EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY OF RELIGION AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A POLITICAL CULTURE PERSPECTIVE

FATOYINBO Victoria Iyelola[1] and **OLONADE Eyitayo Oluyinka[2]**

ABSTRACT

In Nigeria context, religion and politics are deeply intertwined. Pre-colonial traditional rulers combined religious and political roles, while the advent of Islam and Christianity further reshaped political structures and became vehicles for political mobilization, and in post-independence Nigeria, religion continues to influence voting patterns, political appointments, public policy, and even conflicts and violence. The controversies surrounding Sharial law in the North, Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle Belt, and the use of religious platforms for political campaigns demonstrate the persistent and complex relationship between the sacred and the secular in Nigerian politics. It cannot be overstated that religion has always played a significant role in Nigerian politics, particularly since the country won its independence. This paper therefore employed political culture, functionalist and conflict theories to examine the influence of religion on political culture of the Nigerian people. The study adopts a qualitative research design using document analysis for better understanding of the study. The paper therefore concludes and recommend that every religion should get involved in politics and allow their religious virtues to shape their personality to reflect the characteristics of their creator to improve Nigeria society's political space. It is therefore, recommended among many other things that regulatory frameworks should be implemented to promote interfaith cooperation, and an ideal political culture that is conducive to the socio-economic development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Religious Politics, Culture and Political Culture,

[1] **prettylolaem@g-mail.com 08032958532; Political Science Department Ajayi Crowther University,Oyo, Oyo State**

[2] tayo02hero@gmail.com **08034113535; Political Science Department Ajayi Crowther University,Oyo, Oyo State**

Introduction

The interplay between religion and politics is not a new phenomenon, from the early civilizations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, through the medievial papacy in Europe, to the Islamic caliphates and African traditional kingdoms, religion has served as both a foundation and a challenge to political authority. How religion affects political Culture is a collection of ideas, practices, values, and stories that are all entrenched in culture. Just as religion cannot be understood in isolation from its cultural and political contexts, it is practically impossible to understand a culture without considering its religious dimensions. However, as the race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic class are always factors in cultural interpretation and understanding, so also is religion (Harvard Divinity School, 2018). According to Cuba (2015), religion, like other closely-held opinions/beliefs/thoughts, affects political culture in the following ways;

Firstly it creates voting blocks, it does not however guarantees that everyone who identifies with religion X or denomination Y or group Z will vote the same way but in practice we see this happening. Secondly, political cultures have an emotional impact on how laws/executive orders are made, by having individuals in positions of power and by having legislators who have no direct affiliation with a religious group and who can, at least, stop and consider their response to any specific legislation or position. Didonato (2018) maintains that as much as secular governments strive for a clean break between religion and politics, the two do in actuality mix in multifaceted ways. On the political end, religion can powerfully influence which party a person votes for, and even campaigns for. When we talk of religion and political culture in Nigeria, therefore, we are referring to the manner in which religion influences the political viewpoints, attitudes and choices of Nigerians as seen in their involvement in politics, especially party politics, and in their political affiliations and choices. This is a very broad issue we cannot exhaustively discuss within the scope of this paper, and so we will narrow our attention, in this study, to the question, "In what ways does religion influence political culture in Nigerians?"

Conceptual Clarification

Religion

Historical Background of Religion in Nigeria's Political Space-Nigeria's political landscape has been shaped by external forces of colonialism, globalization and foreign policies. The pre-colonial era was characterised by tolerance with politicians frequently entwined with religious authority. However, the introduction of Christianity and Islam by colonial powers significantly influenced Nigeria's religious composition. Islam established a stronghold throughout the nation prior to the British invasion extending from the Sokoto Caliphate, the Borno empire, to the Yoruba land and all the way down to Lagos' Atlantic coast (Oshewolo and Maren, 2015). The exposure of northern communities to Islam was mainly took

place through the trans-Saharan trade route (Nolte, Danjibo and Oladeji, 2014:10). The early contacts between Islam and Northern Nigeria led to the supremacy of Islam in Hausa-Fulani cities before colonization. Usman Dan Fodio (1754–1817) led a jihad in the 19th century that revitalized Islam, and he united a sizable portion of northern Nigeria under a new caliphate. Through voluntarily converted Yoruba people and connections to Malian commercial groups, Islam also reached the Yoruba people in southwest Nigeria (Omilusi, 2015).

Conversely, Christianity arrived alongside colonialists who served as imperialist agents. Coastal cities like Lagos and the ethnic communities in southeast Nigeria saw a greater concentration and intensity of European Christian missionaries' activities as well as those of freed and returned slaves. As a result, as Christian evangelism and education proliferated, Christianity emerged as the predominant religion in southeast Nigeria (Emelonye, 2011). The gradual destruction of African traditional religion appeared imminent as independent missionary workers occupied Southern Nigeria, and as they made their way through the Northern minorities. Prior to these times, traditional African religions dominated all political activities and Chief priests were well-known chiefs with great authority. The arrival of Christianity and Islam during colonialism resulted in a regional religious division like the Northern People's Congress.

Post-independence politicians continued to use religious rhetoric and identity politics to garner support demonstrating the continued influence of religion in politics. Nigerian politics continued to manipulate religion as evidenced by the rise to prominence of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Sir Ahmadu Bello as leaders of the country's western, eastern and northern regions. Islam controlled the North while Christianity continued to have more sway in the South. Since the majority of people in the North were from royal families who controlled all aspects of Northern politics and were heavily influenced by Islam, the problem of the politicization of religion was more evident there than in other parts of the country (Oshewolo and Maren, 2015). Under the second republic, this took on a new turn as the political intrigue turned into the defense of 'Northern interest', which was perceived as merelya ruse to win over the region's minority, both Muslim and non-Muslim (Oshewolo and Maren, 2015). 'Northern interest' served to unite the Northern political actors who had previously been divided by politics. Kukah (1993:5) refers to this political manoeuvre as 'conscription politics.' Presently, global factors like terrorism by Boko-Haram have led to security issues and political instability while conditionalities for foreign aid, and for governance frameworks of the United Nations and African Union has influenced Nigeria's perspective on human rights and democracy.

Throughout history, different academicians have endeavoured to define

religion based on their own subject matter perspectives. However, owing to the ambiguity of religion, there is no widely acknowledged definition. Etymologically, the term 'religion' derives from the Latin word 'religare', which means to bind. According to Okwueze (2003), religion can be understood as a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experience, beliefs and knowledge are reflected in man's conception of himself in relation to others, his social world, the physical as well as the metaphysical world. From both functional and substantive angles, the term 'religion' can be extensively construed. According to the former, religion plays in the sociocultural evolution of humans while the latter clarifies the enigma surrounding religion (Oguntola-Laguda, 2015). Yinger defines religion as, "A system of beliefs and practices through which a group of people struggles with problems of human existence," (Van der Leew, 1963).

Similarly, Durkheim defined religion as, "A unified system of beliefs and practices which are related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church all those who adhere to them," (Durkheim, 1915). Given that religion is ingrained in human nature, religion and human affairs particularly politics are inextricable. From the functionalist definition of religion, it can be deduced that religion can promote socioeconomic development or vice versa depending on how it is used. It has significant social aspects and effects which may be perceived favourably or unfavourably based on how people respond to and embraces the laws, doctrines, precepts and principles that are the foundation of religion (Oguntola-Laguda, 2015).Similar to ethnicity, religion is the cornerstone of African culture since it defines its adherents' universe, gives them purpose, and access to the abilities which help them to understand and interpret both the material and spiritual worlds. In addition, it gives its members a feeling of safety and well being. Furthermore, it empowers them to protect their bodily and spiritual integrity from outside threats (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017).

Religion is more than just a way of life in some countries; it is the basic constitutional law of some countries. States like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Vatican are religious, not secular states. Religious concepts and codes dictate the affairs of such countries. Theocracy, not full-scale democracy, is practised in such Countries where the supreme leaders are invariable religious leaders. According to Boyer (2017),"If religion is the opiate of the masses, these countries know how to get high". Emphasizing further, she said; According to data from the 2017 Best Countries rankings, a representation of 80 countries centered on a survey of more than 21,000 global citizens, Saudi Arabia is observed to be the most religious country in the world. With theocratic monarchy and a legal system based on Islamic Sharia law, her citizens can receive harsh punishments, including death, for apostasy and blasphemy. The Vatican City, also called the Holy See, is the only place in the world where we

have a full theocratic monarchy based on Christian religion. Although within a geographic state (Italy), the Vatican functions as in independent State, with the Pope functioning as its King and head of government. Under international law, the Holy See is allowed to enter into certain international agreements; however, it does not operate under civil laws since it is not a civil state but an absolute monarchy in control of the Roman Catholic Church, ruling according to the Apostolic Constitution of 1967 (Encyclopedia of Nations 2018).

Politics

Politics, which is an act or process of governance or, put differently, a settled pattern of administration. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines politics as "referring or relating to government, or the conduct of government, relating to, or concerned with the making as distinguished from the administration of governmental policy and relating to, involving, or involved in politics and especially party politics." In his book, The Sociology of Religion, Thomas F. O'Dea (1970) said, "Religion, like culture, is a symbolic transformation of experience."

The art and practice of governance decision-making, power distribution, and leadership within a society Easton, 1965). Politics determines how authority is exercised and resources are allocated. Your ideas of politics are determined not by your studies but by what you have seen and heard and associated with politics. Most of us equate politics with the stereotypical politician and because of

this, most of us have the view that the nature of politics is power-hungry, self-seeking, corrupt, and, in some cases, violent. These ideas come from our socialization, as well as from our exposure to social forces and our own experiences with politicians. Therefore, it is understandable that this is the way in which we define politics. However, that it is understandable does not mean that it is justifiable. It is no more justifiable to equate the nature of politics with corruption, self-seeking behaviour, violence, and power hunger than it is to equate the nature of Islam with terrorism. You cannot determine the nature of a phenomenon on the basis of how people who claim to practice it act. For example, how would we regard Christianity if we were to define Christianity on the basis on what has been done in the name of Christianity over the years? Remember that people were enslaved in the name of Christianity as a means of bringing civilization to them. We were told that we were colonized in the name of Christianity because we were inferior and we needed to be made superior by virtue of foreign rule. Nobody could reasonably define Christianity in terms of slavery and colonialism. The nature of politics as we would consider it from our political socialization would lead us to define politics as anything that has to do with the government of a country – elections and so on. This definition is very similar to that found in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (ninth edition): "the art and science of government". This short definition was thought to be acceptable for a very long time, and therefore two or three subjects were seen as marking up

political studies: the study of the constitution, constitutional law, and political philosophy. This definition has become inadequate from an academic point of view because of the developments and change s in political life.

Culture

Culture rules virtually every aspect of an individual's life, which is why it is commonly referred to as a way of life of the people. Culture is dynamic because it allows its members to function through relating with each other without the need to discuss the implications of being together at every moment. Culture is learned and unwittingly expressed, so regardless of its importance we are generally unconscious of its effect on how we perceive the world and interact within it (Global Affairs Canada, 2014).Anthropologist E.B. Taylor referred to culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society," a definition which Griswold notes is the "anthropological definition of culture" (Griswold, 2012).A diagnosis of these three concepts, namely, religion, politics and culture, reveals that, in the context of this study's topic, they are bound in a strong, interwoven relationship in the sense that religion can bond and inspire individuals in the direction of a mutual goal or common belief system; this set of common beliefs can influence their worldview, attitudes and social behavior (culture), which in turn, might become a

prism through which they assess social options and make leadership decisions as to how their society is governed (politics). In generating this string of relationships, religion appears to exert a force greater than what no political factor could generally accomplish. Culture, as a concept, is all-embracing, in the sense that it is a way of life of a people in terms of their collectivist orientation that manifests in their individual or group social expressions.

Political Culture

The 1963 book "The Civic Culture" by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba is credited with popularizing the term 'political culture', and the study was a traditional comparative examination of political beliefs and democratic practices across five nations (Odoemelam and Aisien, 2013). Marshall (1996) defines political culture as, "The norms, values and symbols that help to legitimize the political power system of a society." Ofoeze (2001) citing Rosenbaun noted that there are two ways to describe political culture: at the levels of individual citizens and political system as a whole. With reference to the individual level, political culture refers to "All the important ways in which a person is subjectively oriented towards the essential element in the political system" while the collective orientation of a person towards the basic elements in their political system is its definition in relation to the political system as a whole (Ofoeze, 2001).

Political culture is described as, "The attitudes, beliefs and values which

underpin the operation of a particular political system." These were seen as including knowledge and skill about the operation of the political system, positive and negative feelings towards it, and evaluative judgments about the system' (McLean and McMillan, 2009). Political culture refers to formal customs, traditions, and political behaviours which are passed down from generations to generation, and it incorporates well-established political traits that characterize a society (Udim, 2014). Political culture is also the culmination of the subjective and psychological aspects of politics (Jatula, 2019). It probes the political relationship between actors, actions and outcomes. It is also deemed as the collection of attitudes, convictions and feelings that provide a political process structure and purpose as well as the fundamental presumptions and guidelines that direct behaviour inside the political system (Yusuf, 2022). Since political culture can be intrinsically based on positive orientations that produce norms, values, beliefs and attitudes that uphold the political power structure, constructive political socialization is needed (Odoemelam and Aisien, 2013). This underscores the pertinence of acclimatization of citizens on the fundamental components of politic culture.

In their research, Almond and Verba distinguished three categories of political cultures namely: participant, subject and parochial political cultures. In participant political culture, people comprehend politics and engage in them. However, in subject political culture, people generally follow the law, but they don't get involved much because they regard themselves as subjects of the state rather than as participants in politics. Lastly, in parochial political culture, people vaguely understand that there is a central government, but they have no knowledge or interest in politics. Political cultures are important because they influence not just the political attitudes and behaviours of a populace but also the course of regimes. They offer a framework for comprehending legitimacy, power, authority, and policy. They also have a significant impact on the election processes and democratic growth of a state (Jatula, 2019).

Religious Politics in Nigeria

In Nigeria, religious politics is a well-known phenomenon. Religion has been a significant factor in political expression in Nigeria; it influences the style of governance, policy formulation, and the electoral process. Religion's influence on politics in Nigeria may be both beneficial and detrimental. According to Umeanolue (2019), just as religion boosts national development, it also has the potential to hinder it. In the Nigerian society, there is a clear connection between politics and religion. The connection between religion and politics has been established for a long time, even though the actual role religion plays in politics is still up for debate. In Nigeria, people are not seen as being good or bad because of their religion; rather, religion is exploited by politicians to deceive, divide, and oppress the people. The majority of Nigerians are aware of this oppression but appear to have accepted it as their fate, an attitude

exacerbated by poverty, illiteracy, and lack of political education (Falana, 2010). Religion has always played a big role in politics in Nigeria, especially since the country gained independence. No matter how religion is viewed, its connection to politics in Nigeria cannot be denied. There are numerous competing religions for relevance and recognition in addition to the three major religions—Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Religion. Despite this fact, Nigeria remains, theoretically, a secular state since independence.

Alternatively, Section 38(1) states that: Every person shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the freedom to change his (sic) religion or belief, and (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his (sic) religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Additionally, Section 275(1) of the Nigerian Constitution recognized Nigerians' right to Shari'a law, stating: "There must be for any state that requires it a Shari'a Court of Appeal for that state." Additionally, Section 260(1) states that Abuja would house the Federal Capital Territory's Sharia Court of Appeal. The Nigerian constitution has always been influenced by religion directly or indirectly. Political parties since 1999, at the advent of the fourth republic, has tried to play the religious game in politics by projecting candidates who represent the two major religions, Islam and Christianity, for election at the national and, in most cases, sub-national levels.

Regarding presidential elections, in 1999 all the presidential candidates of the political parties either has a Christian presidential candidate and a Muslim vice presidential candidate or vice versa. This trend has been consistent, as witnessed in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 presidential elections in Nigeria. However, that of 2023 was different as a political party, the All Progressive Party (APC), projected a Muslim-Muslim joint presidential ticket. That action generated a series of reactions; some saw it as a threat to the peaceful coexistence of both religions while others saw it as a way of discouraging Nigerians from judging candidates by their religious orientations. These reactions and counter-reactions are similar to those of 1993 in the aborted third republic, where the then Social Democratic Party (SDP) also had a Muslim-Muslim ticket; the controversy ended with the annulment of that election. According to Akinwunmi (2022), Bola Tinubu and Kashim Shettima, who were the APC presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 2023 election, have consistently defended themselves thus: We are not coming into government to represent the Muslim or Christian faith. The Sultan of Sokoto and the CAN President are competent to represent their faiths.

Since political culture is expressed in how the electorates perceive the political parties and their candidates react to political process. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) argued that religion was vital for politics as "religion drives people to obedience, makes them familiar with laws and how to live in a peaceful

society. Alluding to Hobbes position, Montesquieu (1689-1755) also had a firm belief that religion should be part of politics as "religion provides unity, harmony and social stability for society". Therefore, it can be categorically said that religion affects political culture. This view is supported by available literature that indicates that over many centuries religion has proved to be a very powerful concept that commands total devotion and partly or totally influences the political choices of its adherents. Religion fills such an important vacuum in the life of an individual that, sometimes, someone who had stopped believing in one particular religion may be pulled, like the people of Athens that Apostle Paul referred to who were "worshipping the unknown god" (Acts17:23), towards relying on another form of faith. This could be why Machiavelli believed that "religion was the foundation of state and society". This may also, remotely, explain why, in Nigeria, religion and political culture appear inseparable.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Political Culture Theory

Political systems does not exist in a vacuum. It was developed during the behavioral revolution of the 1950s-60s when political scientist sought to explain politics beyond institutions by focusing on political behavior. The functioning of any government and the nature of its politics are shaped by the beliefs, values , orientations and attitudes of its citizens towards political life. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in their ground breaking work "The Civic Culture (1963), offers a framework for understanding these attitudes and how they influence political institutions and processes. It provides empirical foundations for the concept. They argue that democracy is sustained not only by institutions but also by supportive political culture that encourages both participation and legitimacy. This theory is relevant in multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria where religion and ethnicity and history interact to shape political participation, legitimacy and governance. This theory is a pattern of orientations towards political subjects encompassing citizens knowledge of, feelings about and evaluation of their political system. Political culture is informal deeply rooted in the society and often pass from one generation to the other through socialization processes such as family, religion, education and media. unlike political institution which are formal. They were able to identify three types of political culture which are parochial, subjective and participant political culture. They opine that in practice most society exhibits these three types of political culture and called these combination a "civic culture"

The theory consist of attitudinal nature which concerns with beliefs , values and feelings, collectivity which is orientation within a community, stability and continuity although cultures can change but political culture persist overs time and influence on behavior which shapes

individuals participation in either to obey of resist the political authority.

Religion and Politics Interplay

The relationship between religion and politics continues in the direction of being an important theme in political philosophy, despite the developing consensus among political theorists and the cordial management of both in practical political contexts, such as the United Nations. That there is a need for some kind of separation between church and state and also the right to freedom of conscience. A unique reason for the importance of this topic is that religion over and over again makes strong claims on people's allegiance, and universal religion makes these claims on all people, rather than just a particular community. For instance, Islam has traditionally held that all people owe obedience to Allah's will. Consequently, it is probably inevitable that religious commitments will sometimes come into conflict with the demands of politics. Nonetheless, religious beliefs and practices also hypothetically support politics in many ways (IEP, 2018; Lane, 1992). The influence of religion on world politics is complex.

It is abundantly obvious that the leaders and foreign policies of theocratic countries like Iran and Afghanistan are influenced by their religious doctrines. They routinely spring up international challenges and conditions that cannot be detached from their domestic and foreign policies. The role of religion as a source of public legitimacy is highlighted by the importance of moral pleas made by religious figures like the Dalai Lama and the Pope (Fox, 2001;Golan, & Martini, 2020). Politics and religion both function as "living system", which means they may evolve and adapt to their surroundings just like people do. When combined, the two have a profound impact on people, neighborhoods, nations, and even the entire world.

Politics and religion coexist in a symbiotic connection with the capacity to both help and hurt the other. Every group in human society has a set of beliefs that it has developed with the aid of religious principles (Ivy Panda, 2022). These beliefs frequently influence how people behave politically within a given political system. The media will always assess a politician's life in light of specific religious ideas. These values are based on religious morality and convictions. Here in Nigeria, a candidate for office is classified as either a Christian or a Muslim. The number of votes a political figure might gain in an election depends on their religion. Politicians in the United States identify with Christianity since the majority of voters are Christians. Apolitical figure in the Arab world must identify with Islam because it is the predominant religion in the area. Before a political leader is chosen, there religious factions must also be made apparent. In some nations, religion plays a significant role in every election year. Certain religious affiliations are seen to be connected to cultural values that influence how well leaders operate in any political system. When it was reported

that Obama was a Muslim, the question of religion became more prominent in the United States. Obama almost lost the election due to concerns that he might promote Muslim interests, if elected. The president allayed concerns, though, by affirming that he was a Christian (Fox, 2001; Golan & Martini,2020; Ivy Panda, 2022).

The Role of Religion in shaping Nigeria's Political Culture

Many people have misconstrued religion's purposes by limiting it only to responses to cosmic forces and god manifestations as well as communicating with supernatural and cosmic forces (Familusi, 2012). However, throughout history, religion and politics have been closely linked. This can be seen in the histories of the Mesopotamian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires as well as ancient Egypt and Greece. Following the collapse of the Roman Empire, this practice persisted in the feudal nations (Oyetunbi and Akinrinde, 2021). In a similar manner, in Nigeria, religion plays a significant role in people's lives. As evidenced by our constitution, the influence of religious leaders as well as our political and electoral processes is very crucial in the course of the nation's administrative history (Adamo, 2018). As an agent of socialization institution, religion has been harnessed to inform the political culture. Additionally, it has been applied to constructive orientations that provide standards, ideals, convictions and dispositions that uphold Nigerian democracy.

Furthermore, religion has always have influence on Nigerian elections either explicitly or covertly as it plays a significant role in each and every stage of the process (Familusi,2012). Recognizing that religious rhetoric and affiliations are used to pick candidates, political office aspirants use religious sentiments to court the support of the electorate. This heightened the discourse on Muslim/Muslim or Christian/Muslim tickets that ensued before the presidential election of February, 2023. Electioneering activities are common among religious leaders usually backed by prophecies. In 2011, Pastor Chris Okotie who was a presidential aspirant and General Overseer (G.O) of Household of God Church, unsuccessfully foretold that he would emerge as winner of the election.

However, religious organizations have only consistently or uniformly supported democratic processes in Nigeria. Sometimes, conversely, they have on some occasions displayed anti-democratic tendencies that have been manifested in acts of religious intolerance and violence as well as in the religious practices are dysfunctional since they have negative consequences that contradict with Nigeria's objectives. Prior to, and during elections, political figures promise different religious claims and allegiances to use it as a major tool for achieving their political goals, and they use it to gain political power. As a result, churches and mosques have become fertile political stages where politicians swarm to obtain 'blessings,' and clerics

openly order the faithful to vote for particular candidates (Emeaku, 2019). In order to divide the populace and maintain tension in the nation, political elites employ religious fanaticism and favouritism as their means of getting win over their rivals. The result of this tension creating has been witnessed in a widespread politically motivated and ethno religious killings and kidnappings. As it has been mentioned by Emeaku (2019), that destructive disputes, politicians, policy makers and religious leaders frequently use religion as a deciding factor in deciding who gets what, when and how in public and private offices. Not only this, but it also has a significant impact on the course of government policy. Omilusi (2015) assert that following elections, political gladiators and religious stakeholders undermine public interests as a result of the intrigue and complexities that go into the process. In the same vein, voters choose their candidates solely based on their religious affiliation.

Since religion has reportedly become the crux of cultures, it upholds social standards, and it makes it impracticable to question the gravity of faith or the dedication of the majority of Nigerians to their religious convictions (Emeaku, 2019). Eschatological teachings inherent in religion as well as the antecedents of past politicians, have led to the demonization of politics, and its portrayal as a dirty game. Thus, rather than actively mobilizing the people to engage in politics, religion sometimes alienates its adherents from politics, exacerbating political apathy.

FINDINGS

Religion's influence on politics especially on political culture of the people in Nigeria has been both beneficial and detrimental. According to Umeanolue (2019), just as religion boosts national development, it also has the potential to hinder it. Therefore there are prospects and challenges of religion on politics as discussed below.

A. The Prospect

1. Mobilization and Civic Participation

Religious associations in Nigeria have loudly and consistently condemned bad government policies or actions that violate the rights of the religious community in particular and/or the welfare of the citizenry in general; they have also joined civil societies in denouncing the government's handling of the religious unrest that have erupted among many Northern states (Oshewolo and Maren, 2015). Regarding the promotion of civic engagement and political engagement, religious organizations have been instrumental in motivating their adherents to actively engage in and identify with politics through fasting and prayers for the country's advancement, peace, stability and justice (Ayorinde, 2007).

2. Upholds Democratic Principles

In addition, religion also upholds democratic principles and standards by advancing tolerance, moderation,

veracity, justice and freedom. Nigerian religious leaders have shown their dedication to democracy by imploring people to remain steadfast in embracing democratic institutions (Tukur, 1999). Furthermore, religion offers channels for representation of interests as it expresses, brings together and stands for specific societal interests. One of the numerous ways through which the Christian community has represented its interests since 1986 is through its mobilization and representation in Nigeria's admission to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Oshewolo and Maren, 2015).Since Nigeria's democratic government came into power in 1999, faith-based organizations like the Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC)among others have kept an eye on the outcome of the elections. Given that they frequently collaborate with other civil society organizations, this may not be unrelated to the goal of giving the electoral process some legitimacy. More frequently than not, both academics and politicians are interested in their reports, and the latter rely on them in part for electoral litigation (Omilusi, 2015). To put an end to the recent wave of violence and killings in Nigeria, Pastor E.A. Adeboye rallied millions of his church members to go on a prayer walk. In the same way, an analogous fasting and prayer was announced by the Christian Association of Nigeria in February 2020 in an effort to bolster the armed forces' efforts to combat terrorism and insurgency activity within the nation (Punch Newspaper,2020).

3. Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue, Peace and Cooperation.

Religion which is often perceive as a source of division, contains immense resources for peace building and dialogue. Its ethical teachings, spiritual capital, and institutional frameworks make it a powerful prospect for fostering interfaith understanding. Beyond theology, religious institutions are actively involved in education, healthcare, and social welfare. These activities naturally bring people of different faiths into collaboration. For instance, Christian and muslim organizations often partner in humanitarian responses to disasters or in tackling poverty. This reflects a shift towards a participant political culture where people see themselves as agents of change rather than passive subjects. While challenges exist, the examples of interfaith initiatives worldwide demonstrate that religion can indeed be a force for unity rather than conflict. By reemphasizing the values of compassion, justice, and human dignity, religion serves as credible pathway to interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence in pluralistic Nigeria.

4. Promotion of Tolerant Political Culture

Religion encourage natural respect and coexistence interfaith dialogue fosters tolerance-an essential ingredient of democratic political culture. Citizens

begin to accept diversity as normal rather than threatening. The interfaith mediation centre in Kaduna not only prevented religious crises but also strengthened local communities willingness to embrace participatory political processes rather than resorting to violence this is as a result of the fact that it promotes social standards through the values and virtue thought by these religions.

5. A Check to Bad Governance

Since Nigeria's democratic government came into power in 1999, faith-based organizations like the Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) among others have kept an eye on the outcome of the elections. Given that they frequently collaborate with other civil society organizations, this may not be unrelated to the goal of giving the electoral process some legitimacy.

B. Challenges

1. Political Apathy

Religion serves as a basis for political culture apathy in the sense that the eschatological teachings inherent in religion as well as the antecedents of past politicians, have led to the demonization of politics, and its portrayal as a dirty game. Thus, rather than actively mobilizing the people to engage in politics, religion sometimes alienates its adherents from politics, exacerbating political apathy.

2. Ethno-Religious Polarization

Here in Nigeria, a candidate for office is classified as either a Christian or a Muslim. The number of votes a political figure might gain in an election depends on their religion. In Nigeria, the southern part dominated by Christians appears to see politics as a dirty game that good Christians should not be part of, a view which engenders political apathy, while the Northern part dominated by Muslims sees politics as a normal game – infact, to them, Islam encourages it; and so enthusiasm about politics and political calculations is higher in that part of the country and can easily accept muslim-muslim ticket.

3. Elite Manipulation of Religion

Religion is exploited by politicians to deceive, divide, and oppress the people. Prior to, and during elections, political figures promise different religious claims and allegiances to use it as a major tool for achieving their political goals, and they use it to gain political power. As a result, churches and mosques have become fertile political stages where politicians swarm to obtain 'blessings,' and clerics openly order the faithful to vote for particular candidates (Emeaku, 2019).

4. Electoral Violence & Distrust

In order to divide the populace and maintain tension in the nation, political elites employ religious fanaticism and favouritism as their means of getting win over their rivals. The result of this tension creating has been witnessed in a widespread politically motivated and ethno religious killings and kidnappings. Some religion in some occasions displayed anti-democratic tendencies that have been manifested in acts of religious intolerance and violence as well as in the religious practices that are dysfunctional since they have negative consequences that contradict with Nigeria's objectives.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that in spite of efforts to separate religion from politics, both spheres of activities usually meet, formerly or informally. As to whether religion or religious influence on political culture is positive or negative, available information indicates that it could be either or both, depending on how a given society manages the relationship. Many so-called secular ideas have roots in religious beliefs. For example, political theorists have recently emphasized the ways that different explanations of secularism have been overwhelmingly formed by diverse normative assumptions about Christianity. This single illustration of a fundamental shift in political theory is challenging the legitimacy of the long-lasting contention that religion can be and should be restricted to a private sphere and separated from political influence. Those who insist that religion, Christianity or Islam, should be completely separated from political culture were advised by John Gladwin in his book, "God's People in God's World", that they should have a rethink because from creation the plan of God for mankind is to be in the world and become the light and salt of their various societies so that social phenomena, such as politics and governance, will be in perfect order. According to Harvard School of Divinity, the ongoing global influences of religions in the political life of a people during the course of time and period became pronounced in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in1979, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the 9/11 attack of September11, 2001; since these events, political theorists in the West began to recognize the highly challenging ways that religions and religious influences have been disregarded. This study concludes by providing an illustrative response to the question posed in the introductory section, namely, "In what ways does religion affect political culture in Nigeria?" In Nigeria, the southern part dominated by Christians appears to see politics as a dirty game that good Christians should not be part of, a view which engenders political apathy, while the Northern part dominated by Muslims sees politics as a normal game – infact, to them, Islam encourages it; and so enthusiasm about politics and political calculations is higher in that part of the country. The type of political leadership this kind of system throws up is difficult to separate from religious influence.

Recommendation

This study recommends that since religion cannot be totally separated from politics and one's religious believes cannot immune them from the adverse effects of negative political choices and decisions, everyone, irrespective of their religion, should play active part in politics. They should deploy the virtues taught in their religious doctrines to play ethical politics and help in sanitizing Nigerian politics and stabilizing the polity. Irrespective of anyone's religion, age or sex, they should be involved in politics, even if their involvement only goes as far as simply educating themselves on who is who or why this person, and not that person, should be elected into power also promotion of tolerance through education and institutionalized interfaith initiatives and lastly to discourage the elites / politicians misuse of religion to manipulate the Nigerian people politically..

References

Abu-Nimer, M. (2001). Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peace building. Journal of Peace Research, 38(6), 685-686

Akinwunmi K. (2022, Sep 6). Day Lagos assembly, Islamic clerics defended APC Muslim/Muslim ticket. https://independent.ng/day-lagos-assembly-islamic-clerics-defended-apc-muslim-muslim-ticket

Almond, G. & Verba, S. (1063). The Civic Culture: Political Attitude and Democracy in Five Nations. Princeton University Press. http://www.Jstor.org/stable/J.ctt183pnr2

Baha'ullah, (2018). Why Is Religion Impotent, OneGlobalfaith.org/bahai-faith/Bahaullah.

Bibinu, J. U., Katuka, H., Ibi, R. A., & Ishaya, B. (2020). The role of religion in the politics of Nigerian society. Sapientia global journal of arts, humanities and development studies, 3(2).

Boyer, L. (2017).The Most Religious Counteries.US News, Best Country Report. Retrieved from. https://www.usnews.com/news/bestcountries/ articles/2017-04-17, Cuba, M. (2015) How Has Religion Affects Politics, https:www.quora.com/how-has-religion-affect-politics.

Didonato, N. (2018). Five Ways Religion Can Influence Political Beliefs/Science on Religion. www.pathons.com/blog/scienceonreligion/2013/ 06/five-ways-religion-can-influence-political-beliefs.

Durkheim, M. (1912) The Elementary of The Religious Life, New Translation by Karen E Fields (1986). home.ku.ed.tr/mbaker/cshs503/ durkheimreligiouslife.pdf.

Encyclopedia of Nations (2018). Vatican City-Politics. Government, and Taxation, Vatican City Forum. www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economic/europe/vatican-city-politics-government-and-taxation

Falana, F. (2010). A public lecture delivered at the 51st birthday anniversary

of Rt. Rev Alfred Adewale Martins, Catholic Bishop of Abeokuta, Ogun State on Saturday June, 5, 2010.

Fox, J. (2001). Religion as an overlooked element of international relations. International Studies Review, 3(3), 53-73.

Glagwin, J. (1979), God's People in God's World, Biblical Materials For Social Involvement, Inter Versity Press 38 De Mont Fort Street, lescester LEI 7GP, England.

Golan, O., & Martini, M. (2020).The Making of contemporary papacy: Manufactured charisma and Instagram. Information, Communication & Society, 23(9), 1368-1385.

Griswold, W. (2013)Culture And Societies In Changing World, Sage knowledge.Sk.sagepub.com/books/cultur es-and-societies-in-a changing world.

Harvard Divinity School (2018) Religious Influences Are Embedded In Culture. Harvard University, Cambridge Massachusetts.

IEP, (2018)religion and politics, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy(IEP). A peer-reviewed academic resource, https//www.lep.utm.edu/reat. politics/ Accessed on 03/03/2018.

Ivy Panda. (2022, June 19). Religion and Politics: the Role of Religion in Politics Essay Example.
https://ivypanda.com/essays/reli gion-and-politics

Lane, R. (1992). Political Culture Residual Category or General Theory, A

Comparative Political Studies, https//www.researchchgate.net/publicatio n/ 258130104,

Taves, A. (2009). Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and other Special Things.3