

Interface between Religion and Governance: An Ethical Reflection on how Religious Beliefs Influence Political Governance in Nigeria

By

Taofeek Taiyeola Otubanjo

School of Arts and Social Sciences

Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology, Omu-Ajose, Ogun State.

Email: otubanjo1@gmail.com

&

Sunday Solomon Owoeye

College of Social and Management Sciences

Ph.D. Student, Department of Sociological Studies

Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State

&

Ganiyat Adedayo Balogun

School of Arts and Social Sciences

Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology, Omu-Ajose, Ogun State.

Email: ganiyatb18@gmail.com

Abstract

The interface between religion and governance in Nigeria raises profound ethical questions. In a nation where religious beliefs strongly influence personal and collective identities, political actors frequently draw upon sacred doctrines to legitimize power, shape policies, and mobilize support. This paper critically examines how religious ideologies intersect with political ethics in Nigeria, highlighting the complex relationship between divine authority and secular governance. Recent political developments, including the 2023 general elections, it explores how religious leaders, symbols, and narratives are used to confer moral legitimacy on political candidates and decisions often at the expense of inclusivity, accountability, and justice. The paper addresses ethical tensions that emerge in a multi-faith democracy where religion is both a moral compass and a political tool. It scrutinizes the ethical frameworks derived from Islam, Christianity, and African traditional religions, questioning their application in a modern constitutional democracy. A qualitative research methodology was employed, utilizing content analysis and a review of existing literature. The analysis reveals that religious narratives often confer moral legitimacy on political actions; but it can also lead to sectarianism and undermine principles of inclusivity and accountability. The influence of clerical figures in politics blurs the lines between ethical governance and religious absolutism. To mitigate ethical conflicts, the paper suggests fostering a more inclusive political culture that respects diverse religious beliefs while promoting democratic plurality and ensuring moral coherence in governance.

Keywords: Religious Ethics, Good Governance, Clergy, Democracy, Moral, Political Beliefs

Introduction

Religion remains one of the most powerful social forces in Nigeria, often operating as both a unifying and polarizing element in the political space. With an estimated population of over 200 million people divided mainly between Christianity and Islam and a significant number adhering to indigenous African religions, religious belief is deeply embedded in the national consciousness (Pew Research Center, 2022). Religion not only shapes personal identity and social norms but also exerts considerable influence on Nigeria's political discourse, decision-making processes, and governance structures. In this deeply spiritual environment, political actors frequently invoke divine authority to justify their policies, mobilize electoral support, and undermine opposition. The ethical implications of this fusion are profound. The Nigerian Constitution affirms the secular nature of the state, **and** prohibits the government from adopting any religion as state religion. Yet, in practice, political actions and public institutions are deeply influenced by religious considerations (Anugwom, 2022). The presence of religion in state

functions ranging from prayer sessions in government meetings to public funding of religious pilgrimages illustrates the difficulty in separating religious beliefs from political practices. The result is a unique ethical conundrum: how does a nation committed to pluralism and secular governance navigate religious pressures that often seek moral absolutism?

Recent political developments, especially the 2023 general elections, provide fertile ground for evaluating this question. Political campaigns were punctuated by religious endorsements, clerical prophecies, and faith-based mobilization. The controversy surrounding the Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket ignited nationwide debate, not just about representation but about the ethical role of religion in governance (Eze, 2023). Religious leaders openly backed candidates, framed political choices in apocalyptic or redemptive terms, and used sacred platforms for partisan advocacy—raising concerns about the erosion of neutrality, equity, and democratic values. The politicization of religion in Nigeria is not new. From colonial indirect rule that empowered religious elites to post-independence regimes that used religious symbols for national legitimacy, faith has long been part of Nigeria's political toolkit (Suberu, 2021). However, in today's hyper-connected and ideologically polarized context, the stakes are higher. Politicians no longer simply reference religion; they deploy it as a strategic weapon to shape public morality and electoral behaviour. Conversely, some religious leaders have evolved from moral watchdogs into political actors, eager to wield influence in legislative, executive, and judicial domains.

This shift raises fundamental ethical questions. Can religious convictions coexist with democratic principles such as tolerance, pluralism, and freedom of belief? What happens when clerical authority clashes with constitutional mandates? How should leaders balance personal faith with their obligation to serve a religiously diverse electorate? These tensions are further complicated by the rise of populism, the crisis of political legitimacy, and the pervasive mistrust in institutions all of which incentivize the use of religion for political gain (Iwuoha & Ezeibe, 2022). Ethical governance in a religiously plural society requires a careful balance: acknowledging the moral weight of religious beliefs while resisting their instrumentalization for partisan ends. Religious ethics when genuinely applied can enhance governance by promoting honesty, service, justice, and compassion. However, when religion is used to silence dissent, marginalize minorities, or entrench power, it becomes ethically problematic. Unfortunately, Nigeria's political space often witnesses the latter. Moreover, the ethical standards within religious institutions themselves are not immune to scrutiny. Clerical endorsement of corrupt politicians, the sale of spiritual titles for influence, and selective moral outrage expose contradictions within faith communities (Adebayo & Obasi, 2023). These contradictions weaken the moral authority of religious leaders and confuse the public about the ethical boundaries between faith and politics.

Literature Review

The intersection of religion and governance in Nigeria has garnered significant scholarly attention, reflecting the complex dynamics that shape political behavior and public policy in a multi-religious society. This literature review synthesizes key themes and findings from recent studies, highlighting the diverse perspectives on the ethical implications of religious influence in Nigerian politics.

One of the central themes in the literature is the historical role of religion in shaping political authority. Suberu (2021) explores how colonial indirect rule empowered religious leaders, embedding religious authority within the political fabric of Nigerian society. This historical context is pivotal in understanding contemporary political dynamics, as it established a precedent for the intertwining of religious and political spheres. Similarly, Anugwom (2022) discusses how post-independence governance has been marked by the use of religious legitimacy by political actors, particularly during military regimes. This historical perspective underscores the persistent influence of religious narratives in legitimizing political power.

In recent years, the rise of religious political movements has become a focal point in the literature. Eze (2023) highlights the emergence of organizations such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), which have significantly

influenced electoral politics. These organizations serve as platforms for mobilizing religious identity and shaping voter behavior, illustrating how religious affiliations can be strategically utilized in political contexts. The 2015 and 2023 general elections are frequently cited as critical moments where religious endorsements played a decisive role in electoral outcomes, reflecting a growing trend of clerical involvement in politics (Iwuoha & Ezeibe, 2022).

The impact of the digital age on religious and political discourse is another key area of exploration. Scholars like Adebayo and Obasi (2023) investigate how social media has transformed the dissemination of religious narratives, allowing clerics to reach wider audiences and influence public opinion. The proliferation of “media prophets” who blend religious authority with political agendas raises ethical concerns about the manipulation of religious beliefs for electoral gain. This phenomenon highlights the need for critical engagement with the moral implications of using religious rhetoric in a digital landscape characterized by misinformation and sensationalism.

Moreover, ethical dilemmas arising from the politicization of religion are extensively discussed in the literature. Iwuoha and Ezeibe (2022) argue that the use of religious identity as a political tool often undermines democratic values such as inclusivity and accountability. Their research emphasizes the ethical responsibility of political leaders to navigate the complexities of a multi-religious society while promoting justice and equity. The authors call for a reevaluation of the role of religion in governance, advocating for an ethical framework that respects pluralism and fosters civic responsibility. The literature also addresses the challenges posed by religious favoritism in policy-making. Anugwom (2022) notes that public policies often reflect the biases of dominant religious groups, marginalizing minority faiths and leading to perceptions of injustice. This raises significant ethical questions about the moral obligations of the state to uphold secular principles while accommodating the diverse beliefs of its citizens.

In conclusion, the existing literature provides a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between religion and governance in Nigeria. It highlights the historical legacies, contemporary challenges, and ethical dilemmas that arise from the interplay of these two spheres. As Nigeria continues to navigate its pluralistic identity, further research is needed to develop frameworks that promote ethical governance while respecting the diverse religious landscape. This literature review underscores the importance of critical dialogue on the implications of religious influence in fostering a just and equitable political environment.

Historical and Contemporary Context

The relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria has a complex history, deeply rooted in the nation’s colonial past and evolving through its post-independence journey. Understanding this context is crucial for analyzing the current dynamics of religious influence on governance. Historically, Nigeria’s colonial administration employed indirect rule, which empowered local religious leaders and traditional authorities. This strategy allowed colonial powers to maintain control while co-opting existing social structures. Religious elites were often positioned as intermediaries, which not only enhanced their authority but also ingrained religious influence in political governance. This practice set a precedent for the intertwining of religion and politics that continues to shape contemporary Nigeria (Suberu, 2021).

Following independence in 1960, the political landscape remained heavily influenced by religious affiliations. The First Republic saw the emergence of religious political figures who used their influence to mobilize support. However, the interplay between religion and politics became more pronounced during military regimes, where leaders often invoked religious legitimacy to justify their rule. For instance, General Muhammadu Buhari's regime in the 1980s promoted Islamic values while simultaneously implementing policies that marginalized non-Muslims, illustrating the selective application of religious principles in governance (Anugwom, 2022). In recent decades, the rise of religious political movements has further complicated Nigeria's political landscape. The emergence of organizations like the Jama’atu Nasril Islam (JNI) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) reflects the increasing politicization of religious identities. These groups have played significant roles in shaping public discourse and influencing electoral outcomes. The 2015 general elections marked a turning point, as religious

endorsements became pivotal in mobilizing voters, with clerics publicly supporting candidates based on perceived religious alignments (Eze, 2023).

The 2023 general elections underscored the contemporary relevance of religion in Nigerian politics. The controversial Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket ignited nationwide debates about representation, echoing historical tensions between religious groups. Religious leaders openly endorsed candidates, framing political choices in theological terms, which raised concerns about the erosion of neutrality and democratic values. Such developments illustrate how religious rhetoric continues to shape public policy and voter behavior, often leading to sectarian divisions (Iwuoha & Ezeibe, 2022). Moreover, the digital age has transformed how religious and political narratives are disseminated. Social media platforms have amplified religious voices, allowing clerics to reach broader audiences and influence political mobilization. During election seasons, the proliferation of “divine revelations” and prophetic claims on social media has become commonplace, contributing to the manipulation of public sentiment and electoral tensions (Adebayo & Obasi, 2023). This shift reflects a significant change in how religious authority is exercised, with implications for ethical governance and public morality.

Contemporary Nigerian politics also reveals a troubling trend: the use of religious identity for political gain. Politicians often exploit religious affiliations to galvanize support, inflaming sectarian tensions and undermining the principles of inclusivity and justice. This pattern of behavior raises ethical questions about the role of religion in governance and the responsibilities of political leaders to uphold democratic values. The historical context of religious influence in Nigeria has laid the groundwork for contemporary challenges in governance. The legacies of colonialism and the politicization of religious identities have shaped the current political landscape, where ethical dilemmas arise from the intertwining of religion and politics. Understanding this complex history is essential for addressing the ongoing challenges and opportunities that arise from the interplay of religious ideologies and governance in Nigeria today.

Religious Beliefs and Ethical Frameworks in Politics

In Nigeria, religious beliefs do not merely define private spirituality they constitute foundational ethical frameworks that shape collective perceptions of justice, leadership, and civic responsibility. Both Christianity and Islam, the two dominant religions, offer extensive moral doctrines that speak directly to governance, social justice, and ethical leadership. As Omosor (2013) elaborately discussed, the adherents of the two rival religions in Nigeria rely on certain aspects of their religious doctrines and misinterpretation of their holy texts to legitimise violence and other forms of anti-human activities which they often engage, thereby causing serious security problem in the country. However, while these teachings can serve as moral compasses, their political appropriation has led to divergent interpretations, exclusionary policies, and ethical conflicts within the public sphere. Christian ethics in Nigerian political thought emphasize servant-leadership, justice, love for neighbour, and integrity, drawing from biblical principles. Scriptures such as Proverbs 29:2 “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice” are frequently cited by Christian leaders to advocate for righteous governance. However, these teachings are often co-opted to validate specific candidates or political movements. For instance, during the 2023 elections, several pastors publicly endorsed candidates by declaring them divinely chosen, thereby reinforcing a theocratic view of political authority (Eze, 2023). Islamic ethical traditions, rooted in the Qur’an and Hadith, emphasize justice (*‘adl*), consultation (*shura*), and accountability (*hisbah*) in leadership. In Northern Nigeria, where Islamic influence is stronger, the political application of Sharia law in some states has been justified on ethical and religious grounds (Anugwom, 2022). While proponents argue that Sharia governance promotes discipline and moral integrity, critics contend that it blurs the line between religious conviction and civic obligation, especially in a multi-religious nation.

Beyond doctrine, the everyday ethical expectations of political leaders are often filtered through religious lenses. Politicians are expected to embody spiritual virtues: humility, honesty, and piety. Their public gestures attending religious services, quoting sacred texts, fasting publicly—are used to authenticate their moral character. Unfortunately, these performative acts

frequently mask corrupt intentions and lack substantive ethical depth. Adebayo and Obasi (2023) argue that many political actors manipulate religion to appear trustworthy without embodying its ethical imperatives. African traditional religions, although less politically visible, also offer rich ethical traditions rooted in communalism, respect for elders, and spiritual accountability. In rural communities, belief in ancestral retribution for unjust leadership still influences local governance dynamics. Traditional rulers, often seen as custodians of both spiritual and political wisdom, play crucial mediating roles, though their powers are increasingly marginalized by the formal political system.

The coexistence of these ethical systems creates a moral mosaic in Nigeria's political landscape one that should ideally foster pluralism and accountability. However, it often results in moral relativism, where political actors cherry-pick religious doctrines that suit their ambitions. The ethical dilemma emerges when moral claims are used to undermine opposing beliefs, exclude minority groups, or justify authoritarian behaviour. Moreover, the lack of a shared civic ethic that transcends religious boundaries makes it difficult to establish a coherent ethical standard in Nigerian politics. Civic education, which should cultivate national values of tolerance, transparency, and responsibility, is often overshadowed by sectarian teachings. Consequently, public ethics become fragmented, with each faith community defending its moral universe, sometimes in direct conflict with others (Suberu, 2021). To address this, some scholars and civil society actors have advocated for interfaith ethical frameworks—shared principles such as the dignity of life, justice, and service—that can form the moral bedrock of Nigeria's political culture (Iwuoha & Ezeibe, 2022). These frameworks could serve as a bridge between religious diversity and national unity, fostering a political ethos that is both spiritually grounded and democratically responsible.

In conclusion, while Nigeria's religious traditions offer powerful ethical teachings, their selective application and political appropriation raise significant concerns. A critical challenge for Nigeria's democracy is not merely the presence of religious ethics in politics, but ensuring that these ethics are inclusive, consistent, and oriented toward the common good—not just political gain.

Clerical Influence and Moral Authority in Political Decision-Making

Clerics in Nigeria hold unique and powerful positions at the intersection of morality and political authority. Revered as spiritual guides, community leaders, and custodians of public morality, religious leaders often command larger followings and greater influence than many elected officials. Their messages resonate deeply in mosques, churches, and on digital platforms, shaping the political consciousness of millions. This influence, however, raises critical ethical questions especially when clerical authority becomes a tool for political endorsement or manipulation. Historically, religious leaders in Nigeria were moral voices that challenged oppressive regimes and called for justice and accountability. During the military era, figures like Archbishop Anthony Olubunmi Okogie and Sheikh Abubakar Gumi were prominent critics of authoritarianism, drawing on religious ethics to advocate for democracy and good governance. Today, however, this prophetic tradition is increasingly replaced by clerics who align themselves with political elites in exchange for material or institutional benefits (Adebayo & Obasi, 2023).

In the 2023 general elections, numerous religious leaders publicly supported candidates, framing political contests in theological terms. Prophecies about election outcomes became commonplace, turning altars and pulpits into campaign platforms. This phenomenon was copiously enunciated by Omosor (2019) who lamented that many Christian Clerics in Nigeria are derailing from their core calling as socio-political critics and agents of good governance and development like Prophet Amos as they participate in partisan politics and often compromise truth for political and economic benefits. While some of these endorsements reflected genuine convictions, many were ethically questionable often driven by personal interests or sectarian biases (Eze, 2023). Such partisanship erodes the moral neutrality expected of clerics and polarizes faith communities along political lines. The ethical dilemma becomes sharper when religious leaders use their authority to silence dissent or manipulate followers into voting based on sectarian identity rather than policy or merit. Some imams and pastors urge their

congregations to reject candidates from rival religions, citing divine injunctions. This, not only undermines democratic values like inclusion and equality but also violates the religious principles of compassion and justice that these leaders claim to uphold (Iwuoha & Ezeibe, 2022).

Furthermore, clerical involvement in politics blurs the lines of accountability. When religious leaders endorse political candidates, they are rarely held responsible for the political failures of those candidates once in office. This lack of accountability enables them to maintain moral authority without facing the consequences of their political influence. There is also the issue of selective moral outrage. Clerics often speak out against immorality in opposition parties but remain silent when their preferred candidates or allies are involved in corruption, violence, or incompetence. This ethical inconsistency weakens their credibility and diminishes their role as impartial moral arbiters (Suberu, 2021).

Yet, the potential for clerics to positively shape Nigeria's political ethics remains significant. When religious leaders rise above partisan politics and speak truth to power, they can foster national unity, promote social justice, and serve as moral compasses. Faith-based organizations have been instrumental in peacebuilding, voter education, and humanitarian relief. The challenge is ensuring that this moral leadership is not compromised by political patronage. Clerical influence in Nigeria's political space is a double-edged sword. While it can inspire ethical leadership and civic engagement, it can also entrench division and undermine democratic norms when wielded irresponsibly. Religious leaders must, therefore, commit to a higher ethical standard—one that prioritizes truth, justice, and the collective good over sectarian advantage or personal gain.

Ethical Dilemmas in a Religiously Diverse Democracy

Nigeria's religious diversity is one of its most defining and complex attributes. With Christianity dominant in the South, Islam prevalent in the North, and indigenous African religions interwoven throughout, the country is a mosaic of deeply held spiritual beliefs. This diversity, while culturally enriching, poses significant ethical dilemmas in the context of governance, citizenship, and political equity. How can a government remain religiously neutral in a society where religion is central to identity? How should leaders balance respect for all faiths while ensuring that none is privileged above others? The ethical tensions in Nigeria's democracy emerge most clearly in policies, appointments, and national celebrations. For instance, public holidays and state-funded pilgrimages are disproportionately skewed towards Christianity and Islam, leaving adherents of traditional religions largely marginalized (Anugwom, 2022). While the Constitution (Section 10) affirms the secular status of the Nigerian state, in practice, state actions often reflect religious favoritism—creating perceptions of exclusion and injustice among minority faith groups.

A major ethical concern arises from the politicization of religion in electoral politics. Politicians frequently exploit religious identities to gain support, sometimes inflaming sectarian tensions. The Muslim-Muslim ticket controversy during the 2023 presidential election exemplifies this dilemma. Although the Nigerian Constitution does not mandate religious balancing in ticket selection, many Nigerians expected a Christian-Muslim pairing to reflect the nation's diversity. The choice was therefore interpreted by some as religious insensitivity and by others as political pragmatism—raising questions about the ethical responsibility of leaders to foster inclusion beyond constitutional obligations (Eze, 2023).

Another dimension of this ethical challenge lies in the application of religious laws. In states practicing Sharia, non-Muslim residents often find themselves subject to restrictions that conflict with their beliefs, such as bans on alcohol or enforced dress codes. While these laws are intended to uphold moral order based on Islamic teachings, they raise constitutional and ethical questions about equal rights and religious freedom in a multi-faith society (Suberu, 2021). This legal pluralism complicates the pursuit of justice, as citizens experience differing interpretations and enforcement of laws based on their religion and location. Education is another arena where ethical dilemmas surface. Curricula in many public schools reflect dominant religious ideologies, sometimes at the expense of inclusivity. For instance, Christian or Islamic Religious Studies is commonly offered, but African traditional religion is rarely taught with equal legitimacy. Such

imbalances perpetuate stereotypes and erode the ethical obligation to promote religious literacy and respect for all traditions.

Moreover, the ethics of governance in a religiously plural society demand leader who can rise above sectarian considerations and prioritize national unity. However, in practice, political appointments and resource distribution are often guided by religious and regional affiliations, fostering distrust and rivalry. This violates principles of fairness and competence-based governance, creating a culture of entitlement rather than meritocracy (Iwuoha & Ezeibe, 2022). The ethical dilemmas of governing a religiously diverse Nigeria are multifaceted and persistent. While religion remains a source of identity and moral direction for many citizens, its politicization threatens the ideals of equity, inclusiveness, and democratic fairness. To navigate these challenges, Nigeria must embrace policies and civic values that recognize its religious diversity not as a threat, but as a shared moral responsibility that calls for empathy, balance, and integrity in public life.

Media, Public Morality, and Religious Narratives

In the digital age, both traditional and social media play increasingly powerful roles in shaping public morality and disseminating religious narratives in Nigeria. From televised sermons to viral prophecies, the media landscape has become a primary battleground where religion, politics, and ethics intersect. This intersection holds the potential to educate and inspire civic virtue, but it also presents profound ethical challenges when manipulated for political gain or used to inflame sectarian divisions. Traditional media outlets such as radio, television, and newspapers have long provided platforms for religious leaders to address their followers and the broader public. Many prominent pastors and imams operate their own broadcasting stations or have dedicated slots on national networks. These platforms often blend religious teachings with commentary on political issues, making them powerful tools for moral persuasion and, increasingly, political influence (Adebayo & Obasi, 2023). Sermons aired on Sundays or during Ramadan frequently carry implicit or explicit political messages, endorsing certain candidates or criticizing political actions through the lens of faith.

Social media has amplified this influence exponentially. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have turned religious leaders into digital influencers, expanding their reach beyond local congregations to national and international audiences. During election seasons, these platforms are often flooded with “divine revelations” and apocalyptic warnings about political outcomes, sometimes contributing to voters’ manipulation or electoral tensions (Eze, 2023). The viral spread of religious content with little fact-checking or ethical moderation raises concerns about misinformation, emotional manipulation, and the erosion of critical thinking in political decision-making. A particularly concerning development is the emergence of politically aligned “media prophets” clergy whose online presence is driven by political agendas disguised as spiritual prophecy. Their messages, often sensational are shared widely by partisan accounts and bloggers, further entrenching sectarian loyalties. As noted by Iwuoha and Ezeibe (2022), this convergence of media sensationalism and religious authority creates an environment where public morality is dictated by spectacle rather than substance.

The media's portrayal of religious events and figures also shapes societal perceptions of morality. For instance, when headlines consistently highlight prosperity gospel messages or depict religious leaders as politically influential celebrities, they contribute to a commodification of faith. The risk in this is that people are tempted to redefine moral leadership in terms of wealth, charisma, and political relevance rather than ethical integrity or spiritual depth. Suberu (2021) observes that this media-driven glamorization of clerical power distorts moral expectations and encourages a performative rather than principled engagement with religion and politics.

On the positive side, media platforms have been instrumental in promoting interfaith dialogue and moral accountability. Civil society organizations and ethical commentators use media channels to challenge religious extremism, expose political corruption, and advocate for justice. Documentaries, panel discussions, and opinion pieces exploring the role of religion in

public life have contributed to civic awareness and ethical reflection. Thus, while media presents ethical risks, it also offers critical opportunities for democratic engagement and moral education.

Media plays a dual role in Nigeria's religious-political ecosystem: it can either elevate public morality or erode it, depending on how it is wielded. The ethical challenge lies in curating media content that upholds truth, promotes tolerance, and fosters responsible civic engagement. Religious leaders, media professionals, and policymakers must therefore collaborate to develop ethical standards for media communication particularly when it intersects with faith and politics.

Conclusion

Nigeria's democratic journey is deeply entangled with its rich religious tapestry. While religion has the capacity to inspire justice, compassion, and accountability in governance, its political instrumentalization poses ethical risks that threaten democratic ideals, national unity, and public morality. From the pulpit to the ballot box, and from traditional media to digital platforms, the fusion of sacred convictions with secular ambitions has produced a political culture where faith is often used more as a strategy than a source of integrity. This position paper has explored the multifaceted ways religion influences the Nigerian political space through ethical frameworks, clerical power, media narratives, and legal pluralism. It has highlighted the ethical dilemmas arising from religious favouritism, exclusionary politics, and performative piety. As Nigeria continues to evolve as a pluralistic democracy, it must urgently confront the politicization of religion and reaffirm ethical leadership grounded in justice, empathy, and shared civic responsibility. The challenge is not to remove religion from public life but to ensure that its role contributes constructively to national development, human dignity, and democratic sustainability. This calls for courageous religious leadership, ethical political practices, and a media landscape committed to truth and social cohesion.

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian government must reinforce its constitutional commitment to religious neutrality in governance. Public appointments, policymaking, and state resources should not favour any particular religion.
2. Civil society and religious institutions should collaborate to create common ethical standards rooted in shared values like justice, integrity, and accountability, which transcend sectarian interests.
3. Regulatory bodies such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should enforce stricter guidelines to prevent the spread of divisive religious content and ensure accurate, responsible religious commentary in media.
4. Education curricula should emphasize civic ethics, religious tolerance, and interfaith dialogue from early schooling through tertiary institutions to foster a more pluralistic and inclusive society.
5. Religious institutions must provide ethical training for their leaders on the dangers of political partisanship and emphasize their prophetic role in speaking truth to power without aligning with political factions.
6. Government institutions should consult religious minorities, traditional belief systems, and interfaith organizations during policy design to ensure inclusivity and foster national cohesion.

References

- Adebayo, A., & Obasi, K. (2023). *Faith, power and the pulpit: The role of religious leaders in Nigeria's 2023 elections*. Lagos: Centre for Civic Ethics.
- Anugwom, E. E. (2022). Religion and the state in Nigeria: Contestations, contradictions, and pluralisms. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 40(2), 189–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2022.2046100>
- Asuelime, L. O. (2017). Religious manipulation of the political process in Nigeria and the way forward. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 9(1), 1–10.
- Eze, S. C. (2023). The pulpit and the podium: Religious prophecy and political partisanship in Nigeria's electoral campaigns. *African Affairs Review*, 13(1), 52–71.
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). *A history of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press.

- Iwuoha, V. C., & Ezeibe, C. C. (2022). Religion, identity politics and democratic backsliding in Nigeria. *Democratization*, 29(6), 1102–1120.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2036347>
- Jega, A. M. (2007). *Democracy, good governance and development in Nigeria*. Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Juergensmeyer, M. (2017). *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al Qaeda*. University of California Press.
- Kalu, O. U. (2008). *African Christianity: An African story*. University of Pretoria.
- Omosor, F. O. (2013). The Interface between Religious Fundamentalism and Political Terrorism: Boko Haram Scourge and Security in Nigeria. *Abraka Humanities Review*, 5(1), 80-96.
- Omosor, F. O. (2019). The Role of Christian Clerics in Promoting Good Governance and Development in Nigeria: Prophet Amos as a Model. *KIU Journal of Humanities* 4(3), 33-46.
- Suberu, R. T. (2021). The ethics of pluralism: Religion and federalism in Nigeria. *Journal of African Politics and Religion*, 8(2), 99–124.
- Tar, U. A. (2018). Religion, ethnicity and politics in Nigeria: Implications for sustainable democracy and development. *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(3), 43–55.
- Tella, S. A. (2016). Religion and politics in Nigeria: A case study of ethno-religious conflicts. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 6(2), 234–241.
- Tomori, O., & Adewale, B. (2019). Media and religious narratives in Nigeria: Challenges for peace and security. *Media Watch*, 10(1), 90–104.
- Udoh, O., & Adejumo, A. (2020). Ethical leadership and governance in Nigeria: The role of religious institutions. *International Journal of Ethics in Social Sciences*, 5(4), 123–137.
- Ukah, A. (2007). The politics of religious identity and interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 37(1), 83–106.