



THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF ADAMAWA STATE

ABSTRACT

This study examines the intersection of religion and politics within the period of the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa State and Nigeria at large. Religion plays a significant role in the politics of Adamawa State, often influencing voter behavior, policies, election outcomes and governance. Adamawa State, with its diverse ethnic and religious composition, provides a unique microcosm to explore these dynamics. The study adopts a Cross-Sectional Research Design incorporating mixed-methods approach employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The findings reveal about 57.6% is of the opinion that religious affiliations significantly impacted voting patterns and candidate preferences in Adamawa State during the 2023 Presidential Election. The study also highlights the relationship between religious leaders and political actors with 66.8% who strongly agreed that, religion leaders exert considerable influence over voters' decision in Adamawa state 2023 presidential election. The findings of this research can contribute to the broader discourse on the role of religion in Adamawa State politics, offering insights into how religious dynamics influences electoral processes and outcomes in a pluralistic society even though the finding of the research is rejected by the researcher because the result contradicts the official INNEC declaration which emphasized that political parties and their influence determined the electoral outcome, rather than religion, as seen in the 2023 presidential result. The implications of these findings are critical for policymakers, political strategists, and scholars interested in the nexus of religion and politics in Adamawa state and Nigeria at large. The study recommends for policymakers should promote secularism in political campaigns, strengthen regulations on religious endorsements, and encourage interfaith dialogue to foster unity and impartiality in political participation.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Nigeria is a nation characterized by its diverse ethnic and religious composition with Christianity and Islam being the two dominant religions. While the constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits religious discrimination. Despite being a secular nation in principle and hence imbibe with the European democratic culture, however religion often intersects with politics in Nigeria, influencing outcome of an election, policymaking, and governance.

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Religious identities play a significant role in shaping political allegiances, with candidates often seeking support from religious leaders and leveraging religious sentiments to mobilize voters.

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria provides a pertinent case study of the intersection of religion and politics, particularly in Adamawa State and Nigeria at large, a region known for its religious diversity. In this context, understanding how religious affiliations and narratives intersect with political campaigns, voter behavior, and electoral outcomes is crucial for understanding the nature of Nigerian democracy. This research aims to explore the relationship between religion and politics in the context of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, particularly Adamawa.

The nexus between religion and politics has always been a fascinating and debated subject. While certain scholars (Ahmed, 2018, cited in Nkatta and Eze, n.d.) argue that, religion is an inherent aspect of politics and is used for political mobilization, others (Gill, 2001) believe that religion should be kept separate from political matters. Despite the division among scholars regarding the role of religion in politics, history provides various examples of how religion has played a significant role in the political decisions of societies. In Christianity, for instance, Jesus Christ was subjected to persecution from birth due to being seen as a political figure, while in Islam, the concept of Jihads has been utilized to overthrow governments and political structures in order to establish Islamic caliphates. This was exemplified by Usman Dan Fodio in 18th-century Nigeria when he established Islamic Fulani dominance by toppling Northern Hausa Kingdoms. In contemporary times, groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria also assert that they are conducting a Jihad against the Nigerian State to establish their own caliphate.

Onyenekwe and Luca, (2023) argues that, religion can influence politics in three ways: by direct involvement of religious men in politics, by fusing the two (religion and politics) as one, and by subjecting politics or government to religious doctrine or laws, thereby carrying out politics or governance along the lines of religious doctrine, ideals, or laws.

Furthermore, religious elements exert considerable influence on Nigeria's electoral process, and specific core principles underpin this aspect. For example, religious factors frequently impact the choice of presidential or gubernatorial candidates and their running mates. The primary objective is to protect the interests of the respective religious followers. As a result, it is common to observe tickets featuring a combination of Muslim and Christian candidates or vice versa (Onyenekwe and Luca, 2023).

Onebunne (2018), argues that, Religion does not make people good or bad. On the contrary, it is being used as an instrument of oppression and deceit in Nigeria. It appears that Nigerians have resigned themselves to fate and this is possibly further compounded by poverty, illiteracy, and lack of political education on the part of majority. This position is further aggravated by the general perception that politics is a dirty game and that only people who can deceive, manipulate, and greedily accumulate wealth are meant to participate (Onebunne 2018).

Furthermore, this study explores the ways in which religious identities and beliefs intersect with political ideologies, highlighting the influence of religious leaders, movements and organizations in shaping public opinion, mobilizing voters, and advocating for specific policy positions. We therefore analyze the role of

religious institutions in shaping political discourse, the impact of religious rhetoric on electoral campaigns, and the implications of religious-based affiliations on political party formations and alliances. Hence, they have excellently provided a detailed account of the salience of religion to the major political debates, conflicts and series of collective violence that once characterized the early and recent history of Nigeria. Since the inception of a renewed democratic regime in 1999, religion has continued to surface in the political sphere of the country; and the dramatic and dynamic changes religion has taken in the contemporary global political space has further given much impetus to the phenomenon of religion and politics in Nigeria, and elsewhere.

Nkatta and Eze (n.d.) posits that, religion can impact political participation by virtue of religious leaders instructing their adherents to engage in or abstain from political activities. Additionally, some political leaders make decisions influenced by their religious convictions or guidance from spiritual mentors. An illustrative case occurred in Belgium in 1990, when an abortion bill was proposed. Belgian Catholic bishops cautioned their followers about supporting abortion, as it could lead to their exclusion from the church community. Responding to this, the devoutly Catholic Belgian King informed the Prime Minister that signing the law would conflict with his conscience. This instance vividly portrays how religion can shape an individual's political choices, serving as a factor that can either rally people behind certain political decisions or push them to oppose them. Consequently, someone with an inclination for political involvement might be dissuaded from participating by their religious leaders and community.

The discourse highlights the contrasting views among scholars regarding religion's role as a political mobilization tool. While some argue for religion's separation from politics, others contend that it significantly influences political activities and mobilization. The subsequent section will pivot to Nigeria to examine religion's impact on political mobilization there.

Wilson, Sheikh and Ochse (2014), challenges the conventional separation of religion and politics in International Relations (IR), arguing for a reevaluation of boundaries. There's a growing trend to explore alternative ways of understanding the evolving relationship between the religious and the political in the context of contemporary global politics. The scholar questions the assumed monopoly of secularism, asking whether the contributions of religious actors represent a new development or a reclaiming of a historical heritage. There's a call to move beyond traditional frameworks in IR analysis, acknowledging the complexity of interactions between religion and politics. The critique extends to the downplaying of Judeo-Christian influences by IR scholars and a 'fetishization' of the Westphalian paradigm, potentially leading to the omission of religious discussions in the field. Overall, the scholar advocates for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to understanding the intricate relationship between religion and politics in IR.

Yüksel and Büyükbaş (2023), contends that, religious freedom is a fundamental right in the United States, protected by a metaphorical 'wall of separation' between church and state. This separation, highlighted in the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, is considered a model for preventing state interference in religious practices. The author suggests that Turkey, in the process of formulating a new constitution, may find the American approach to church and state separation intriguing, particularly in light of a proposal by İsmail

Kahraman for the guarantee of religious freedom in Turkey's new constitution. Overall, the argument underscores the potential relevance of the U.S. model for safeguarding religious freedom in Turkey.

The objectives of this study seek to answer the research questions on the intersection of religion and politics during the 2023 presidential election in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The study aims to analyze how religious factors influenced political campaigns, voter behavior, and election outcomes, and to propose strategies for future electoral processes (Binoy, 2019). Specifically, it will examine the extent to which religious factors influence voter behavior and political outcomes in the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa State. It will assess the role of religious leaders and institutions in shaping political discourse and influencing voter decisions during the election. Additionally, it will explore the perceptions and attitudes of voters towards the intersection of religion and politics and its impact on electoral processes and outcomes. Finally, it aims to identify the challenges and opportunities presented by the intersection of religion and politics in the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICS

Aristotle, who lived from (384 to 322 BC) and was cited in Onebunne's work (2018) posited that, politics as an inherent aspect of human nature that cannot be avoided. He believed that individuals engage in politics when they seek to determine their social status, pursue personal well-being, and attempt to persuade others to adopt their viewpoints. Aristotle's perspective led him to the conclusion that the capacity of both individuals and organizations to attain higher levels of social life is through their political interactions with others. These interactions typically occur within institutions specifically designed to resolve social conflicts and establish state objectives.

Umeanolue, (2020) defined politics as "the processes and actions related to acquiring and utilizing authority within the realm of public affairs, along with the capacity to exert influence over choices that impact a nation or a community."

Onebunne, (2018) suggest that, politics can be defined as the process of making authoritative decisions about the allocation of various values within a social system. These values encompass everything that people in society desire, including wealth, respect, prestige, position, security, power, and other similar aspects. In essence, politics involves the authoritative distribution of these sought-after goods and benefits in a given community or society.

According to Ojewunmi, (2020) argues that, politics has been defined as the dynamic of relationships within a group or organization that enables individuals to wield a specific form of authority or influence over others. According to Ajayi (2020; it is a commonly held belief in contemporary times that politics is a realm marked by crafty and frequently unscrupulous actions and tactics.

2.1.2 CONCEPT OF ELECTION

Chinonyelum, (2015) argues that, in democratic government, the fundamental principle is that it is governed by the "consent of the governed," and elections serve as the practical manifestation of this concept of "consent." According to Chinonyelum (2015), elections are at the core of democracy. He further defines elections as an "institutional arrangement" that serves as a method for populating public offices through a competitive competition for the votes of the people. Olisa and colleagues (Chinonyelum, 2015) posited that, elections are the mechanisms or processes used for choosing individuals to fill public offices or other private positions.

Gaubu (2015) argues that, election is the process through which the members of a community or organization select one or more individuals to act as representatives with the authority to make decisions on their behalf. The inclusion of elections in a democratic system is aimed at guaranteeing that the government exercises its powers with the consent of the governed. In essence, elections provide legitimacy to the government's authority. Thus, election is a method by which members of a group, club, society, community, or organization periodically choose certain individuals from within their ranks to hold specific offices.

In the opinion of Bamidele, (2022) argues that, Elections can be understood as a complex process characterized by the unpredictability of events, where multiple variables interact and influence each other. They are often described as a formal collective decision-making act that takes place within a broader context of interrelated events, including antecedents (preceding factors) and subsequent actions.

CONCEPT OF RELIGION

The term "religion" is etymologically traced back to three Latin words, specifically "Ligare," meaning to bind, "Relegere" meaning to unite or link, and "Religio," signifying a relationship. In light of this linguistic exploration, religion can be understood as a connection that exists between human beings and divine entities. Bouquet further elucidated it as "a stable relationship between the human self and a non-human entity, which may be described as the sacred, the supernatural; the self-existent, the absolute, or simply, God" (Onebunne, 2018).

Onebunne (2018) suggests that, religion comprises the profane and the supernatural. He defines religion as the varied symbolic expression of and the appropriate response to what people consciously affirm as having unlimited value for them. Thomas and kwarkye, (2013) define religion as the array of human activities that become evident through beliefs and ritual practices, all of which are undertaken in response to the existence of a Supersensible Being.

RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICS

According to Christian beliefs, God governs His people through chosen individuals, and no government can effectively rule without God's permission. It's worth noting that some scholars point out that Jesus was a

political activist and Messianic revolutionary who, much like the zealots of his time, sought freedom for Israel (Ojewunmi et al., 2020).

Christians generally hold that the Christian Church doesn't endorse a specific political system but is adaptable to various forms of secular government, even when they may be flawed. The Church typically supports any political system that allows it to freely carry out its spiritual mission. However, there is a spectrum of Christian views on political involvement. Some Christians view political participation as undesirable, believing that religion and politics should remain separate, drawing from the notion that "they are in it but not of it," citing Jesus' statement in John 17:16. They regard politics as a morally compromised arena that Christians should avoid to maintain their purity. This perspective often has its roots in the colonial history and a failure to differentiate between partisan politics and general political engagement (Ojewunmi, 2020).

Ojewunmi (2020) argues that In Islam, religion and politics are intricately connected, as the polity under Islamic control is expected to adhere to theocratic principles, this means that political power is vested in religious leaders, and a secular form of government is considered non-existent in this context. Consequently, in Islam, politics and religion are closely intertwined, forming an integral part of the same domain.

It is often emphasized that one of the greatest achievements of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was the unification of Arabia, both in religious and political terms. In Islamic thought, the most effective political system is considered "theocratic," where Allah is the sole recognized authority. This perspective explains why Muslims are actively engaged in both political participation and partisanship and often hold significant political power in various African states. Muslims view religion as an essential aspect of one's identity, influencing every facet of an individual's life. They regard Islam as a comprehensive way of life, shaping how Muslims think and behave in various settings, whether it be in the Mosque, at home, or in the marketplace. Islam is seen as having authority over every aspect of human existence (Ojewunmi, et al., 2020).

2.1.3 THE ROLES OF RELIGIONS ON POLITICAL SYSTEM OF NIGERIA

Ojewunmi, (2020) argues that, Nigeria is a secular state, and its constitution permits the separation of religion and the state. This forms the basis of secularism in the country. Secularism as a theory upholds the principle that, religious groups should not interfere in the affairs of the state, and conversely, the state should not interfere in religious matters. In simpler terms, secularism guarantees religious freedom for all members of society. It defends the absolute freedom of religion and other belief systems and safeguards the right to express religious beliefs as long as it doesn't infringe upon the rights and freedoms of others.

Umeanolue (2020) argues that, the role of religion on Nigerian politics carries both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, it can enhance national development by encouraging leaders and citizens to abide by ethical values rooted in their faith. Religion also provides a set of moral values that guide behavior, whether it's in Christianity, Islam, or African Traditional Religion. When used positively, religion can inspire political engagement for the common good.

Conversely, the negative influence of religion on politics has at times threatened the unity of Nigeria. Issues like the Sharia Court of Appeal and religious crises have strained the secular and pluralistic nature of the country, causing displacement and interethnic tensions. These tensions can hamper sustainable development and even undermine a unifying institution like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Economically, public funds spent on religious activities and numerous holidays for religious festivals can have implications. Additionally, religious bias in politics can lead to mediocre leaders, who may prioritize religious affiliations over competence. This religious prejudice can affect the impartial functioning of the government and other institutions.

BellaNaija (2018) maintains that, the connection between religion and politics has been a consistent and undeniable phenomenon. People tend to bring religion into politics and politics into religion, and the people of Nigeria are no exception to this pattern. Religion has assumed a significant role in the political landscape of the country, which is quite understandable given Nigeria's extensive religious diversity. These religious diversities are closely connected with various political activities in the nation, making the relationship between religion and politics a prominent and influential aspect of Nigerian society.

Nolte, Nathaniel and Abubakar (2009) suggested that, the capacity of religious organizations to engage in politics and governance in Nigeria is profoundly influenced by various factors, including linguistic, ethnic, and regional identities, as well as the struggles within Nigeria to limit the political participation of certain groups through the imposition of 'indigeneity' requirements at the state level. Consequently, due to the strong links between ethnicity and religion, competition among religious groups is closely intertwined with other rivalries that shape local politics in Nigeria.

The relationships between the state and religious organizations are characterized by inequity. In some states, certain organizations are excluded from active participation in local politics, while others enjoy favorable access to state resources. Conflicts regarding religious participation are deeply interconnected with disputes over access to material and ideological resources, ranging from land ownership to control over state budgets and local media outlets such as radio and television channels. This complex interplay between religion, ethnicity, and political power underscores the intricate dynamics of Nigeria's political landscape.

Afolabi, (2015) emphasizes that, religion has assumed a pivotal role in Nigerian politics. Nigeria, as the most populous country in West Africa, is marked by significant religious diversity, encompassing Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. These religious affiliations are closely interwoven with the nation's political activities.

Regrettably, religion in Nigerian politics has often been used for negative purposes. Political officeholders have exploited religion as a tool to gain power, while religious leaders have sometimes manipulated it for personal gain from those who hold public office. This exploitation and mishandling of religion in politics have been particularly prevalent since Nigeria gained its independence. This underscores the complex and sometimes problematic relationship between religion and politics in the country.

2.1.4 ROLE OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IN VOTER BEHAVIOR

According to Said, Rahman and Yousufi, (2021) posited that, religion has a significant influence on voting behavior, particularly in conservative societies, and this is supported by both theoretical perspectives and empirical data gathered from respondents in the context of the 2013 general elections in Buner.

Jim, (2019) posited that, Nigeria is characterized by its diverse religious landscape, encompassing three primary faiths: Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions. Additionally, there exists a fourth group, the self-identified free-thinkers, who do not align with any of the aforementioned religions. However, this group does not wield significant influence in Nigeria's religious composition. Notably, Christianity and Islam have played prominent roles in the country's political sphere. Many individuals vying for public office have strategically leveraged religious fervor to achieve their political goals. Consequently, Nigeria has experienced frequent incidents of pre- and post-election violence, resulting in substantial damage to both lives and property. This challenging scenario persists in the nation.

Goldberg (2014), argues that, the conventional divisions such as social class or religion are frequently said to have diminished in their ability to explain voting preferences. The influence of religious divisions remains uncertain, with outcomes varying based on the selected cases and indicators. This study specifically examines the impact of religion on the inclination to vote for the Christian Democratic Party of Switzerland (CVP), utilizing data from the Swiss national elections in 2007 and 2011.

Nwankwo (2019), suggests that, in the initial of 1999 and 2003 took place in Nigeria, religion did not wield a substantial impact on voter choices. However, its influence steadily increased from 2011 onward. When comparing the elections of 1999 and 2003 with those in 2011 and 2015, the effect of faith on voter preferences was positive in the latter two elections. Notably, the impact of religion reached its zenith in 2015, demonstrating a significant and resilient effect on voters' choices.

2.1.5 IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS ON POLITICS

Nkatta and Eze (n.d.) contend that religious leaders play a crucial role in influencing political mobilization. According to them, a religion can have a substantial impact on the political choices individuals make. They emphasize that various elements, such as engagement in elections (whether as a candidate or a voter), active participation in electoral processes, support for political campaigns, and acceptance of political roles, are all aspects that can be influenced significantly by religious factors.

Iheanyi (1996) argues that, considering the central role of religion in traditional Nigeria, religious leaders exert significant influence in the Nigerian political landscape. The focus is on how leaders from Islamic, Christian, and traditional religious backgrounds, collectively as a group, have positioned themselves in relation to the historical reality of class conflict during both the colonial and postcolonial periods. The author contends that these religious leaders have played a substantial role in shaping the sociopolitical dynamics of

Nigeria. However, the author takes a critical stance, suggesting that their impact has generally been negative, contributing to the tone of Nigeria's sociopolitical change and influencing its current economic condition.

Adamo (2018) centers on the politicization of ethnicity, regionalism, and religion in Nigerian politics during the first Federal General Election in 1954. Under the Lyttelton Constitution, which introduced different electoral laws for regional and central legislatures, varying voting criteria were established. Universal adult suffrage was implemented in the East, while in the West, only adult male taxpayers could vote, and the North adopted an indirect college system, limiting participation to taxpayers.

The election results reflected a pattern of regional and religious dominance. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) secured a majority of seats in the North, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) dominated in the East, and the Action Group (AG) led in the West. The author asserts that the electoral trend demonstrated the entwining of politics with ethnicity, regionalism, and religion. The three major parties, led by figures representing each region and associated with specific religious groups, tended to win in regions where their respective religions held sway. The author also notes that parties of Christian origin did not achieve success in the predominantly Muslim North, illustrating the religious dimension in Nigerian political dynamics during this period.

Oguntola-Laguda (2015) highlights a common trend among political officeholders in Nigeria: a failure to fulfill electoral promises and a tendency to instrumentalize religion during campaigns, only to neglect its principles and ethical guidelines once in power. In this context, religion becomes a tool for achieving political objectives rather than a genuine guiding force. Moreover, the author observes that individuals aspiring to leadership positions in Nigeria often adopt religious sentiments primarily for the purpose of mobilizing voters and gaining support from the public. However, once victorious in elections, these leaders frequently sideline the ethical teachings and doctrines of religion amid the complexities of political power struggles. The author argues that true adherence to the principles of religion would lead political leaders to prioritize ethical considerations and regard religious ethics as a foundational framework for effective and considerate leadership.

Haider (2016) argues that, religion and religious identity have the potential to both foster fragmentation and promote cohesion within a society. On one hand, there are instances where religious leaders have actively contributed to division by inciting and subsequently supporting various forms of violence, including electoral and political violence. On the other hand, religious leaders and other actors within religious communities can also play vital roles in fostering cohesion. Their influence can be harnessed to promote unity, understanding, and shared values, contributing positively to social harmony and stability. The impact of religion on social dynamics largely depends on the actions and motivations of those who wield religious influence.

Haider (2016) asserts that, influence of religious leaders is closely tied to the organizational structure of a particular religion. In congregational religions, where religious leaders deliver sermons and engage directly with the congregation, they are more likely to effectively mobilize citizens along religious lines. This is in

contrast to religions where the role of religious leaders is more limited or circumscribed. The nature of engagement and interaction within the religious community can significantly impact the ability of religious leaders to sway public opinion and mobilize followers based on religious affiliations.

The willingness of religious leaders to engage in politics and peacebuilding can vary significantly. In Africa, for instance, newer reformist churches are often less inclined than established churches to participate in political debates and contribute to peace initiatives. The specific interests of religious actors play a crucial role in shaping their involvement in political change and their support for democratic processes (Haider, 2016).

Geographic factors also come into play, as evidenced by a study on Nigeria. Religious leaders residing in religiously diverse and integrated settings are more likely to promote religious tolerance compared to those living in religiously homogenous settings, according to Dowd's findings in 2014. This suggests that the local context and environment significantly influence the role that religious leaders are inclined to play in political and social dynamics.

2.1.6 POLITICAL PARTIES AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

The issue of political parties and religion in Nigeria has deep historical roots, dating back to the country's independence and its establishment as a democratic republic. Notably, the overthrow of Yakubu Gowon marked a significant turning point. Throughout its history, Nigeria has experienced continuous shifts in its foreign, economic, and internal political policies. Despite appearances of smooth political transitions, these developments are often like ripples on the surface of a complex social structure in black Africa (Moses, 2021).

Adamo (2018), posited that, the influence of religion in Nigerian elections following the introduction of the Arthur Richards Constitution. In the 1947 election for area councils, only a minority of members (4 out of 24) were elected through the popular vote, while the majority were either nominated or appointed by colonial or regional authorities.

Religion's significant role in Nigerian elections is highlighted, particularly in the early days and notably in the northern part of the country during the 1950s. Three northern political parties—the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC)—were characterized by religious affiliations, with Muslim leaders and representation of consensus Muslim communities. The NPC represented upper-class Muslims, the NEPU represented lower-class Muslims, leading to interreligious conflicts. The UMBC, formed by non-Muslim societies, opposed NPC's dominance, receiving support from Christians and missionaries to counter perceived FulaniHausa Islamic hegemony in the North.

The influence of religion on party formation and voting extended to southern Nigeria as well. The National Muslim Party formed in Lagos in 1953 aimed to oppose the Action Group (AG), but it didn't achieve electoral success in the 1954, 1956, and 1959 elections. Another Muslim party, the National Muslim League

(NML), was established in 1957. The question of whether religion and politics should be kept separate is contingent on how we define these concepts. If we define "politics" as party politics and "religion" as the authoritative structure of religious institutions, it may be reasonable to argue for their separation (Moses, 2021).

Religion and politics in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Nigeria, are multifaceted and go beyond the ordinary. Religious influence extends into candidate selection and the electoral process. Christian organizations and associations have evolved into labor groups that now engage with political parties, politicians, and the public to influence election outcomes due to their significant following and influence over the populace. This phenomenon is closely tied to the publications on Christianity and local books on witchcraft and mystical experiences, reflecting the diverse religious landscape in Nigeria.

The involvement of political parties and party members in fetish crafts and spirituality to influence the electoral process has become a part of Nigerian politics. Religious leaders, across various faiths, play a pivotal role in shaping political dynamics in Nigeria. This situation is reflective of the complex state of religious affairs in the country. A vital aspect of the debate on religion and politics is its impact on the formulation of public policy in Nigeria. The resurgence of politics intertwined with religious affirmation is not confined to Nigeria but is prevalent in various African countries (Moses, 2021).

Moses (2021) argues that, religious identity or affiliations with political parties poses a significant threat not only to the political institutions of Nigeria but also to the fabric of social relations within the state and among its citizens. When individuals in positions of political power prioritize their loyalty to religious affiliations and political ideology, they tend to make decisions and formulate policies based on bias and prejudice. Consequently, this allegiance to religion, political party, and ideology can lead to a erosion of patriotism, nationalism, and Pan Africanism, often sidelining objectivity.

In this scenario, political parties, political actors, and institutions may make decisions not guided by legality and expediency but by the lens of their religious identity and ideological beliefs. This can result in a disregard for the statutes and provisions of the constitution and international law. The influence of these affiliations and ideologies on decision-making can overshadow the principles of impartiality and fairness that should ideally guide the political landscape (Moses, 2021).

2.1.7 AN OVERVIEW OF THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

According to Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Report, (2023), the 2023 general election in Nigeria marked the seventh election in the series of general elections held since the country returned to civil rule in 1999. This particular election was conducted in two phases.

The federal election, which aimed to elect the president, vice president, and members of the National Assembly, took place on 25 February 2023. Subsequently, the state election, which aimed to elect governors, deputy governors, and members of the State Houses of Assembly, was conducted on 18 March 2023. To conclude the electoral process, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) organized a

supplementary election on 15 April 2023. This supplementary election was carried out in 96 constituencies across 23 states of the federation where previous elections had been inconclusive.

The 2023 presidential general election in Nigeria was a missed opportunity for the country's democratic development. Expectations were high that this election would build upon and improve the progress made through electoral reforms and innovations introduced since 2011. Unfortunately, these hopes were dashed as multiple accredited election observation groups reported significant deficiencies that tarnished the credibility of the 2023 presidential election.

The election faced persistent challenges in election administration, including inefficient management of permanent voters' cards (PVCs) distribution, operational and logistical failures, malfunctioning election technology, inadequate handling of results management procedures, a lack of transparent results collation and declaration processes, and poor crisis communication. The high levels of election violence, insecurity, and widespread vote-buying further eroded the election's credibility.

Like many elections in Nigeria, the 2023 general election was conducted amid a deeply contentious and disputed atmosphere. For the first time in Nigeria's fourth republic, three major parties—the All-Progressives Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and the Labour Party (LP)—engaged in a hard-fought but divisive campaign. The preelection campaigns brought to the forefront the divisive nature of Nigerian politics, particularly along ethnic, religious, and regional lines. Actors such as the Situation Room played a significant role in calming tensions and shifting the focus of the campaigns toward critical issues.

According to the report by Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), (2023), the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections were held on schedule, marking a departure from the delays and postponements experienced in previous election cycles. Despite various challenges, including security concerns, fuel scarcity, and currency redesign, the election took place. However, the conduct of the election faced several issues. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) received the necessary resources for the election shortly before the polls, but deployment plans were impacted by uncertainty. INEC officials' arrival at polling stations varied, with some arriving before the scheduled opening time and others coming an hour or more after the expected start. This issue was more pronounced in the southeast, where concerns for personal safety due to attacks against INEC officials were prevalent.

Challenges were also observed in the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). While INEC provided training on the technology, recruitment issues and capacity gaps affected its effective deployment. Incidents of voter accreditation being completed without the use of BVAS were noted in several regions, contravening the legal framework. Technical problems with BVAS malfunction were also widespread, particularly in the northeast and northwest.

Despite these challenges, INEC's contingency planning resolved most technical issues within an hour, and accreditation proceeded efficiently when the technology was working. However, in some cases, malfunctions caused significant delays. Anecdotal reports indicated that voters waited for hours, sometimes in adverse weather conditions, leading some to leave without voting.

The INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) was intended to enhance transparency by providing real-time transmission of election results from polling units to the central collation center. However, as of 21:00 hours on Election Day, no results were uploaded to the platform for the presidential election. INEC cited technical hitches related to scaling up the IReV platform for the delay, but these fueled rumors of vote manipulation. Despite high hopes for technology, its deployment during the results transmission stage eroded public confidence in the electoral process's transparency and accountability. INEC's failure to adhere to its own stated procedures was a significant organizational failure.

The 2023 election witnessed significant participation, especially among the youth. Over 70% of the 9.46 million voters added to the register by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were youth aged 18-34, making up 39.7% of the total electorate of 93.4 million. Despite this youth enthusiasm, ethnic identity remained a critical factor influencing voter preferences, as young voters were not a monolithic group. In the presidential election, a total of 24,055,878 valid votes were cast, and the top four candidates garnered significant support. Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the APC led with 8,794,726 votes, followed by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the PDP with 6,984,520 votes, Peter Obi of the LP with 6,101,533 votes, and Rabiu Kwankwaso of the NNPP with 1,496,687 votes. Notably, each of the leading three candidates won 12 states, demonstrating a balanced distribution of support. In contrast, Rabiu Kwankwaso only secured victory in his home state, Kano. Geographically, Tinubu achieved 25% of the votes in 29 states, Atiku in 21 states, and Obi in 16 states, showcasing a diverse voter landscape with substantial support for different candidates across various regions of Nigeria.

2.1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.8.1 Social Identity Theory

The adoption of Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a valuable lens for examining the complex dynamics at the intersection of religion and politics in the 2023 presidential election in Adamawa State and Nigeria at large. Social Identity Theory (SIT) was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The theory demonstrates how individuals categorize themselves and others into a social group, often based on shared characteristics like religion. While Adamawa State is characterized by a diverse population with various religious affiliations, in this regard social identity plays a crucial role in shaping political attitudes and behaviors. The theory's emphasis on group identification, inter-group relations, in-group favoritism, and social influence provides a comprehensive framework to analyze the political landscape. The election dynamics in Adamawa State are likely influenced by individuals' strong identification with their religious groups, leading to in-group favoritism, potential alliances based on religious identity, and the influence of social norms within these groups. By adopting SIT, researchers can gain insights into the complexities of group dynamics and their impact on political decision-making in the specific context of the 2023 presidential election in Adamawa State and Nigeria at large.

Presidential Election in Adamawa State and Nigeria at large closely align with Social Identity Theory (SIT). Each objective corresponds to specific elements of SIT, demonstrating its applicability to the study

Investigating how religious affiliation influences voter behavior and political preferences: This objective directly aligns with SIT's, emphasizing on group identification and in-group favoritism. The theory predicts that, individuals derive a sense of belonging from their religious group, influencing their political preferences. The theory also explores the concept of social influence and conformity as religious leaders and institutions often serve as influential in-groups. SIT envisages that individuals conform to the norms and values of their group, impacting political discourse and mobilization by leveraging religious identity, explore perceptions and attitudes of voters regarding the involvement of religion in politics: This objective also focuses on attitudes within social groups, aligning with SIT's prediction that perceptions are shaped by social identity.

3.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter is dedicated to presenting and analyzing data, employing tables to showcase the collected data, which encompasses different response categories that influence the eventual outcomes. Using the Kobo Toolbox platform, 400 questionnaires were randomly distributed among three Local Government Areas, guaranteeing that the sample size appropriately reflects the overall number of respondents. Each of the chosen local governments represented the three senatorial districts in Adamawa state. The data collected from these respondents is organized in tabular form, demonstrating the quantity of responses to each questionnaire item alongside their corresponding percentages.

3.1.1 CHI –SQUARE TEST

Chi Square Test of People’s Voting Behavior

Null Hypothesis: The following factors did not influence people’s voting behavior during the 2023 presidential election in Adamawa State.	Chi-square Statistics	Degree of freedom (DF)	Significance (P-values)
Religious affiliation influence voter turnout in Adamawa State's 2023 Presidential Election.	132.153	4	0.000
Voters in Adamawa State prioritize candidates who align with their religious values in the 2023 Presidential Election.	214.223	4	0.000
Religious preferences of political candidates overwrite your choice of candidate during the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa State.	125.026	4	0.000
The outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Adamawa State was based on voters’ religious bias.	132.142	4	0.000
Your vote was based on your religious belief.	217.231	4	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Note that this table provides a summary of the chi-square test result.

The Chi-square test results presented in Table 4.6 provide compelling evidence regarding the significant influence of religious factors on voting behavior during the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The statistical analysis examines various aspects of how religion intersected with politics and shaped electoral outcomes. Firstly, the hypothesis that religious affiliation influenced voter turnout in

Adamawa State's 2023 Presidential Election is strongly supported. The Chi-square statistic of 132.153 with a degree of freedom (DF) of 4 and a P-value of 0.000 indicates a highly significant relationship. This suggests that voters' religious affiliations were a critical determinant in their decision to participate in the election.

Similarly, the data shows that voters in Adamawa State significantly prioritized candidates who aligned with their religious values. The Chi-square statistic for this factor is 214.223 with a DF of 4 and a P-value of 0.000, underscoring the strong influence of religious congruence on candidate preference. This finding highlights the tendency of voters to support candidates who reflect their own religious beliefs and values. Furthermore, the preference for candidates based on their religious affiliations also appears to be a decisive factor. With a Chi-square statistic of 125.026 and a P-value of 0.000, this result confirms that the religious identities of political candidates were a major consideration for voters when choosing whom to support.

Additionally, the outcome of the election in Adamawa State was significantly influenced by voters' religious biases, as evidenced by a Chi-square statistic of 132.142 and a P-value of 0.000. This indicates that religious prejudices and biases played a substantial role in shaping the election results. Finally, the hypothesis that voters' choices were based on their personal religious beliefs is strongly validated, with the highest Chi-square statistic in the table at 217.231 and a P-value of 0.000. This finding illustrates that individual religious beliefs were a primary driver of voting behavior in the 2023 presidential election.

3.1.2 Chi Square Test of the Role of Religious leaders and Institutions in the 2023 Presidential Elections.

Null Hypothesis: Religious leaders and institutions did not play role in the 2023 Presidential Elections in Adamawa State.	Chi-square Statistics	Degree of freedom (DF)	Significance (P-values)
Religious leaders influence your decision to vote during the 2023 presidential election.	135.510	4	0.000
Religious institutions mobilized support for presidential candidates during the 2023 election within governments in Adamawa State.	92.723	4	0.000
Religious institutions utilize their platforms to advocate for particular presidential candidates in the 2023 election in Adamawa State.	197.212	4	0.000
Religious leaders publicly endorse specific 2023 presidential candidates.	89.157	4	0.000
party candidates gave religious leaders money and other materials to influence the voting decisions of their followers.	318.197	4	0.000
Religious institutions engage in activities such as voter education and mobilization to support specific presidential candidates in the 2023 election in Adamawa State.	183.763	4	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Note that this table provides a summary of the chi-square test result.

The expected and the observed frequencies for each of the variables are provided in the appendix. The Chi-square test results presented in Table 4.7 offer substantial insights into the significant roles played by

religious leaders and institutions during the 2023 Presidential Elections in Adamawa State, Nigeria. This analysis evaluates various dimensions of their involvement and influence on the electoral process.

Firstly, the hypothesis that religious leaders influenced voters' decisions during the election is robustly supported. The Chi-square statistic of 135.510 with a degree of freedom (DF) of 4 and a P-value of 0.000 indicates a highly significant relationship. This result suggests that religious leaders had a considerable impact on guiding their followers' voting choices. The involvement of religious institutions in mobilizing support for presidential candidates is also significantly evidenced. With a Chi-square statistic of 92.723 and a P-value of 0.000, this finding highlights the active role that religious organizations played in rallying support for specific candidates within governmental frameworks in Adamawa State. Additionally, the use of religious platforms to advocate for particular presidential candidates is notably significant. The Chi-square statistic for this factor is 197.212 with a P-value of 0.000, indicating that religious institutions effectively utilized their platforms to endorse and promote certain candidates to their congregations. Public endorsements by religious leaders of specific presidential candidates were also a critical factor, as shown by a Chi-square statistic of 89.157 and a P-value of 0.000. This statistic underscores the public and influential endorsements made by religious leaders, which likely swayed the voting decisions of many followers. The interaction between political candidates and religious leaders, particularly in terms of material inducements, is significantly highlighted. With the highest Chi-square statistic in this table at 318.197 and a P-value of 0.000, this finding suggests that there were notable instances where party candidates provided religious leaders with money and other incentives to influence their followers' voting decisions. Finally, the engagement of religious institutions in voter education and mobilization activities to support specific candidates is strongly supported by the data. The Chi-square statistic of 183.763 and a P-value of 0.000 indicates that these institutions were actively involved in educating and mobilizing voters to support particular presidential candidates.

3.1.3 Chi Square Test of People’s Opinions on Religion Intersection in Politics

Null Hypothesis: People’s Opinions did not Influence Religion Intersection in Politics in the 2023 Presidential Elections in Adamawa State.	Chi-square Statistics	Degree of freedom (DF)	Significance (P-values)
Voters perceive religion as a guiding factor in their decision-making process when selecting a presidential candidate in the 2023 Election in Adamawa State.	132.153	4	0.000
Your perspective regarding the intersection of religion and politics appears to be favorable during the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa State.	214.223	4	0.000
Religious affiliations of political candidates outweigh your selection of a candidate during the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa State.	125.026	4	0.000
Religion played a significant role in the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa State.	132.142	4	0.000
There should be regulations to limit the involvement of religion in politics during election campaigns	217.231	4	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Note that this table provides a summary of the chi-square test result.

The Chi-square test results presented in Table 4.8 highlight the significant influence of people's opinions on the intersection of religion and politics during the 2023 Presidential Elections in Adamawa State, Nigeria. This analysis examines various aspects of public perception and its impact on the electoral process.

Firstly, the hypothesis that voters perceive religion as a guiding factor in their decision-making process when selecting a presidential candidate is strongly supported. The Chi-square statistic of 132.153 with a degree of freedom (DF) of 4 and a P-value of 0.000 indicates a highly significant relationship. This result suggests that a substantial number of voters considered religion as a primary influence in their candidate selection during the election. Similarly, the perception that the intersection of religion and politics is favorable is significantly evidenced. With a Chi-square statistic of 214.223 and a P-value of 0.000, this finding highlight that many voters viewed the relationship between religion and politics positively during the 2023 Presidential Election in Adamawa State. The data also shows that the religious affiliations of political candidates were a decisive factor for voters. The Chi-square statistic for this factor is 125.026 with a P-value of 0.000, underscoring the importance of candidates' religious identities in voters' selection processes. This result indicates that voters' preferences were heavily influenced by the religious backgrounds of the candidates. Furthermore, the role of religion in the election is confirmed to be significant by the Chi-square statistic of 132.142 and a P-value of 0.000. This indicates that the involvement of religion in the electoral process was perceived as substantial by the voters, influencing the overall dynamics of the election. Finally, there is significant support for the opinion that there should be regulations to limit the involvement of religion in politics during election campaigns. With the highest Chi-square statistic in the table at 217.231 and a P-value of 0.000, this finding suggests that many voters believe in the necessity of regulating religious influence to ensure a more balanced and fair electoral process.

3.1.4 Chi Square Test of the Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Religion Intersection in Politics.

Null Hypothesis: Perceived advantages and disadvantages by respondents do not influence religion intersection in Politics in the 2023 Presidential Elections in Adamawa State.	Chi-square Statistics	Degree of freedom (DF)	Significance (P-values)
There's a risk of politicians exploiting religious sentiments for their own gains.	191.173	4	0.000
Political competition based on religious lines in Adamawa State, can potentially fuel inter-religious tensions and conflicts.	524.721	4	0.000
When religious and politics intersect, it can lead to worries about whether governance remains secular and certain religious groups might receive preferential treatment.	189.312	4	0.000
Religion serves as a platform for community engagement and mobilization, allowing political candidates to connect with voters on shared values and beliefs.	921.182	4	0.000
Religious principles such as justice, compassion, and integrity can inform political leadership, promoting ethical governance practices.	502.157	4	0.000
Religion intersection in politics can lead to lack of inclusivity, fairness in governance	294.621	4	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Note that this table provides a summary of the chi-square test result.

The Chi-square test results in Table 4.9 offer a comprehensive analysis of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the intersection of religion and politics during the 2023 Presidential Elections in Adamawa State, Nigeria. These results reflect the significant influence of respondents' perceptions on the integration of religion into the political landscape. Firstly, the hypothesis that there is a risk of politicians exploiting religious sentiments for their own gains is strongly supported. The Chi-square statistic of 191.173 with a degree of freedom (DF) of 4 and a P-value of 0.000 indicates a highly significant concern among respondents. This suggests that many voters believe politicians may manipulate religious sentiments to further their political ambitions. Secondly, the concern that political competition based on religious lines can potentially fuel inter-religious tensions and conflicts is overwhelmingly supported, with the highest Chi-square statistic in the table at 524.721 and a P-value of 0.000. This finding highlights a significant apprehension that the intertwining of religion and politics could exacerbate religious discord and lead to conflict within Adamawa State. Another critical finding is the worry about the secular nature of governance when religion and politics intersect. The Chi-square statistic for this concern is 189.312 with a P-value of 0.000, indicating a significant fear that governance may become biased, potentially favoring certain religious groups over others, which could undermine secular principles. On the advantageous side, the role of religion as a platform for community engagement and mobilization is notably significant. With a Chi-square statistic of 921.182 and a P-value of 0.000, this result highlights the perception that religion can facilitate political candidates in connecting with voters through shared values and beliefs, enhancing community involvement in the political process. Additionally, religious principles such as justice, compassion, and integrity informing political leadership are another significant advantage perceived by respondents. The Chi-square statistic for this perspective is 502.157 with a P-value of 0.000, suggesting that many believe the intersection of religion and politics can promote ethical governance practices driven by these moral values. Conversely, the concern that religion's involvement in politics can lead to a lack of inclusivity and fairness in governance is also strongly supported. The Chi-square statistic of 294.621 and a P-value of 0.000 indicates a significant belief that religious influence could result in biased governance, potentially marginalizing certain groups.

3.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the chi-square test show that religious factors had a considerable influence on Adamawa State voters' choices in the 2023 presidential election. Voters' preference to support candidates who used their religious views had a significant impact on voter turnout and preference. Religious organizations and leaders were instrumental in actively rallying support and promoting particular candidates. The general public's views on religion and politics were divided; although some acknowledged religion's importance in moral leadership and community involvement, others voiced worries about bias, exploitation, and interreligious conflict. These results were further emphasized in the focus group discussion, which focused on the relationship between religion, voting behavior, and political endorsements.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are designed to address key challenges and leverage opportunities identified through comprehensive analysis. Implementing these strategies will help achieve optimal outcomes

- i. **Enhance Voter Education:** Implement comprehensive voter education programs aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of the importance of making informed decisions based on factors beyond religious affiliations. This can help mitigate the tendency for voters to prioritize candidates solely based on religious alignment.
- ii. **Promote Political Diversity:** Encourage political parties to nominate candidates from diverse religious backgrounds to ensure representation and inclusivity in the electoral process. This approach can help reduce the influence of religious biases on candidate selection and voting behavior.
- iii. **Strengthen Regulatory Measures:** Implement regulations to limit the exploitation of religious sentiments by political candidates during election campaigns. This may include stricter enforcement of laws prohibiting the use of religious rhetoric to manipulate public opinion and sway voter decisions.
- iv. **Foster Interfaith Dialogue:** Facilitate constructive interfaith dialogue and collaboration to promote mutual understanding and respect among different religious communities, by fostering dialogue and cooperation.
- v. **Empower Independent Electoral Bodies:** Strengthen the independence and capacity of electoral management bodies to ensure fair and transparent electoral processes. This includes measures to safeguard against undue influence from religious leaders or institutions and uphold the principles of secular governance.
- vi. **Encourage Ethical Leadership:** Advocate for ethical leadership that transcends religious divides and upholds principles of justice, compassion, and integrity. Political leaders should prioritize the common good over narrow religious interests, fostering a more inclusive and equitable political environment.

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