# Impact of Religion on Populace Participation in Politics for National Development

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**Abstract:** This paper examined the Impact of Religion on Populace Participation in Politics for National Development. Religion, the opium of the masses, has become a strong determining factor for people's participation in politics. The influence of religion on politics is visible in the participation of the populace in political matters or issues. This means religion can enhance or affect national development. The research adopted a descriptive design while data was reported qualitatively. Findings revealed that religion had contributed positively and negatively to politics and that some adherence to religious and moral values enhanced peace and national development. At the same time, some disturbed progressive peace and national development. The work recommends that political officeholders adhere to the positive tenets of their faiths, which promote the welfare of the human race.

**Keywords:** Impact, Religion, Populace, Participation, Politics, and National Development

## Introduction

Religion is among the dominant factors influencing people's political participation,particularly in this post-independence era. The interaction between religion and politics in Nigeriacan not be denied. The apparent interplay between religion and politics isattracting reactions from scholars such as Loimeier (2007, 137); Nmah (2007, 119-127); Imo (2008, 211-215); Marshall (2009, 273); Adebanwi (2010, 121); Sodiq (2009, 646); Onapajo (2012, 42); Obiefuna (2018, 187), which comes with a consensus on the ambivalent impact of religion on politics and national growth, development, and survival. However, the impacts of religion on politics and national development can be positive, negative, or both. Hence, religion is viewed as two sides of a coin, with positive and negative impacts on people's participation in politics for national development.This paper examines the impacts of religion on populace participation in politics for national development.It is believed that national development can be achieved through the political participation of persons who adhere to the tenets of their religious faiths.

**Overview of Politics**

Etymologically, 'politics' originates in the Greek word 'Polis,' which means "Everything that has to do or relates to the city-state. The use of city-states no longer exists. Thus, the modern definition is "That which concerns the state."[i]Therefore, politics is defined as the study of the state, especially as it relates to goals, aims, purposes, and the institutions through which its goals will be achieved. That is connected toits members, governing bodies, and other states. According to Hornby (2000,157), politics involves getting and using power in public life and influencing decisions that affect a country or a society.It is the procedure of making decisions that apply to individual members of a group achieving and exercising positions of governance organized governor over a human community, predominantly a state.

Further, it is defined as the adjustment and interplay of power and interest within a society's public life and affairs on national and multi-national levels.[ii] Politics involves who gets what, when, and how—the decision to support a particular religion or set of principles in a society instead of an individual.[iii] Politics is essentially about good governance and primarily involves structuring power to achieve some articulated goals.

In this work, the authors consider politics not as an end but as a process through which the day-to-day running of the lives of the masses in a community, states, and nations are ensured. It further involves the study of the government and the collection of officers who make, interpret, d enforce rules for the whole community.It is the way in which people understand and order their social affairs, and acquire greater control over the situation. It is also a tactic for maintaining harmony among individuals who have various goals and aspirations for their lives or for settling disputes within any given group, whether it be a family, tribe, village, or nation-state.

Onyekpe (1998, 16) definedpolitics asa power struggle, which is the authority to determine or formulate and execute decisions and policies the society must accept; it is the struggle for power of governance, especially executive authority.[iv]Further,Onyekpe gives a caveat to the first part of his definition. According to him, the struggle for or the acquisition of power and the society's reaction to it depend significantly on the country's political development level. Politics involve stage governance and how the political leaders acquire their mandate.

Politics is the art of government, exercisingsocial controlby making and enforcing collective decisions. According to Heywood (2004, 5), this is a classical definition of politics, developed from the term's original meaning in Ancient Greece. This is the traditional view of the discipline, which focuses on the government's personnel and machinery.The Greeks viewed politics as matters in the public realm against the private realm. This conception moves beyond the narrow realm of government to what is considered public affairs. In other words, the distinction between an essentially public and private sphere of life. The public realm was viewed as morally superior to the private realm. Their primary interest was in the

moral purposes that decision-makers should pursue to realize all state members' public or common good, i.e., the conformity of ideas and actions with perfect goodness. This view of politics is often traced back to the work of Aristotle. According to Aristotle,a man by nature is a political animal, by which he meant that it is only within a political community that human beings can live the good life (8).

According to Hornby (2000), politics involves getting and using power in public life and influencing decisions that affect a country or a society(899). Nmah (2007) defines politics as the adjustment and interplay of power and interest within a society's public life and affairs on national and multi-national levels (119). According to Okafor (2007), politics involves who gets what, when, and how. The decision to support a particular religion or set of principles in a society instead of an individual is political. Politics is essentially about good governance and primarily involves structuring power to achieve some articulated goals(166).

## Concept of Religion

Etymologically, the word 'religion' is derived from the Latin root religare, and it means 'to bind fast.' Then 'religion'certainly has a strong emphasis on the community aspect. It is something that binds fast the members of it together. Some scholars emphasize that religion is concerned primarily with conceptions of God, divinity, and the meaning and order of human existence. Others have emphasizedhow religion draws distinctions between sacred (transcendent or other-worldly) forms of space and belief and more mundane, or profane, domains of 'worldly' human endeavour[v]Ugwu (2002) defined religion as faith and practices involving the relationship between humankind and what is sacred (2). More comprehensively, Merriam (1980) views religion as the outward existence of God to whom obedience, service,and honour are due, the expression of human love, fear or awe of some super-human and overruling power, whether by profession of belief, by the observance of rites and ceremonies or by the conduct of life (250).

According to Nmah (2007, 121-124), religion may be defined from four primary points of view: subjectively, objectively, morally, and institutionally. Religion is subjectively defined as man's natural and innate consciousness of dependence on a transcendent suprahuman Being and the consequent natural and spontaneous propensity to render homage and worship to him. Objectively, religion may be defined as a complex configuration of doctrines, laws, and rituals by which man expresses his loyalty to a transcendental Being, God. On the other hand, it is defined morally as a virtue in a person, an enduring quality, a habit which disposes of him who has it to pay, steadfastly and well, the depth of honour and worship that he owes to God. Subsequently, religion may also be defined institutionally as possessing its definite system of beliefs, activities, and values, like any other social institution. For the present study, the definition of religion given by

Obiefuna (2018) will be adhered to here. Obiefuna sees religion as a phenomenon in human society. It is part of life [but] which shapes the traditions of society - marriage, politics, education (formal and informal), economy, law, and health as social institutions (10).Accordingly, religion is the means through which people express an understanding of the reality and meaning of life. It is thought that religion has a significant impact on how individuals and groups view ethical principles and morals. Religion has made significant impacts on the social, spiritual and political affairs of the country. The high esteem given to religion is demonstrated by the diverse manner through which it is carried out in many societies. It serves as the social glue that holds the community together and serves as a stabilizing influence in society. It is a powerful force for fostering morality and society.

Furthermore, the only institutions that offer a flawless way of life that is based on heavenly principles and helps people to develop morality are religious institutions. Religious organizations, such as churches, mosques, schools, and others, instill moral ideals through music, sermons, special seminars, and workshops, among other methods. These organizations also speak out, act practically, and set an example for their followers by upholding moral principles. Similarly, through steadfastly combating immorality, homosexuality, corruption, and other issues that can divide people in the nation, religious organizations serve as a unifying force. Religious organizations also serveas guide to people in the right direction by modeling moral behavior in homes, communities, societies, and governments. They are the guardians of morality. In essence, religious organizations must take up the role of the way and fly the morality flag high.

## National Development

Development means different things to different people. The development could be seen as a process of economic and social transformation based on complex cultural and environmental interactions[vi] (Ajaebu, 2012, 52). According to Rodney (2018), development is the process that includes: physical development, which includes man-made goods produced by the use of technology, cultural development, which comprises the values, norms, and traditions of society; and personal development, which includes the psychological directions of individuals. In common parlance, development describes a process through which the potentials of a nation are enhanced until it reaches its stable position (204).

It is a process of allowing people to meet their aspirations. Obi (2009) asserted that "development is the harnessing of available resources by a people for the realization of their major objectives, solving their major articulated problem without deliberately creating new problem situations" (63). National development is a vital issue; hence it has always engaged the attention of every citizen and government of Nigeria. National development is the capacity of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people by providing security and social amenities, which include quality education, potable water,

transportation infrastructure, medical care, and employment, among others (Ajaegbu, 2012, 51 and 52).

National development is deliberate, keenly directed, focused energetic projection of national culture, and collective action to develop a political and economic system. From the political perspective, it is in the area of developing and instituting a democratic policy. Nation development thus entails the ability of the nation-state to sustain itself as a sovereign by giving freedom and liberty to its people to use a well-laid mechanism or system of leadership recruitment and leave a legacy or culture of smooth succession of power to future generations (Samson, 2013: 34). From economic context the greatness of individuals is through the success which a nation makes in industrial development for improved production of goods and services. It improves people's living standards and builds their minds together to want continued existence as one nation. Gambari explicates that: in reality, the greatness of a nation has to be earned and is not determined just by the size of its population or the abundance of its natural resources. China and India have the largest populations in the world, but they are only now rising as critical global players. On the other hand, Japan has few natural resources but has long become a global economic powerhouse. "In today's world, skills, productivity, industriousness, and competitiveness determine national greatness. Not even possessing the nuclear bomb is      sufficient    to make a nation excessive without reference to the seriousness and creativity    of           its citizens"(Gambari :2008: 28).

From the foregoing national development has objectives and purposes to be achieved. It is to achieve sustainable development through job creation, employment, good conditions of service and welfare packages, and a favorable climate for investors (foreign and local) in both urban and rural areas. It extends to the development of behaviors, values, and lingua franca. Nations thus are built by exemplary men and women and sustained by institutions such as governmental and non-governmental organizations that promote good governance and, thus, socio-economic development. The challenges of national development in Nigeria include intolerance, misconceptions, inadequate grasp of religious matters, fanaticism, extremism, and violence, among others, which are inimical to the progress of a country (Oladosu, 2015, 141). Therefore, all religious organizations must work together to encourage their followers to take steps toward actualizing national development. Each of these religions in Nigeria must actively impart moral principles that will serve as a guide for people's behavior, character, and attitude, forming their personalities and values and fostering national development.

**The Place of Religion in Politics**

This section is devoted to considering the roles of religion in politics. Indeed, religion and religious associations perform several democratic roles as; support for tolerance, peaceful cooperation, and love is promoted through ministerial practice. Religion is a significant phenomenon in contemporary society because it impacts all facets of nation development and because its practices are taking over people's lives. Nigeria is an example of a plural society that is divided into many religious groups. Nigeria has many different religions, but the three most prevalent are African religion, Islam, and Christianity. Due to their substantial adherent bases, Christianity and Islam are Nigeria's two most prominent religions. Nigeria's two main religions, Christianity and Islam, have demonstrated intense political rivalry. This is due to how seriously Nigerians take their faith. Religious institutions, therefore, have a part to play in combating political immorality in Nigeria. The high immorality level in the nation's political system demonstrates that religious institutions have fallen short in their responsibility to promote moral principles in their adherents.

Schaefer & Lamn (1997, 273-275) identify some democratic utilities of religion, which include the integration of human societies composed of individuals and social groups with diverse interests and aspirations. In their view, religious bonds transcend these personal and divisive forces. Another essential function identified by the two authors is the ability of religion to legitimize the existing social order. According to Rotimi, Mala &Aiyegboyin (1999, 33-41), religion performs six interrelated functions, namely, restraining or criticizing the conduct of government, encouraging political participation, promoting democratic values and norms, articulating and aggregating distinctive societal interests, generating cross-cutting identities and providing avenues for the development of leadership skills.

Regarding the first function of restraining and containing government conduct, religious associations have repeatedly and stridently denounced bad governmental policies or actions that infringe on the interests of the religious community and the welfare of the citizenry. Thus, religious associations have joined independence groups in civil society in criticizing the dubious and circuitous nature of the military's democratization project and the government's management of the religious disturbances that have convulsed several Northern states. On the stimulation of political participation and civic identification, religious organizations have played an essential role in encouraging and mobilizing their members towards active participation in and identification with public affairs and politics. This is done by stimulating a sense of civic identification and participation in their members by urging such members to 'pray and fast' for peace, stability, justice, and progress of the Nation (Ayorinde, 2007, 70).

Thirdly, religion promotes democratic values and norms. This is done by promoting and propagating such democratic norms and values as tolerance, moderation, willingness to

compromise, and respect for truth, justice, and freedom. At different times, religious leaders in Nigeria have demonstrated this commitment to democracy by urging the populace not to waver in their support for democratic institutions (Tukur, 1999,  78). More so, religion provides avenues for interest representation. Religious organizations articulate, aggregate, and represent distinctive societal interests. The Christian representation and mobilization against people's membership of the country in the OIC represented only one of the many instances of interest representation by the Christian community since 1986.

It is pertinent to state unequivocally that religion can greatly aid national development by promoting moral values sorely lacking in modern society. This is because morality is seen as the by product or fruit of religion (Idowu, 1996: 79). religion guidesresisting greed, lust, and hatred via moral strength and courage. It also guarantees values and gives life meaning. Therefore, it is the holy duty of Christianity, Islam, and the African religion to advance a better and more harmonious way of life for the populace. National development requires religious and moral ideals rooted in religious texts, traditions, and beliefs. These virtues include kindness, compassion, mercy, generosity, dedication to duty, brotherliness, peace, love, justice, tolerance, obedience, self-control, prudence, courage, wisdom, goodness, and others. The moral values birthed by religion enable people to judge according to divine ethics and justice. Therefore, religious morality guides building a community where people can live in harmony and uphold what is decent and just (Shehu, 2011:108). As a result, religious organizations are responsible for instilling moral values in their followers.

Religion equally generates cross-cutting interest. The existence of cross-cutting interests implies that competing affiliations could operate to secure social peace and democratic stability and prevent destructive or protracted social conflict by inducing individuals and groups to divide their emotions in a single explosive line of affiliation. Finally, religious organizations, like many other ordered shares of associational activity or social intercourse, provide an appropriate environment for developing leadership skills. This is done by displaying an impressive capacity to manage people and resources in their respective organizations by speaking out courageously and consistently against the excessive solutions to the nation's problems. Through this, religious leaders have gained some reputation and legitimacy as influential national leaders of thorough and potential statements.

It would be misleading to conclude that religious organizations have uniformly or consistently supported democratic processes and values. On the contrary, they periodically exhibited disturbing anti-democratic tendencies that have found expression in religious violence and intolerance, the corruption and manipulation of religious leaders. From the preceding, some religious activities can be described as dysfunctional because their

consequences frustrate the stated goals of the groups. Religion is generally functional or dysfunctional, depending on how much it contributes to achieving societal goals.

**Reasons for Participating in Politics for National Development**

Politics is seen as evil, corrupt, and deceptive, which hinders some Christians from participating. Ayokunle asserts that politics and Christianity are two distinct entities that help society grow. Both have parallel practices, but they share some common goals that benefit man (Ayokunle, 2015:21). Christian religion is essential to the life of Christians. So also politics, though some denominations do see politics as a dirty practice, they should get involved to change the story. Politics is perceived as evil and looked upon as a dirty game. However, there is nothing dirty in politics.

Nevertheless, the so-called dirtiness associated with it is due to the evil people who engage in this evil must be flushed out. Christians must ensure they select or elect Godly people into the system. However, this is possible because Christians must actively be involved in politics. However, from a biblical point of view, it is evident that participating in politics is a spiritual, social, and moral obligation.

Spiritual Obligation to God

The first obligation that the Christian has to participate in politics is the Spiritual obligation to God. Our obligation to God is to be good Christians and citizens. God ordains politics, and He instituted it. Government is not the invention of power-hungry, self-seeking men and women. This was God's idea. There is no authority except that which He allows, and he intends that it should serve Him. Politicians are supposed to be His representatives before the nations and ultimately accountable to Him. Jesus described the character and nature of a Christian in the Sermon on the Mount, which is to be "salt and light." This means Christians are to be of good character and conduct. Hence, every Christian in public and political office is expected to display this character and conduct. Therefore, Christian Leaders should be involved in politics because they are the light and salt to bring sanity to the system. They are to teach with their lifestyle and conduct how to play politics without practicing evil of buying votes, snatching bi-lotes box, and embezzling money for selfish purposes. If Christian Leaders ignore politics, the same corrupt people will continue to lead, and it will be impossible for Christian Leaders to influence the system positively in Nigeria.

Social Obligation to Others

The second obligation for Christian political participation is the social obligation to humanity. Our social obligation to humanity is to be a good citizen involves being willing to run for public office. Every Christian has a social obligation to be engaged and involved in the country's political process. When Christians participate in the government system of their country, they would be in a position to influence good and godly heritage that will

guarantee religious liberty for their children and grandchildren. The Children will inherit the work habits, attitudes towards others, family life and the examples we have set; they will inherit the education, health care, justice, political, and religious systems.

Moral Obligation to Truth

The moral obligation to truth is the third obligation for Christians to be involved in politics. Our laws and policies must be based on unalienable rights from God. Moreover, it is He alone who, through the Ten Commandments, established eternal standards of right and wrong that any civilized society must be based upon. All those who run for such offices must hold fast to the moral obligation of truth. This is seen in Romans 13:9-10. God desires everyone to be treated equally. The resources of the nation should be judiciously used to care adequately for everybody; especially the poor in the country.

## Impact of Religion on Politics for National Development

The influence of religion on Nigerian politics has both positive and negative implications. The implications can be considered as follows:

## Positive Impacts

The positive influence of religion on politics enhances national development. In this sense, one expects religious and ethical values to manifest at every point of influence. This means that religious people must abide by the ethical teachings inherent in their religions, which will provide good leadership and obedient followership. Religion provides humanity with moral values by which to live. According to Nnadi (2004), if positively used, religion promotes the political life of any society (113). Every religion, whether Christianity, African Traditional, Islam, etc., has moral values that regulate and harmonize human life. In Exodus 20 of the Christian Bible, there is an outline of the Ten Commandments, which guide the behaviours of Christians in the society. In the same way, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR) have rules which their adherents must obey.

Religion tells what is right and wrong... religion enriches people's morale for the welfare of the individual and society (Awoshiri, Bibinu, Katuka, & Sergius, 2022, 57). Adherence to religious, ethical values is imperative for all religious practitioners. Hence, as Omoregbe (1998, 21) posited, living a moral life is necessary because God commands it. Failure to do this will be counterproductive in the matter of national development. Johnstone (2001) asserted that what one believes, concerning what is good, trustworthy, and desirable, as well as what God intends for people and society, could be expected to influence the choice one makes in the political arena. That is, religion should affect people's voting patterns (103). Another expected positive impact of religion in politics is adherence to the oath of office. In this case, political leaders, having invoked God when the oath is being administered, will rule with the fear of God.

**Negative Impacts**

The influence of religion on politics has, at various times, threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. This is because no society can grow in an atmosphere of religious violence, which often has a political undertone. Christian and Muslim politicians have failed in Nigerian politics since they cannot blend politics with religious values. Unfortunately, religion is often used to cause confusion, woe, or pacify the electorate in Nigerian politics. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo played religious politics when he was the civilian President to the detriment of the masses. According to Ugwueye (2009), during Obasanjo's democratic administration, the link between religion and politics was glaring from the ruled and the ruler's vast use of the Christian religion. Unfortunately, it was done, for the most part, for selfish interests, not for real religious reasons. (253). The negative impact of religion on Nigerian politics is increasingly manifesting in the nation. Every political process in Nigeria has a religious undertone. The civil service, appointment to important positions in the government, and the entire body politic of the nation are seriously influenced by religious prejudice. Many Nigerians refuse to be posted or transferred to some parts of the country because of how religion is handled in Nigeria. This ugly situation continues hampering national development in the country.

**Recommendations**

From what has been experienced in Nigeria and as established in this paper, absolute secularity is impossible because of the unavoidable interplay between religion and society. This is to say that religion in politics has come to stay, and religion shall continue to be relevant in society. What can be done because of this reality is to utilize the benefits accruing from it to enhance; because of these considerations, religious leaders should exhort their members to be involved in the political process and to vote.

Moreover, they should help educate and equip their members to think rightly about political issues, candidates, and party platforms. This equipping and educating should be affected through regular preaching, corporate prayer, etc.). However, for robust political discipleship, additional steps should be taken. This might mean making voter's guides and other educational material available. Religious individuals need to change the way they view politics today in order for them to get involved in it. However, it is essential to define political involvement properly before going to that. Some say that voting is an indirect form of involvement. Religious individuals should be aware of political issues, vote, and have personal preferences.

**Conclusion**

This paper examined the impact of religion on populace participation in politics for national development. Politics is so relevant to the development of any Country in the world. When politics is practiced with a correct attitude, progress is inevitable. In light of this, the populace is encouraged to play their role in politics. These religious impacts have both positive and negative aspects on national development. Religion influences the political decisions of successive governments. This shows that religion and politics relate effectively, but the impact derived from the relationship relies solely on the sincerity of those engaged in politics. However, religion and not competency have become the requirement for election or appointing individuals into political or public offices, which in a way, promotes inequality and conflict in society. Therefore, religious leaders must educate their followers on the need to participate in politics to enhance national development. They should participate actively in politics, contest elections for political positions, and support and vote for others. They should be encouraged to seek political appointment at national, state and local government levels if they feel God calls them to do so.

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