

# POWER RELATIONS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS PRAXIS IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** Over time, arguments have been on the need to separate religion from politics in order not to render the noble objectives of both phenomena defeated. Meanwhile, the reverse has been the case and despite the fact that the Nigerian constitution proclaims Nigeria as a secular state, religion continues to cast an ominous shadow on the country's governance and its inherent power relations. Religion has further become a tool with which people seek political power. This study, therefore, is an attempt to examine the interplay between religion and politics within the Nigerian state's power architecture. The dimension the interplay takes, forms part of the concern of this study, so also are the political and development implications of the politicization of religion for governance in Nigeria. To achieve this, the study utilizes both primary and secondary data, whilst adopting a content-analysis approach in its analysis. Findings and analyses clearly expose the politicians' religious intricacies in their desperation to win and maintain their grips on political power by all means, including manipulating religion for personal political ends. The implications of this, as revealed by facts, are the production of manipulative crop of leaders in governance, and creation of artificial religious crisis among adherents of different religious beliefs and faith. Tougher sanctions are recommended for criminal misuse and manipulation of religion for political ends among all cadres of the population.

**Keywords:** Power Relations. Religion. Politicization. Dimensions. Developmental Implication. Nigeria.

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**Resumo:** Ao longo do tempo, tem-se discutido a necessidade de separar a religião da política para não tornar frustrados os nobres objetivos de ambos os fenômenos. Enquanto isso, o inverso tem acontecido e, apesar do fato de a constituição nigeriana proclamar a Nigéria como um estado secular, a religião continua a lançar uma sombra sinistra sobre a governança do país e suas relações de poder inerentes. A religião tornou-se ainda mais uma ferramenta com a qual as pessoas buscam o poder político. Este estudo, portanto, é uma tentativa de examinar a interação entre religião e política dentro da arquitetura de poder do Estado nigeriano. A dimensão que a interação assume faz parte do interesse desta pesquisa, assim como as implicações políticas e de desenvolvimento da politização da religião para o governo, na Nigéria. Para conseguir isso, o trabalho utiliza dados primários e secundários, adotando uma abordagem de análise de conteúdo em sua análise. Descobertas e análises expõem, claramente, as complexidades religiosas dos políticos em seu desespero para vencer e manter seu domínio do poder político por todos os meios, incluindo a manipulação da religião para fins políticos pessoais. As implicações disso, conforme revelado pelos fatos, são a produção de uma safra manipuladora de líderes no governo e a criação de uma crise religiosa artificial entre adeptos de diferentes crenças religiosas. Sanções mais duras são recomendadas para o uso criminoso e a manipulação da religião, para fins políticos, entre todos os quadros da população.

**Palavras-chave:** Relações de poder. Religião. Politização. Dimensões. Implicações Desenvolvimentais. Nigéria.

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**Abstract:** Over time, arguments have been on the need to separate religion from politics in order not to render the noble objectives of both phenomena defeated. Meanwhile, the reverse has been the case and despite the fact that the Nigerian constitution proclaims Nigeria as a secular state, religion continues to cast an ominous shadow on the country's governance and its inherent power relations. Religion has further become a tool with which people seek political power. This study, therefore, is an attempt to examine the interplay between religion and politics within the Nigerian state's power architecture. The dimension the interplay takes, forms part of the concern of this study, so also are the political and development implications of the politicization of religion for governance in Nigeria. To achieve this, the study utilizes both primary and secondary data, whilst adopting a content-analysis approach in its analysis. Findings and analyses clearly expose the politicians' religious intricacies in their desperation to win and maintain their grips on political power by all means, including manipulating religion for personal political ends. The implications of this, as revealed by facts, are the production of manipulative crop of leaders in governance, and creation of artificial religious crisis among adherents of different religious beliefs and faith. Tougher sanctions are recommended for criminal misuse and manipulation of religion for political ends among all cadres of the population.

**Keywords:** Power Relations. Religion. Politicization. Dimensions. Developmental Implication. Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Politics and religion play important roles in shaping the man's social life and the way societies operate. While politics is meant to regulate social behavior for man to coexist peacefully and gainfully, especially when the society's resources are justly and equitably distributed, the latter regulates individual behavior and the belief of a higher power (Zaben, 2012, p. 1). Over time, successive governments in Nigeria have used religion to justify

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their authoritative political systems. This perhaps explains why some had seen religion and modernity as antithetical to each other. Such perception was borne out of the notion that accelerated pace of modernization has resulted in the repression of religion in public life (Bose, 2009, p. 23). Meanwhile, realities on ground in contemporary societies have indicated a renewed and increasing interactions between religious and human organization's public realms despite the increased pace of modernization.

It is of interest that religious enterprise appears to be thriving very much in Nigeria while there is noticeable decline in religious fervor in the world's many parts. In Nigeria, company warehouses and private buildings are being converted to prayer houses on daily basis, so also are the sports stadia all over the country, which are being used more for religious crusades than for sporting events. In the last few years, the country is witnessing an increased patronage of high ranking public officials who not only openly call for and sponsor regular prayers sessions in different prayer houses, but have themselves become prayer merchants. They are often seeing at church crusades and prayer vigils with all the paraphernalia of public office, and sometimes grabbing the microphone to deliver sanctimonious homilies and earthshaking prayers.

The relationship between religion and politics thus makes Nigerian polity an interesting phenomenon. Interactions between religion and politics in Nigeria thus provide examples of the challenges of mixing religion and politics. This is because Nigerian society is religiously pluralized and this significantly influences the nation's political decisions and policies (Oguntola-Laguda, 2008, p. 123-133). But, it is of interest to know the type of influence religion is having on political decisions and policies. On this note, the main objective of this paper is to examine the dimension and implications of politicization of religion on development in Nigeria and lastly suggest workable formula for a complementary relationship between religion and politics for a stable, united and progressive Nigeria.

## **1 THE LINKAGE AND GENESIS OF DIVISION BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

Religion takes an institutional form, and almost all religious traditions have some form of rule dictating who a member of the spiritual community would be and which members can make official pronouncements regarding doctrinal content. Recognizing this fact is an essential part of the broader definition of religion, specifically as it pertains to the study of politics. It raises the issue of church-state relations (Gill, 2001, p. 117-138). Overlapping authority, between state and religious leaders, may also cause conflict. Religious leaders may use their institutional position to challenge unpopular governments as a means of preserving their authority or credibility among parishioners. In essence, by acknowledging that religion commonly takes on institutional forms, the role of interests becomes as critical to the analysis

of religion and politics as are beliefs and values (Gill, 2001, p. 139). In the middle ages, the Church was a formidable power, one that could even threaten the monarch. To keep itself strong, the Church encouraged feudalism and discouraged independent thought. Ultimately, though, massive corruption and abuse of power, by the Church, led to popular dissent and revolution. Martin Luther King is one of the most prominent symbols of this dissent. Another factor that contributed to the weakening of the stranglehold of religion over the masses was the growth of science. When new scientific discoveries were made, more and more teachings of the Church were refuted. The clergy had claimed that the Earth was at the center of the universe; Galileo's explanations proved otherwise. The Church had thought that there were only three continents, but the discovery of Australia punched a hole through this. These and other scientific findings showed that religion was not all-powerful. People realized that religion did not really have all the answers. In the West, the experience of the Middle Ages and the thinkers' teachings, like Rousseau, gave birth to the phenomenon of secularism. True secularism seeks to keep the state independent of religious influence. While each individual has the right to practice their own religion, the state will not be swayed by religious motives or ideologies. Having lived through the detrimental effects of mixing religion with politics, the West was now ready to let religion and politics rule separately (Gill, 2001, p. 136). Conversely, religious dominance over political decisions is still a reality in societies like the Middle East. Secularism is looked upon with suspicion, and people believe that the laws and regulations, written in their holy scriptures, were meant for society as well as the individual.

### **1.1 SECULARIZATION AND THE RESURGENCE OF RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE**

A secular state's dream, where the dominance of religion in both social and private life is drastically curtailed for sustainable growth and development, has been around for some time. Meanwhile, many scholars still held on to this belief system in spite of strong empirical evidence to the contrary (Omotola, 2009, p. 81-98; Warner, 1993, p. 1044-1093; Stark; Bainbridge, 1985; Tucker, 1978). Promoters of secularism also played a crucial role in reducing the potency of religion in public life. Politically, secularization theory has two important predicted consequences. First, religious values and beliefs should play a decreasing role in political decision-making and should serve less as a basis for mobilizing collective action today than in the past. Many of the new social movements that arise will be more secular in nature (Inglehart, 1990, p. 156). Social movements should have little in the way of spiritual content, and religious leaders should not be prominent among such movements. Religious cleavages in electoral politics should also disappear. Second, at the institutional level, secularization predicates the eventual separation of church and state. As the state takes over the social welfare functions of churches, little reason remains to support churches with public funds or official policy. In fact, according to Wallace (1966), state leaders may very well

go on the offensive against religious organizations because the government competes with religious ritual by introducing its own ritual. Though the critique of secularization theory, dated back to the 1960s (Martin, 1965, p. 85), political events, in the late 1970s and 1980s, finally ended the relevance of this paradigm. For example, the overthrow of a supposedly modernized Iranian regime in 1979, by Islamic clerics, as well as Catholics rallying around a new 'liberation theology' that removed a Nicaraguan dictator from power, revealed the influence of religion on politics. Also, conservative evangelicals, in the United States, founded the Moral Majority and played an important role in Ronald Reagan's presidential election. And clashes between Hindus and Muslims, in India, began to have serious political overtones in the world's most populous democracy (Gill, 2001, p. 138). The religion, which was once thought to be near extinction, came roaring back with a vengeance, hence the renewed interest and renaissance of scholarships on spiritual movements, religion and politics.

## 1.2 RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES OF ADHERENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

The three dominant religions in Nigeria are traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. These religious ideologies allow for interactions between religion and politics. The people's traditional religion is a systematic reflection of their socio-cultural orientation, history and legacies on elemental forces, which in turn produce a belief in a supreme cosmic power who created heaven and earth. All things in their social psyche belong to this power. Thus, the people's traditional politics have a strong linkage to their belief in theocracy. To Yoruba, Oba (king), the people's political leader, is only holding office in trust for 'Olodumare' (The Supreme Being). It is in view of this that an Oba's selection or appointment must be carried out through adequate consultation with 'Ifa' (an Oracle) for spiritual approval. As a result of this, politics and religion, in traditional societies, are intertwined and have direct influence on each other. This is still the situation even at the close of the 20th century in Nigeria. Islam, on the other hand, dictates and governs the totality of the Muslims' life (its adherents) from cradle to grave; thus, their political interests, economic considerations, social values and interactions are often given to Islamic interpretations based on the Holy Quran, prophetic practices and other sources of law recognized in Islam. These virtues are expected to permeate any Islamic state's sociopolitical structure. In fact, Prophet Muhammed was his people's spiritual as well as the political leader during his lifetime. After his death, the 'caliphs' emerged and still held on to the same principles. By virtue of this, it is obvious that Islam allows for a spiritual relationship between religion and politics (Akintola, 1997, p. 138-155). Many Christians in Nigeria, on the other hand, would rather argue that it is against the tenets of the Christian faith to get involved in politics. This line of argument hinges on Jesus Christ's statement that "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" (King James Version Bible, 1954, Matthew 22:21). Whereas, the fact remains that

Jesus Christ did not discourage political participation for the faithful. The revered Matthew Hassan Kukah lent credence to this with his submissions that:

What Jesus really meant was not that religion and politics do not mix, nor did He mean that Christians should not participate in politics... the coin was representation of the power of Caesar and that was why the coin had Caesar's sign ... In the case of God, His authority is over and above the realm of Caesar's empire. In that sense, both Caesar and his coin are under the aegis of God and the issue of separation is an aberration (Kukah, 1998, p. 16).

### **1.3 THE POLITICIZATION OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA**

Religion, as an institution, plays a tremendous and influential role in Nigeria's public life and governance, despite the fact that the Nigerian state and successive governments have never adopted a particular religion as the state religion. Religion has manifested itself as a potent force in the Nigerian state's political development, right from pre-independence to post-independence. In this regard, Nigeria's state can hardly be talked about without reference to religion (Suberu, 2009, p. 547-561; Kenny, 2001; International Idea, 2000; Kukah, 1994, p. 18; Falola, 1990). However, historical events linked to religion tilt more towards its negative than positive contributions to the Nigerian state (Ibrahim, 1991). The Jihad, the civil war propaganda, the Sharia law controversy, the tensions provoked by the Nigerian accession to the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), and the incessant religious crises that have engulfed the Northern part (particularly the Maitatsine and Boko Haram problems) mainly indicate that religion cannot be ignored or wished away in the Nigerian political development.

Both Muslims and Christians have used religion as a tool to serve their political interests. Religion, in the politics of 1970 onwards, was basically a tool with which the politicians pursued their secular interests. The schism between the two dominant religions, in postcolonial Nigeria, has always turned out to be primarily political. It matters to each of the religions who becomes the country's president and who does not, and who becomes a state's governor and who should not. In a South-Eastern state, for instance, Christians may not want to live to see a Muslim become governor even if they are absolutely sure their Christian rights would be protected; in like manner, a core Northern state would not want to have a Christian as governor even if they were guaranteed their religious freedom as Muslims. This highlights why, during electioneering campaigns, it is not uncommon to witness religious sermons and preaching wrapped in political toga, in both mosques and churches, all towards the actualization of political ends.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is both exploratory and analytical. It relies on both primary and secondary data. The primary data emanated from religious leaders as well as political analysts who were engaged in in-depth interviews. Primary data were further collected in selected towns, in Niger State and Osun State, Nigeria. The English language was used as a means of communication in the course of primary data collection. Where applicable, Hausa and Yoruba languages were also used to collect data. The data elicited were recorded, transcribed and translated where applicable. The need for ethical consent was also recognized in the conduct of this study, especially through the administration of an informed consent form prior to the conduct of the interviews. The introductory part of the interview guides, which emphasized the issue of voluntary participation, was read and interpreted (where necessary) by each participant. The participants were therefore informed of their rights to decline participation if they so desired. On the other end, secondary data were derived from archival materials on the subject matter of this study. Both Christian and Muslim religious leaders were involved in the study and formed the fulcrum of the data collection exercise all through. Analytically, content analysis was used to analyze the elicited data, given the qualitative nature of the data elicited.

### 2.2 RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATION IN THE CHOICE OF CANDIDATES

Data collected, through primary and archival sources, are presented here and content-analyzed thematically.

Rather than allow quality candidates to emerge through the due process of democratic practice, religious consideration has always been allowed to influence the choice of candidates for elective positions in many of Nigeria's elections. That is why Nigerian politicians always push for either a "Christian-Muslim" ticket (or vice versa) for most executive positions as opposed to the same religious candidates, except in areas where each religion has an absolute majority. Instances of these are abundant in Nigeria's political history. For instance, traces of religious influence have dotted all Nigerian civilian presidents and their vice presidents or prime ministers' emergence since the nation's independence, even though the predominance of Islam in Northern Nigeria had made the presidents' emergence from Muslim extraction inevitable. Instances of these are also abundant in the choices of candidates for state executive positions. There are instances where people of similar faith are paired as candidates and running mates in elections for obvious reasons. The prevailing political climate, such as general dissidents or gang-ups against a sitting administrator's style, usually paves the way for such occurrences. Media propaganda and several public political rallies would be the arsenals being deployed for a successful outcome. At the point of picking the candidates to

contest elections to replace such a regime, the candidates, who were perceived to have saleable political credentials, are always selected or elected to take part in the final elections. Typical examples include Chief M.K.O. Abiola's presidential ticket and Ambassador Babagana Kingibe's vice presidential ticket in 1993; Olagunsoye Oyinlola's governorship ticket; and Erelu Olusola Obada's deputy governorship ticket during the 2003 General Elections in Osun State, Nigeria. Abiola and Babagana Kingibe were both Muslims, while Oyinlola and Olusola Obada belong to the Christian faith, yet they won in their respective elections. This pointed out the precarious nature of religiously-induced political behavior in Nigeria.

### **2.3 POLITICIANS' POLITICAL BEHAVIOR DURING ELECTORAL PERIODS**

Even though religious leaders can, to some extent, be said to be apolitical in the country's partisan politics, Nigerian political leaders, irrespective of religious affiliations, are seen visiting and seeking the religious leaders' blessings and prayers for success in their political careers and elections. In fact, they visit them at any time, as affiliation with or closeness to them is seen as capable of yielding some political benefits. Omotoye (2012) reported that former President Olusegun Obasanjo was a regular visitor to the Redemption Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), most especially when the Holy Ghost program was to be held. In preparation for the 2007 General Elections, late President Yar'Adua, a Muslim, was taken by Obasanjo to the Redemption Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) to solicit cooperation and prayers. A similar case was reported at the advent of the 2011 General elections, when Muhammad Buhari, a Muslim, also visited the Holy Ghost camp. He was accompanied by his vice presidential candidate, Pastor Tunde Bakare. Reports also had it that President Goodluck Jonathan kept a vigil at the Camp in 2010 so as to seek Pastor Adeboye's blessing and prayer. The camp has become a regular prayer venue for seeking political victory for Nigerian politicians.

In addition, reports of political leaders at the state level, visiting churches and shrines to seek political fortunes, are replete in the Nigerian media, both print and electronic. Similar political strategy to create a sense of belonging and demonstration of identification with the adherents of Islamic faith, during the holy Month of Ramadan, by Olusegun Obasanjo as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was an invitation for breakfasts with top Islamic faithful at Aso Rock Villa.

### **2.4 STATUS OF RELIGIOUS CENTERS VISITED AND THE PERCEIVED HIDDEN IDEOLOGICAL MOTIVES**

The following are the general trends noted as characteristics of religious centers being patronized by politicians: (a) Only religious centers, with a large number of followers

and a wide network of branches, are those that politicians are easily attracted to; (b) the leader of those religious centers must be charismatic, that is, the leader that commands everybody's respect in society; (c) there must be evidence of miraculous healings and answering of prayer requests in those religious centers; and (d) visitation to such religious centers will not attract rebuke from the populace due to the general respect for the centers and their leaders. These are some of the reasons why Redemption Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God remains the most patronized by top-notch politicians (both Muslims and Christians) in Nigeria. On the other hand, the Christian political leaders, especially the Christian Governors at the state level, are usually seen in the gathering of the Muslim faithful during their festivals. These Governors are usually seen in the midst of the Muslims at the major open field (Eid) praying ground, dressed in Islamic regalia and holding the meditating beads or rosary. At the national level, once the election is won and the President is sworn in, he can rest assured that nothing will happen to him because the country's resources are under his control. With this, he can manipulate the whole situation to his advantage. On the other hand, the case is not always similar for a state governor, hence the need to constantly dance, to the tune of every religious group, to maintain his grip on the exalted post he is holding. On this note, it is apparent that politicians' patronage of religious centers was aimed at:

- Seeking the members' votes of such religious congregation, who will be expected to align or likely align to their candidacy after the visits.
- Seeking the leaders' spiritual blessing of such congregation on one hand and for psychological manipulation of the general populace in the case of controversial electoral outcomes.
- Justifying the electoral outcome even in the face of controversy over the results. For example, ascension to power by Otunba Adebayo Alao-Akala in 2006 and 2007, as Governor of Oyo State, was ascribed to spiritual blessings he received from Pastor Adeboye of RCCG due to assistance he rendered for the church for a successful Crusade in Ibadan when Alao-Akala was still deputy to Governor Rashidi Ladoja.

## **2.5 POLITICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF MIXING POLITICS WITH RELIGION**

Due to the prominence of religion as a political instrument, successive governments in Nigeria have been neck-deep in religious matters. By the time Nigeria obtained her independence in 1960, it was obvious how varying religious persuasions would play a determining factor in the nation's political destiny, as demonstrated by the Sharia issue. However, religion has become an inalienable factor in the new Nigerian politics, being used to stamp the ruler's authority and acceptability. The erstwhile traditional Nigerian philosophy

of life was characteristically tolerant and accommodating. Felicitations and celebrations during religious holidays, such as Christmas and the Id-el-Kabir, cut across religious lines. People of different religions have lived and worked together for years in offices, as tenants in houses, and have even intermarried. However, this trend is changing rapidly as people feel insecure in places other than their homeland, which might be due to religious intolerance, ethnicity, or politics. Religious intolerance assumed alarming dimensions in the 1980s. Firstly, it was Maitatsine's uprising, which unleashed cold-blooded onslaughts initially on orthodox Muslims, whom they felt were not puritanical enough. After his death, his followers turned against non-Muslims, possibly as a spillover from the Sharia issue. It was actually the beginning of the active politicization of religion, to the detriment of national security. These ethno-religious riots in Nigeria are conclusive evidence that the country has a sectarian problem. The concern amongst most Nigerians is that religious disharmony may prove to be the greatest stumbling block to Nigeria's unity and development. Nonetheless, the slow pace of government action, to curtail the uprising, might have been responsible for the outbreak of other subsequent religious uprisings. We believe that, more often than not, aspiring political leaders laid and still lay more emphasis on the psychological exploitation of the people's religious affiliations than on the logicity and practicability of their manifestos, based on their individual credibility and merit. Nigeria's past leaders (1975–90) had adjudicated among these various religious groups in Nigeria as the "Official" state religion. Quite unfortunately, religion has been added to the already existing ethnic divisions in the Nigerian political process. We believe that this is salient food for thought, for Nigerian leaders and those who have the best interests and the nation's love at heart. In a nutshell, the effect of religion on politics all over the world is bifocal, in the sense that it is both positive and negative. It is positive in the sense that religion, as earlier identified, is value-driven and naturally robs off the polity through the ardent religious believers' participation. The negative effect could be deciphered from the perspective of sectarian tendencies, where religious bigots do anything, in the name of religion, to ensure that positions or offices are gained by their adherents. Most often, such people stand on the position that their ideals and beliefs dominate any environment in which they find themselves.

Analyses of the implications of diversity, in Nigeria and other countries, suggest diversity is a necessary, but not sufficient condition, for conflict. In other words, the very fact that a country has different ethnic, communal, religious and racial groups does not make division and conflict inevitable. In cross-country studies, economists have revisited Weber's hypothesis. Barro and McCleary (2003) assess the effect of religious participation and beliefs on a country's rate of economic progress. Using international survey data for 59 countries, drawn from the World Values Survey and the International Social Sciences Program, conducted between 1981 and 1999, Barro and McCleary (2003) found that greater diversity of religion is associated with higher church attendance and stronger religious beliefs.

For a given level of church attendance, increases in some religious beliefs—notably belief in heaven, hell and an afterlife—tend to increase economic growth. This is evident in the activities of churches in Nigeria, where they assist some of their devoted members, not only influencing their view of success and the need to acquire wealth, but also helping to secure jobs for them, thereby helping to improve their living standards and the country at large. Other studies have focused more on particular religions in varied historical time periods. For example, very useful insights have been gained by focusing on Islam and Judaism. For Islam, there have been detailed investigations into financial systems in the Middle East, including zakat (alms for charity) and the manner in which Islamic banks have been using a financing method, equivalent to the rate of interest, to overcome adverse selection and information problems. This is also practical in Nigeria. The routine giving of arms to the needy, during Christmas celebration or Ramadan, is a way religion helps to reduce poverty by encouraging ‘the haves to give to the have not’ in order to be given by God. The introduction of Islamic Banking, by the Central Bank of Nigeria, no doubt, will improve the borrowers’ economic power. A bank that shares profit and loss with the borrower will invariably reduce the risk of doing business more than conventional banks that win in any business they enter with their clients. This will make funds available for those who have an idea of a profitable business to create wealth and employment, and also add value to the economy by paying taxes to the government.

Religion could also foster development through the encouragement of members to acquire formal education. If formal education is significant to a high standard of living, then religion may explain why there are more poor people in northern Nigeria than in other regions, especially South-West and South-Eastern Nigeria. This is because the women’s practice in *Purdah*, in Northern Nigeria, could account for the women’s low enrollment in former education institutions. Mixing religion with politics means using religious faith for political aims; this often leads to the exploitation of religion for political objectives. The end result of this has always been the infliction of suffering on the masses.

## CONCLUSION

Review of doctrines of three dominant religions (African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam) in Nigeria has shown that religions, in Nigeria, are not particularly against the relationship between religion and politics. It is expected by this that religion should not be antithetical to socio-political development and economic growth. It is further stressed that the distinction that is often proclaimed between religion and politics was only a mirage, as the two institutions in Nigeria seem inseparable. These intertwined factors have affected the state’s political, socio-cultural, as well as economic policies. In agreement with Oguntola-Laguda’s (2008) position, the divergent religious beliefs could be a pivot for effective policies

and politics, provided adherents of these religions live and play according to the ethics and disciplines of their religions. In spite of this, it has been noted that attempts by government, in Nigeria, to give religious meaning and interpretation to politics and policies have not been duly justified. The reason is that the country has witnessed political instability, corruption, economic downturn and moral laxity, which have plunged her into economic doldrums. The fact behind this has been described as products of the rulers' neglect of ethics of their religions while in office, thereby adopting a secular ethics, which has no respect of the divine and supernatural forces. It is therefore the empirical position of this study that the politicization of religion, within the Nigerian social and political spaces, has had negative implications for the Nigerian state's developmental aspirations. If properly and positively approached and leveraged, religion is capable of propelling the developmental quests of the Nigerian polity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research can inform policy development and interventions aimed at fostering a more inclusive and equitable religious landscape in Nigeria and how the institution of religion could further be leveraged to positively shape the conduct of power relations among actors. This study therefore recommends that policymakers consider the implications of power relations within religious institutions on issues, such as religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, gender equality and social cohesion. Similarly, policies that promote transparency, accountability and equal representation, within religious institutions and the political space, can help address power imbalances. As such, they must be embraced and institutionalized. Finally, educating the broader society about power relations, within religious praxis, is crucial for fostering a more informed and politically tolerant society. Efforts should therefore be made to raise awareness among the general public, religious leaders and practitioners about the potential impact of power dynamics on religious practices and social relationships. This can be achieved through public lectures, workshops and community engagement initiatives.

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