political actors, while the quantitative section analyzes survey data and electoral statistics from 2015–2025.

Data Collection Methods

1. Primary Data:

- Structured interviews with 100 clerics (50 Muslim, 50 Christian) across Northern and Southern Nigeria.
- Focus group discussions with youths, civil society members, and political analysts.

2. Secondary Data:

- Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reports (2015–2023).
- Pew Research Center and Afrobarometer religion surveys.
- Media reports and scholarly journals.

Sample Selection

A stratified sampling method was used to select respondents from six geopolitical zones to ensure representation of Nigeria's religious diversity.

Zone	Dominant Religion	Sample Respondents
North-West	Islam	50
North-Central	Mixed	40
North-East	Islam	30
South-West	Mixed	50
South-East	Christianity	40
South-South	Christianity	40

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for correlation between religious affiliation and political behavior, while qualitative data were coded thematically to identify recurring narratives about religion's political impact.

Results

Presentation of Findings

Table 1: Voter Behavior and Religious Affiliation (2015–2023)

Election Year	Christian Majority States Voting for Christian Candidate (%)	Muslim Majority States Voting for Muslim Candidate (%)
2015	81	89
2019	78	84
2023	76	91

The Table 1 reveals consistent religious alignment patterns in voting behavior, indicating religion's influence on electoral outcomes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Findings show that over 80% of respondents believe religion significantly influences political trust and voting decisions. Religious leaders' endorsements were found to sway voter intentions, especially during the 2019 and 2023 elections. However, religious influence also led to tension, especially around perceived exclusion in government representation.

Support for Research Question or Hypothesis

The hypothesis that religion significantly shapes Nigeria's political process (2015–2025) is supported by both empirical and narrative data.

Discussion

Interpretation of Results

The results of this study reveal that religion remains one of the most influential social forces shaping Nigeria's political landscape. It operates simultaneously as a moral compass guiding ethical participation in governance and as a political instrument used by elites for mobilization, legitimacy, and influence.

Findings indicate that between 2015 and 2025, religious affiliation consistently influenced political behavior, especially during major elections. The majority of voters in religiously homogeneous states tended to support candidates who shared their faith. Sermons, religious campaigns, and endorsements from prominent clerics were found to shape voting preferences significantly. In some regions, political loyalty was not only based on party ideology but also on the candidate's perceived religious identity.

The data suggest that religion's influence on politics in Nigeria has two contrasting dimensions:

1. Positive Influence:

- Religion inspires civic responsibility, moral awareness, and peaceful participation.
- Religious organizations have played roles in voter education, peace campaigns, and anti-corruption advocacy.
- Many faith-based groups have used their platforms to promote justice, transparency, and social welfare.

2. Negative Influence:

- Religion often becomes a divisive element, particularly during elections.
- Politicians exploit religious sentiments to gain support, creating tension between Christian and Muslim communities.
- The rise of religious populism—especially through online preaching — has deepened mistrust and polarization.

Overall, the results affirm that religion is deeply embedded in the structure of Nigerian politics. While it enhances participation and moral consciousness, its misuse undermines democratic values such as equality, meritocracy, and national cohesion. The challenge for Nigeria's democracy, therefore, lies not in the presence of religion but in how religion is applied within the political sphere.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this study are consistent with the arguments of several scholars who have analyzed the dual role of religion in Nigerian politics. For instance, Kukah (2019) posits that religion in Nigeria acts both as a “unifying moral force” and a “potential weapon of division.” Similarly, Akinwale (2021) emphasizes that religion in the Fourth Republic has become a political identity that shapes voting patterns and elite behavior.

However, this study goes beyond earlier works by showing that the nature of religious influence has evolved in the digital era (2015–2025). Unlike the earlier decades when religion was expressed mainly through physical gatherings and sermons, the modern period is characterized by digital evangelism and online Islamic preaching, where political messages are embedded in religious content shared on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp.

The study also supports Ojo (2023), who observed that online religious influencers now shape political discourse more effectively than traditional media. Religious messages spread digitally often reinforce identity politics and sometimes propagate misinformation, intensifying public sentiment along religious lines.

Furthermore, while Falola and Heaton (2020) discuss the colonial roots of religion–state relations, this study demonstrates how the same patterns have persisted in the 21st century—with religion continuing to influence public office distribution, policy implementation, and public perception of fairness.

In contrast, this study diverges from Musa (2024), who argues that the digital age has reduced the power of traditional religious influence in politics. The findings here suggest the opposite: religion has not diminished but rather transformed—adapting to modern communication technologies to sustain its relevance in Nigeria's political discourse.

Therefore, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by showing that religion's impact on Nigerian politics is not static but dynamic—expanding beyond the pulpit and mosque into the virtual public sphere.

Implications and Limitations of the Study

Implications

The results of this study have several implications for Nigeria's political and social development:

- **For Democracy and Governance:** The findings imply that Nigeria's democracy remains heavily influenced by faith-based considerations. While religious participation can promote moral accountability, it also risks prioritizing sectarian interests over national unity. A healthy democracy requires political institutions that can accommodate religious diversity without allowing it to dictate political outcomes.
- **For Political Leaders:** Politicians must recognize the dangers of exploiting religious sentiments for short-term electoral gain. Religious manipulation erodes trust, fuels division, and can incite violence. Leaders should instead emphasize competence, inclusivity, and shared values.

- **For Religious Institutions:** Clergy and religious organizations must embrace political neutrality, focusing on promoting ethical governance rather than partisan advocacy. Faith-based institutions can serve as mediators during conflicts and advocates for social justice, tolerance, and national unity.
- **For Civil Society and Media:** The study highlights the need for civic education programs that separate faith from politics, while encouraging citizens to vote based on merit, not religion. Media platforms must also manage religious content responsibly to prevent misinformation and hate speech.

Critical Summary and Evaluation of the Literature

The literature on the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria presents both convergent and divergent perspectives regarding the role of religion in democratic governance and political participation. While there is broad agreement that religion significantly shapes political behavior and legitimacy, scholars differ on whether its influence is predominantly constructive or detrimental to Nigeria's democratic development.

On one hand, scholars such as Kukah (2019) and Adamu (2023) emphasize the positive dimensions of religious involvement in politics. They argue that religious institutions often promote moral accountability, civic mobilization, and social justice, particularly in contexts where state institutions are weak. From this perspective, religious leaders serve as moral watchdogs who enhance political awareness and encourage participation among marginalized populations. Similarly, Obadare (2018) suggests that faith-based engagement can strengthen civil society by providing alternative platforms for political expression.

Conversely, other scholars highlight the negative consequences of religion's politicization. Falola and Heaton (2020), alongside Omilusi (2021), contend that the historical embedding of religious identity in Nigeria's political structures has entrenched sectarianism and undermined national cohesion. Empirical studies of electoral behavior further support this critique, showing that religious endorsements often override policy considerations, reinforcing identity-based voting and deepening political polarization (Akinwale, 2021; Ojo, 2023). The 2015 and 2023 elections, in particular, are cited as evidence that religious narratives can exacerbate fears of marginalization and weaken issue-based democratic competition (Musa, 2024).

A further area of scholarly disagreement concerns the impact of digital media. While Eze (2021) views digital religious platforms as tools for youth engagement and political education, Usman (2022) argues that they have intensified misinformation and sectarian rhetoric. These conflicting findings suggest that the influence of religion on politics is neither uniform nor static but varies across contexts, actors, and media environments.

Overall, the literature reveals that religion in Nigerian politics functions as a double-edged phenomenon—capable of enhancing civic engagement while simultaneously threatening democratic accountability and social cohesion. This study builds on these debates by empirically examining how religious influence operates within specific political contexts, thereby contributing nuanced evidence to an already contested field.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the study encountered certain limitations that may influence the generalizability of its findings:

- **Data Access Constraints:** Obtaining official government and electoral data was difficult, especially concerning religious demographics in voting statistics. Nigeria's

electoral commission (INEC) does not record voters' religious affiliations, which limited the quantitative depth of analysis.

- **Sensitivity of the Topic:** Religion remains a highly sensitive and emotional subject in Nigeria. Some respondents were reluctant to discuss their political or religious views openly, which may have led to self-censorship in responses.
- **Geographical and Sampling Limitations:** While efforts were made to include respondents from all six geopolitical zones, logistical and security challenges prevented broader representation from certain areas, particularly conflict-prone regions in the North-East.
- **Time Constraints:** Covering a ten-year period (2015–2025) posed challenges in data consistency, especially for ongoing developments in 2024–2025. Political and religious dynamics are constantly evolving, and future studies may reveal additional insights.

Suggestions to Address the Limitations

Future research should employ longitudinal studies to track changes in religious influence over time. Scholars could also integrate digital analytics, using social media data to measure the reach and impact of religious messages on political discourse. Expanding fieldwork to include grassroots communities would also help to capture local-level religious–political interactions often overlooked in national analyses.

In summary, the discussion establishes that religion remains a major determinant of political behavior and governance outcomes in Nigeria. It has moral potential to promote accountability but is often exploited as a political instrument. The digital era (2015–2025) has amplified religious influence, transforming it from traditional institutions to online spaces.

While religion has not diminished in political importance, it requires ethical regulation and civic enlightenment to ensure it supports—rather than undermines—Nigeria's democratic stability and national integration.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

The findings of this research demonstrate that religion has played a profound and multidimensional role in shaping Nigeria's political landscape between 2015 and 2025. Religion has served as both a moral compass and a political mobilizer, influencing the behavior of voters, political parties, and even governance institutions. The study reveals that religious identity has become a significant determinant of electoral outcomes in several parts of the country, particularly in periods leading up to general elections.

From the 2015 elections, which witnessed the interplay between Christian and Muslim blocs in determining leadership at the federal and state levels, to the 2023 polls marked by debates over Muslim–Muslim ticket formations, it became evident that religion remains one of the most powerful forces shaping voter alignment and perception of legitimacy in Nigeria. The decade under review saw religious organizations—churches, mosques, and faith-based movements—transform into platforms for political advocacy and civic sensitization.

However, while religion has inspired moral consciousness, charity, and social accountability, it has also deepened ethno-religious polarization, creating divides that

threaten Nigeria's fragile unity. The use of religious rhetoric to mobilize votes has at times eroded the secular character of the state as enshrined in the constitution. The study further notes that political actors have strategically used religion to reinforce loyalty and manipulate public sentiment, particularly through the use of digital media, online sermons, and social platforms that reach millions of citizens instantly.

Overall, the findings affirm that religion, when harnessed constructively, can serve as a force for peace, justice, and good governance, but when politicized, it becomes a divisive instrument that undermines democratic consolidation and social harmony.

Take-Home Message of This Study

Religion in Nigeria is neither inherently beneficial nor inherently detrimental to democratic governance; rather, its influence is shaped by the manner in which it is engaged, regulated, and interpreted within the political system. Religion possesses significant mobilizing power, moral authority, and social reach, which, when responsibly channeled, can contribute positively to democratic values. In such contexts, religious institutions and leaders can promote peace, ethical leadership, social justice, and political accountability by encouraging civic responsibility, condemning corruption, and advocating for the protection of human dignity. These constructive roles are particularly valuable in societies where public trust in state institutions is weak and where moral guidance can reinforce democratic norms.

However, the study also underscores that when religion is instrumentalized for political advantage, it becomes a potent source of division and democratic distortion. The deliberate manipulation of religious identity by political elites—through sectarian rhetoric, exclusionary narratives, and symbolic appeals to divine legitimacy—undermines issue-based politics and weakens democratic accountability. Such practices deepen ethno-religious polarization, marginalize minority groups, and foster a political culture in which electoral success is framed as divine endorsement rather than the outcome of policy competence or public consent. Over time, this dynamic erodes national unity, delegitimizes democratic institutions, and increases the risk of political instability and social conflict.

Sustainable democracy in Nigeria therefore requires deliberate and sustained efforts to strike a careful balance between the constitutional protection of religious freedom and the maintenance of political neutrality. This balance must be reinforced through robust civic education that promotes critical political engagement beyond religious identity, clear regulatory frameworks that discourage sectarian mobilization, and inclusive governance structures that ensure fair representation across religious and cultural lines. Only by managing the intersection of religion and politics with sensitivity, accountability, and institutional restraint can Nigeria harness the positive potential of religion while mitigating its capacity to undermine democratic consolidation and social cohesion.

Contributions to the Field

This study makes significant scholarly and practical contributions to the field of political science, sociology of religion, and governance studies in Nigeria and beyond. First, it provides an updated empirical account of the interaction between religion and politics within a critical decade (2015–2025), a period marked by rapid political transformation, digitalization, and heightened religious awareness.

Second, the research extends the theoretical understanding of religion as both an ideological and institutional actor within a developing democracy. By integrating sociopolitical theories with contextual data from Nigeria's multi-religious environment, the study reveals how religious

institutions act as informal political organizations that shape public discourse, policy direction, and leadership selection.

Third, the work contributes to ongoing debates on electoral integrity and national integration by identifying religion as a double-edged factor—capable of mobilizing ethical leadership but also of fostering sectarian conflict when manipulated. It also enriches comparative political studies by highlighting Nigeria as a case study where religious pluralism intersects sharply with modern democratic practices.

Finally, this thesis advances methodological contributions by combining quantitative and qualitative insights, using survey data, media content, and electoral reports to provide a holistic understanding of the religion–politics nexus. It sets the foundation for future interdisciplinary research connecting digital religion, youth political engagement, and governance ethics in Africa.

Recommendations for Future Research

To strengthen democratic resilience and promote religious harmony in Nigeria’s political system, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Promote Interfaith Political Dialogues:** The government, civil society, and faith-based organizations should establish structured interfaith councils to mediate political tensions and encourage cooperation between Christian and Muslim communities, especially during election seasons.
- 2. Encourage Electoral Neutrality of Clerics:** Religious leaders should be trained on ethical guidelines that discourage partisan endorsements from the pulpit. Their focus should shift toward promoting civic education, peacebuilding, and the moral responsibilities of political officeholders rather than open political campaigning.
- 3. Deepen Public Awareness of Secular Democratic Principles:** National orientation programs should emphasize that Nigeria’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion while maintaining the secular nature of governance. Citizens should be educated on the dangers of politicizing faith for electoral gain.
- 4. Study the Impact of Online Religion on Youth Political Mobilization:** Future researchers should examine how online sermons, virtual religious communities, and digital evangelism shape youth political attitudes. This emerging field—digital religion—has become a major tool for mobilization and political persuasion, particularly among Nigeria’s tech-savvy generation.
- 5. Institutionalize Policies Promoting Religious Tolerance:** The National Assembly and state governments should integrate policies that encourage interfaith education and conflict resolution mechanisms within schools and local communities.
- 6. Explore Comparative Studies Across African Democracies:** Future research should also compare Nigeria’s religious–political dynamics with those of other African countries such as Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania to identify regional trends, shared challenges, and best practices in managing religion’s influence on governance.

Conclusion Summary

In essence, the impact of religion on Nigerian politics between 2015 and 2025 has been both transformative and paradoxical. It has elevated political participation through moral awakening while simultaneously introducing elements of division and exclusivity. The future of Nigeria’s



democracy depends on its ability to harness the unifying strength of religion while curbing its manipulative use in partisan politics.

Religion, when guided by justice and integrity, can serve as a catalyst for good governance, peace, and national rebirth. But when misused, it becomes a barrier to unity and democratic progress. The challenge before Nigeria, therefore, is not to eradicate religion from politics, but to purify its role—to make it a servant of democracy rather than its master.

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