

JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE (JRSC)
**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ITS BANE IN NIGERIA: A CHRISTIAN
RELIGION PERSPECTIVE**

ADEGBENRO Olusola Ajani¹

Abstract

This paper aimed to examine the view and perceptions of Christians in politics. It's a belief that some Christian's political attitude towards politics in Nigeria is apolitical. Therefore, this paper deeply examines why and reasons some Christians do not participate in political activities. Participating in governance of a society is an essential aspect of human responsibility as a good citizen, yet in Nigeria, many citizens face serious obstacles that hinder their involvement in political life. Corruption, insecurity, poverty and the manipulation of ethnicity and religion often discourage active involvement. However, from a Christian perspective, political participation is more than exercise of civic rights but an expression of stewardship, justice and love of neighbourhood. The paper will rely on secondary data sources by making use of qualitative approach and political culture as a theoretical framework. The paper will answer this research questions like, why do some Christians avoid politics. What are the views and attitudes of Christians to political activities in Nigeria? The study seeks to contribute to knowledge by offering afresh insights into how Christian teaching on stewardship, justice and servant leadership can help to addressing Nigeria's persistent challenges of political participation and to proffer solutions to the ethical and spiritual challenges faced by Christian such as disillusionment, fear of compromise and apathy.

Key words; political participation, Democracy, challenges, Christian perspective, faith ad Governance

¹ Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo. Department of Political science, faculty of social sciences +2348134306851, adegbenroolusola85@gmail.com

Introduction

Participating in political activities remains a crucial element of democratic governance, though, in Nigeria, it continues to face serious challenges rooted in historical, socio-economic, and institutional realities. Corruption, electoral malpractice, and violence to voter apathy, illiteracy, and the manipulation of religion and ethnicity, all of these obstacles have weakened citizens' confidence in the political process. From a Christian perspective, political participation is not only a civic duty but also a moral responsibility rooted in biblical teachings on justice, stewardship, and love of neighbor. However, many Christians in Nigeria struggle with political engagement due to disillusionment with governance, fear of persecution, or the perception that politics is inherently corrupt and dirty.

Scholars like Arowolo and Aluko (2012), established that, Political participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance and sustainable nation-building. Verba, Scholzman & Brady,(1995), opined that, political participation encompasses a range of

activities through which citizens influence political decisions, including voting, political debate, civic education, community mobilization, and engagement in governance processes. In Nigeria, however, according to Omotola, (2010), Ibrahim & Garuba (2010), political participation has been weakened by systemic challenges such as corruption, electoral malpractice, violence, poverty, and voter apathy, all of which fret public trust in democratic institutions. From a Christian perspective, engagement in public life cannot be separated from the call to stewardship, justice, and love of neighbor. In the Holy Bible, Christians are regarded as “the salt of the earth” and the light of the world with the mandate to influence the society positively. Political participation, therefore, is not merely a civic right but also a moral obligation grounded in biblical principles of justice, equity, and servant leadership. Yet, according to Agbiji & Swart, (2015), many Nigerian Christians remain hesitant to engage actively in politics, often due to disillusionment with the system, fear of compromise with corruption, or the

perception that politics is inherently “dirty”.

The principal objective of this paper is to examine the views and perceptions of Christians in politics and to examine why and reasons some Christians not all will not participate in political activities and the challenges to political participation in Nigeria.

The concluding parts would focus on recommendations to the challenges hindering political participation in Nigeria through a Christian lens. By highlighting the intersection between faith and governance.

Methodology

This paper makes use of qualitative approach, using data gathered from secondary sources. It will be analyzed via content and historical analysis.

Conceptual Clarification

Political Participation

According to Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978), political participation consists of those legal activities by the citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental

personnel and the actions they take. This definition emphasizes different ways citizens can shape political outcomes. Political participation refers to the various ways in which individuals take part in activities intended to influence the selection of leaders, the formulation of public policy, and the functioning of political institutions. In the Nigerian context, political participation is shaped by social, cultural, and religious factors. Scholars such as Agbaje (1999) argue that weak democratic institutions, electoral malpractice, and pervasive corruption undermine citizens’ trust in politics, often leading to political apathy. Okoli and Iortyer (2014) opined that political violence and manipulation discourage active participation, especially among youth and marginalized groups. For Oyediran et al. (2002) public participation relates to those activities through which political parties, civil society, labour unions, traditional leaders, academics, religious groups, student associations, community-based organizations and others participate in the selection of public office holders or leaders directly or indirectly, and in the

formation of public policy for good governance.

From a Christian religious perspective, participation is influenced by moral and ethical considerations, with some Christians perceiving politics as “dirty” and unfit for the faithful, while others view it as an avenue for promoting justice, accountability, and service (Oboh, 2019).

Democracy

Democracy is one of the most widely discussed concepts in political science. According to Przeworski et al (1996), opined that democracy is a system where political office is filled through regular, free and fair election between competing parties with the possibility of a winners freely assuming office. Democracy to this end can be refers to a system of government in which political power resides with the people, who exercise it directly or indirectly through elected representatives. According to Schumpeter (1942), democracy can also be described as an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for

the people’s vote.” This explanation pinned point competition, leadership selection and the role of election. practically, democracy takes different forms. Direct democracy, practiced in ancient Athens which allows citizens to make decisions themselves while representative democracy adopted in our contemporary world today involves electing officials to act on behalf of the people. In Nigeria, democracy is fragile due to historical legacies of colonialism, military intervention in politics and persistent challenges such as electoral malpractice, corruption, and ethno-religious divisions. Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006) opined that while Nigeria has formally adopted democratic institutions since 1999, its democratic culture remains underdeveloped with low trust in institutions and limited citizen participation.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts Political Culture Theory as a theoretical framework as developed by Almond and Verba (1963), which explains how citizens values, beliefs, and orientations shape their attitudes toward political participation

and governance. Political culture refers to the patterned ways in which individuals view the political system and their role within it, ranging from active engagement to apathy or alienation. In Nigerian, political culture is heavily influenced by religion, ethnicity, colonial legacies, and historical experiences with authoritarian regimes and corruption. These factors combine to determine how citizens, including Christians, perceive politics and whether they choose to participate in it. From a Christian religion perspective, political culture theory is particularly useful in highlighting how faith-based values and orientations shape political behavior. Many Nigerian Christians perceive politics as corrupt, violent, or morally compromised, which discourages active participation. At the same time, Christian teachings on justice, stewardship, and service can foster a participatory culture that motivates believers to engage in governance for the common good. Thus, the Christian religious worldview contributes both to political apathy when politics is seen as “dirty” and to political activism when politics is seen as a means of advancing righteousness and justice in society.

Therefore, political culture theory provides a framework for understanding the challenges to political participation in Nigeria as rooted not only in structural or institutional barriers but also in the belief systems and value orientations shaped by religion. By applying this theory, the study situates Christian attitudes toward politics within the broader Nigerian political environment, offering insight into why participation remains limited despite the moral imperatives within Christian teachings to promote justice and good governance.

Challenges to political participation in Nigeria

Nigeria returns to democratic rule in 1999, despite this milestone achievement, Nigeria still battling with diverse political challenges. Among the numerous challenges in Nigeria, political participation continues to face the most challenges that hinder citizens most especially ordinary Nigerians and religious groups—from fully engaging in the political process. One of the foremost challenges is electoral violence and insecurity. According to Omotola (2010),

elections in Nigeria are frequently marred by violence, intimidation, and rigging, which discourages citizens from voting or openly supporting candidates. This creates an atmosphere of fear and undermines confidence in the democratic process. Corruption is another major challenge in Nigeria political arena, many Nigerian citizens has lost confidence and trust in the political institution.

According to Agbaje and Adejumbi (2006) widespread of corruption among political elites has made citizen lost faith in governance, leading many to view politics as a “dirty game” reserved for the corrupt. This perception fosters political apathy, particularly among Christians and other religious groups who associates politics with immorality and dishonesty. Similarly, Bratton (2013) notes that weak institutions and unaccountable leadership reinforce disengagement from politics, as citizens doubt whether their participation will lead to meaningful change. Socio-economic factors also play a crucial role. Poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy limit citizens’ ability to engage effectively in politics. According to Omodia (2012), economic hardship

reduces political participation because citizens often prioritize survival over civic duties, while low levels of political education mean that many Nigerians are unaware of their rights and responsibilities in a democracy. This is compounded by the monetization of politics, where political parties and candidates use money and material incentives to secure votes, thereby excluding those without financial power (Awofeso & Irabor,2016).

In addition, religion and ethnicity shapes participation patterns in Nigeria. While religion can motivate political activism, it can also discourage engagement. According to Oboh (2019) argues that many Nigerian Christians perceive politics as morally corrupt, leading to withdrawal rather than participation. In essence, political participation in Nigeria is constrained by a complex interplay of violence, corruption, weak institutions, socio-economic deprivation, and ethno-religious factors. These challenges create a political culture of apathy and disillusionment, making it difficult to

sustain inclusive and meaningful democratic participation.

Christianity and Political Participation in Nigeria

Religion plays a major role in shaping political behavior in Nigeria, and Christianity, as one of the dominant faiths, has a complex relationship with political participation. The Christian faith provides both motivation for political engagement and reasons for political withdrawal, depending on how believers interpret biblical teachings and the socio-political context.

On the one hand, Christian doctrine emphasizes justice, stewardship, and service, which can inspire political involvement. In his word, Ojo (2007) argues that many Christian leaders have increasingly recognized politics as a platform to promote moral governance, protect the rights of the oppressed, and advance societal development. Similarly, Obono (2014) notes that the social teachings of Christianity such as the biblical call to seek the welfare of the city in encouraging Christians to view political participation as an extension of their civic and spiritual responsibility.

From this perspective, political involvement is seen as a way to reflect Christian values in governance and promote the common good.

According to Stephen Chinedu Chioke (2023), he opined that Christians' participation in politics and democratic governance cannot be overemphasized, because it occupies the center stage in the political discourse of developing countries of the world with specific reference to Nigeria. that a pluralist sovereign country like Nigeria is fraught with political participation challenges should not be neglected and the effects thereof cannot be duly quantified. Contemporary political debates have shifted from drawing the picture of politics, election and so on to core issues of democratic governance and the symbiosis that exists between man as a stakeholder and the state together with politics itself to Biblical and moral issues.

Contextually, political participation is synonymous with political involvement and would be interchangeably adopted. Political participation/involvement entails a situation where an eligible citizen directly

seeks to acquire, occupy and consolidate political office at either the local, state or federal government or seeking to influence leaders at the local, state and federal levels. Political participation is involvement in political processes of the State. Then, how do people participate in politics? Politics is done via representative democracy anchored on true representation of those inside and those outside. Therefore, politics at any point must necessarily take into consideration the people at the grassroots, the people at the city area and then the international community. Again, "By political participation we mean activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision making (Huntington and Nelson, 1976)." In other words, Christians and other private citizens are politically involved in matters that concern statehood when they seek to influence government decision making. This suggests that any act targeted at attracting allocation of values through state decision making process is political participation. Political participation is taken as covering three main areas. Firstly, it refers to electoral representation where individuals are nominated, receive

votes and gain seats in parliamentary and local elections. Secondly, it includes presence in ministerial cabinets where more decision-making takes place. Lastly, it relates to the involvement of ordinary citizens in the political process through voting in various levels of elections. As citizens, Christians like Muslims would expect to participate freely in all three categories. If this is ensured, the society will be politically developed to meet up with the 21st century human needs envisaged in the social contract that exists between man and the State.

Stephen Chinedu Chioke (2023), opined that Christians who are already disenchanted and disappointed with the way politics and governance is being handled in Nigeria. Considering this, the paper goes a bit deeper to excavate areas of obligations that Christians have to fulfill. They are:

Duty to God – It is important to say that Christians have heavenly and earthly fathers. To this end, Christians must do everything possible to satisfy heaven's curiosity over us and do the bidding of God. To decipher this bidding, we read: Son of man, I have made you a

watchman for the people of Israel; so, hear the word I speak and give them warning from me (Ezekiel 33:7, NIV). From this doctrine enunciated in the just cited verse, it is clear that Christians have been called of God to serve in political positions and then instruct the led with the right instructions from God, our Creator through policy templates and the instrumentality of the Constitution. Indeed, this signifies a manifest indication of authority and responsibility from God. Thus, “The fulcrum of any task is authority and responsibility (Chioke & Mbamalu, 2020).” Leadership through political participation is an unavoidable task saddled upon Christians by God himself. Therefore, this point is pinned to doctrinal perspective.

Duty to the State – Citizenship has a price (Udenta, 1999). In other word, every Christian is duty bound to pay his/her price by rendering approved civic responsibilities to the State. This stems from the social contract theory of the State. To start with, why does government perform its function in a sovereign state? Fundamentally, “The reason why government must perform those functions

is because of the social contract (mutual agreement) it entered into with the public. Social contract is the action of the general public in a certain geographical location coming together and agreed that a certain group of people or a person should be entrusted with the right to govern under stipulated conditions, principles, state laws and international conventions/treaties for service delivery and local policing of lives and properties of the people as well as the protection of the state territory against foreign aggression through a well constituted and equipped armed force. Therefore; based on morality, every citizen – Christians and non-Christians are duty bound to render support to the state via participation and other areas of civic responsibility.

Duty to neighbours – Christians owe it as a duty to care for others neighbours. Neighbour means the person you owe a duty of care and whom your actions or inaction would affect. It does not matter whether you are related to that person by blood or not. This is the moral foundation for love, compassion, equity and fairness in all social interactions and

politicking processes. In this dimension, John Stott was right to have said, “The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion.” Also, our social obligation to others says that to be a good citizen involves being willing to run for public office. The debate herein is that duty to neighbor stems from both moral and doctrinal (religious) standpoints as both approve it.

As a duty to neighbours, the matter is not just running for public office, one must seek to run an Administration that is service delivery conscious and not a breeding citadel for corruption and allied inconveniences.

On the other hand, many Nigerian Christians remain reluctant to engage in politics due to its association with corruption, dishonesty, and violence. According to Oboh (2019), a prevailing perception among Christians is that politics is a “dirty game,” incompatible with religious morality. This belief fosters political apathy within the church, particularly among clergy and devout members who see political engagement

as a compromise of their spiritual integrity. Similarly, Ukah (2011) observes that while Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are influential in shaping public opinion, they often encourage withdrawal from politics, portraying it as worldly and spiritually dangerous. Another dimension is the role of church institutions. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other denominational bodies have at times mobilized believers for political causes, especially around issues of justice, religious freedom, and good governance (Adogame, 2010).

Surveys show varying Christian percentages in Nigeria, with a 2017 survey finding 56% Christian and a more recent 2022 survey indicating 54.2% Christianity. The data highlights the centrality of religion in Nigerian life, with a 2015 survey finding over 70% of Nigerians practiced their religion several times a week, and the 2024 report showing trust in religious leaders. Christians, particularly in the South, often express higher trust in their faith leaders compared to Muslims in Nigeria most especially on political issues.(Afrobarometer.org) .

Conclusion and Recommendations

In view of the above, various attempts have been made to explore the concepts of political participation, with a view to unravelling a lasting remedy to the challenges posed by political apathy. Based on the approach explored in this paper, the study identifies that: There is a Low Political Participation among Christians. Many Nigerian Christians perceive politics as corrupt, violent, and morally compromised, which discourages their active involvement in political processes beyond voting. Also, religious Teachings Shape Political Attitudes in that Christian doctrines can either encourage civic responsibility like justice, stewardship and service or reinforce political withdrawal when politics is perceived as incompatible with spirituality. Issues related like Socio-Economic Challenges were also identified. Poverty, unemployment, and political illiteracy limit Christians' ability to engage effectively in governance, with survival needs often prioritized over civic duties. The role of the church organizations like

the Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN) cannot be overemphasized.

The study thereby recommends that Political Education within Churches should be strengthened and the Churches should incorporate civic and political education into their programs, teaching members that politics can be a platform for advancing justice, equity, and accountability in line with Christian values. Encouraging Active Participation and openly discouraging apathy and instead promote responsible participation in elections, political parties, and governance processes. Policies that reduce poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy should be prioritized by both government and religious institutions to empower Christians to participate more actively in politics.

Reference

- Adogame, A. (2010). *How God became a Nigerian: Religious impulse and the unfolding of a nation*. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 28(4), 479–498.
- Agbaje, A., & Adejumo, S. (2006). *Do votes count? The travails of electoral politics in Nigeria*. *Africa Development*, 31(3), 25–44.

JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE (JRSC)

- Agbaje, A. (1999). *Political parties and pressure groups*. In R. Anifowose & F. Enemuo (Eds.), *Elements of Politics* (pp. 195–211). Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publications.
- Agbiji, O. M., & Swart, I. (2015). *Religion and social transformation in Africa: A critical and appreciative perspective*. *Scriptura*, 114(1), 1–20.
- Arowolo, D., & Aluko, F. S. (2012). *Democracy, political participation and good governance in Nigeria*. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 1(3), 797–809.
- Awofeso, O., & Irabor, P. A. (2016). *Political participation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: An analysis of 2015 general elections*. *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs*, 4(1), 1–7.
- Chioke, S. C. (2020). *The trouble with godfatherism in Enugu state from 1999 – 2019: Diagnosing the gargantuan enigma and the escape route thereof*. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance Research*. 3(1); 277 – 300
- Chioke, S. C. (2023). *Participation of Christians democratic governance in Nigeria*. *Jopafl*.
- Huntington, S. P. & Nelson, J. M (1976). *No easy choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press
- Ibrahim, J., & Garuba, D. (2010). *Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing dialogue(s) for nation-building*. Abuja: Global Rights.
- Obboh, G. E. (2019). *Christianity and political participation in Nigeria: An ethical appraisal*. *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*, 11(2), 45–58.
- Obono, O. (2014). *Religion and political participation in Africa: The case of Christianity in Nigeria*. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 44(2), 145–168.
- Okoli, A. C., & Iortyer, P. (2014). *Electioneering and political participation in Nigeria: The paradox of youth participation*. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 6(2), 21–27.
- Omodia, S. M. (2012). *Political participation and democratic culture in Nigeria: A case study of Kogi State*. *International Journal of Social Sciences Tomorrow*, 1(3), 1–6.
- Omotola, J. S. (2010). *Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic*. *African Affairs*, 109(437), 535–553.
- Ojo, M. A. (2007). *Pentecostal movements, Islam and the contest for public space in Northern Nigeria*. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 18(2), 175–188.
- Schumpeter, J. A. (1942). *Capitalism, socialism, and democracy*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Udenta, J.O.E (1999). *Elements of government and public administration*. Enugu: New Generation Books
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.