

**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN OYO STATE NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the degree to which religion contributes to political participation in Oyo State, Nigeria, and the scenarios under which such influence can be directed to inclusive democratic participation. The study was spurred by the enormous role of religion in the life of the Nigerian public and the lack of systematic, state-level empirical studies that have explored the impact of religious institutions, identities, and leaders on political behaviour at the community level. The study was based on four research questions that sought to find out: (i) in what ways religion influences political participation. Social Identity Theory, gave a theoretical frame to see how religious group membership can impact the political attitudes, preferences, and voting behaviour of individuals in a very direct manner. The study used a quantitative survey research method. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from 99 adult residents randomly selected from four local government areas in Oyo State Nigeria. In Nigeria today, political participation, religious identity and political behaviour, then faith-based institutions and democratic engagement, are strongly tied to religion and political participation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Election, Faith, Ibadan, Politics and Religion

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Introduction

Religion still plays a leading role in politics in many parts of the world, especially in developing democracies where religious bodies are not only seen as moral authorities but also as providers of social services and facilitators of mobilization. Classical secularization theory based on historical data foresaw a slow fade, off of religious influence in politics of the modern world. Nevertheless, newer studies have uncovered that religion continues to be closely connected with the democratic processes, political communication, and civic engagement particularly in Africa (Adogame, 2024; Pew Research Center, 2024).

Instead of fading away, religion has found its way in modern democratic systems, influencing how people perceive political legitimacy, participation and governance. In Nigeria, religion transcends the private sphere and has become a potent public element that not only influences the formation of identity but also electoral behaviour and political alignments. The interplay among Christianity, Islam and indigenous religious traditions has at different times shaped the political landscape and forms of governance. Up, to, date studies of Nigeria's Fourth Republic

illustrate that religious bodies are still instrumental in voter mobilization, setting campaign themes and shaping public opinion (Ibrahim & Mustapha, 2024; Onapajo, 2025). Religious speech and appeals based on ethnic identities were central during the 2023 general elections in shaping electoral debates, thereby underscoring the role of religion in political rivalry and democratic legitimacy (Nwangwu & Onapajo, 2024).

New research also shows that religion might serve as a catalyst for both the stabilization and destabilization of political life in Nigeria. Religious bodies are, on the one hand, vehicles for the promotion of democratic virtues such as citizenship, conscience, and unity. At the same time, the attachment of one's religion to one's political stance can exacerbate tensions along other lines such as ethnicity or region and exclusive mobilization (Akinola, 2024; Suberu, 2024). Hence, the problem of democratic consolidation is not about excluding religion from politics but figuring out how it can be used to encourage broad participation rather than division along identity lines. Recent firsthand information from sub, Saharan Africa reflects a high degree of association between religious participation and civic engagement. Per a

report from Pew Research Center (2024), those actively involved in religion are more frequently attending to the ballot box, engaging in political talk, and community activism in various African democracies. On a similar note, the United Nations Development Programme (2024) draws attention to the expanding significance of faith, based actors in the mobilization of young people for political purposes in West Africa, adding that religious societies are reliable conduits for civic instruction and electoral enlightenment.

Nigeria is an especially significant example in which to explore these issues. Several authors have documented that religious leaders are constantly affecting political participation through support of candidates, political issue framing in a moral focus and congregation mobilization during election times (Adewale, 2025; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2025). Furthermore, digital transformation has drastically broadened this impact. Churches, mosques, and other faith, based organizations' use of social media platforms has altered political communication and as a result, religious narratives are circulating broadly and influencing voters' attitudes instantaneously (Nwangwu & Onapajo, 2024). Nigeria is a clear case where

religion is visibly present in politics. However, political science literature has, for a long time, largely ignored religion as a major factor in explaining political participation. More traditional methods have given more weight to institutional structures, economic inequality, ethnicity, and patronage networks. On the other hand, fresh pieces have suggested that religion is a key analytical tool for deciphering the features of modern Nigerian democracy (Adogame, 2024; Mustapha, 2024). Besides serving as a vehicle for the formation of moral worldviews, religion also determines aspects such as political institution trust, legitimacy perceptions, and the propensity to participate in civic activities.

Oyo State presents a very fascinating place to research these experiences. It is one of the politically most active states in Nigeria with a population mixture of Christians, Muslims, and traditional worshippers. Hence, Oyo State is a representative of Nigeria's religious and political picture on a larger scale. Some research has found that religious diversity in south-western Nigeria leads to the shaping of political talks, the mapping of voter loyalties, and the mobilization of the people at the grassroots level (Ojo, 2024). Also, there is

hardly any systematic, in, depth, state, level study on the role of religion in political participation in Oyo State. Also, the merging of young people, religion, and digital political activism has, to a great extent, influenced political participation. Most young Nigerians are religious and they are most of the time politically very active, especially on the internet. Nevertheless, it is a fact that religiously themed digital mobilization can be a tool for democratic awareness on the one hand, and an instrument of deepening polarization on the other hand, and it all boils down to its management (Nwangwu & Onapajo, 2024; UNDP, 2024). It is therefore very important to learn about these mechanisms at the local level so as to enhance the inclusiveness of democratic participation.

The research questions of concern are; how does religion influence political participation among citizens in Oyo State? The objectives of the study is to examine how religious leaders and faith-based institutions influence patterns of political participation among citizens in Oyo State.

The scope of this research is to examine how religion and political participation interact in Oyo State, Nigeria. In terms of geography, the

study is focused on specific LGAs within the state, including both urban areas such as Ibadan North and Ibadan South, West and semi, urban or rural areas such as Akinyele or Ogbomoso zones.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative survey research design. The design is suitable because it allows the researcher to collect numerical data from a representative sample of respondents using structured questionnaires. The data obtained are analyzed statistically to examine the influence of religion on political participation in Oyo State. The quantitative approach enhances the objectivity and enables the researcher to draw conclusions based on measurable evidence. The target population includes:

1. Adult residents of Oyo State eligible to participate in political processes.
 2. religious leaders and representatives (pastors imams church elders, Islamic scholars, etc.)
 3. Members of faith, based youth groups, who often represent a politically active demographic.
- Quantitative data gathered through questionnaire will be processed using descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages, and charts. If

needed, cross, tabulations can be employed to check for relations between religion and political behaviour.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The study will maintain high ethical standards. Participants will be free to take part or not, and they will be made aware of the aim of the study. Privacy and secrecy will be guaranteed, and care will be taken in the use of personal data. Before starting interviews or handing out questionnaires, churches will be asked for their approval.

Religion and Political Participation in Nigeria

Religion plays a major role in shaping the social and political scene of Nigeria. Consistently ranked as one of the most religious countries globally, the majority of the Nigerian population have deep religious attachments. Christianity and Islam are the two major faiths while indigenous African religions also have a presence. People's religious beliefs greatly influence their views of government, political legitimacy, and leadership. Therefore, religion is a major determinant of political participation in Nigeria's democracy. Political participation means the ways in which citizens can take part or be engaged in political activities - voting campaigning political talk, civic activism, and so on. In countries like Nigeria, religious institutions are the main sources through which political messages are communicated and individuals' attitudes

towards politics are formed. Religious events offer the means for people to talk about political matters, identify and discuss potential leaders, and use collective political action as a tool for change. On the basis of current evidence, we might say that religion is one of the major reasons why political mobilization and voting behaviour occur in Nigeria. Religious groupings are regularly combined with ethnicity and local identity in consideration of political affiliations and elections. As an example, a study on the politics of the Fourth Republic of Nigeria revealed that political behaviour and electoral rivalry in different parts of the country are still deeply influenced by religious identity (Adewale & Temitope, 2024).

Moreover, it has been noted that during election campaigns, political figures often recruit religious leaders and institutions to rally voters. Religious leaders may take the opportunity of a message at church, a religious event, or a community gathering to urge their congregation to vote and get involved in their community. Of course, such interactions can lead to greater democratic participation. Yet, the one hand politicization of religion on the other can be equally what's the problem, concentration, and concern. Indeed, recent elections have marked the making of religion as a public issue in political discourse in Nigeria, 2023 general elections, in particular, illustrated through extended public debates, the clashes between one religion or the other over leading the polity with the view that the leadership of a particular religion will lead to the division of the country and the weakening of the democratization process, etc. (Vande & Adeniyi, 2024). Hence, it is only through religious-political dynamics that the

understanding of the level of democratic participation in Nigeria can be elucidated. Next sections reflect on the religious factor, which has, over the last time, influenced political participation in Nigeria, from the standpoint of the historical background to the institutional framework to the present day religious-political developments.

Historical Evolution of Religion and Politics in Nigeria

The connection between religion and politics in Nigeria goes back a long time. Before colonization, in various Nigerian communities, the holders of political power were often closely linked with religious institutions and traditional belief systems. Most of the time, the traditional chiefs got their rule legitimized through religious or spiritual powers, and the religious ceremonies greatly influenced the running of the government and the organization of the society. The introduction of Christianity and Islam in the colonial era led to religion being more formally integrated into Nigerian culture. Christian mission works assisted in starting schools and health centers while Islamic centers had significant impacts in the northern Nigeria governance systems. These changes increased the role of religion in the public sphere. After Nigeria became independent in 1960, religious consciousness remained a factor in the political scene. Quite often, the political rivalry was connected to the religious as well as ethnic differences, especially in the areas where the religious loyalties corresponded with the ethnic groups. According to researchers, the mix of religion and politics became notably more visible when Nigeria was shifting to a democratic rule.

Modern research indicates that religion is still a core part of Nigeria's political culture. One of the studies that looked at politics around elections in Nigeria revealed that politicians frequently use people's religious identities to gather voters and enhance their credibility. For instance, research on the 2023 presidential election suggests that religious stories and denominational ties were a very important factor in political discussions and results in Nigeria (Kertyo & Ityonzughul, 2024).

Religious Institutions and Political Mobilization

Religious institutions like churches, mosques, and faith-based organizations have become some of the main conduits for political mobilization in Nigeria. Leveraging their extensive social networks and enjoying a highly trusted status among their adherents, these institutions serve as efficient vehicles for rallying people to engage in political processes. Politicians increasingly rely on religious institutions as part of their election campaigns. A typical political hopeful visits places of worship to give sermons, request blessings from members of the clergy, and discuss their platforms with potential supporters. Through these encounters, we can see the pivotal role that churches and mosques play in mobilizing voters. There is evidence from research studies that religious figures sometimes steer public opinion by linking politics to religious or ethical dimensions. Occasionally, they push their congregations towards backing those candidates whom they see as morally sound or just. On the flip side, the politicization of

religious communities also brings about difficulties for a democratic system. Research on Nigerian elections has found that religion-based mobilization tends to deepen division along identity lines rather than issue-based political rivalry. Maigari (2024) points out that religious leaders are getting more politically engaged and, at times, even lead their churches in politically supporting certain individuals.

Religion and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria

Voting behaviour is a highly visible form of political participation, and in Nigeria, faith-based identity often steers voters' perceptions of political candidates and their electoral choices. In fact, voters might base their judgement of the candidate on their religious affiliation, shared religious values, or even the religious leaders' endorsements. Studies on Nigerian elections have shown that religion has become a determining factor in influencing the behaviour of voters. For example, in the 2023 elections, issues of religious representation in political leadership were among the main topics of political discussions. Political candidates belonging to certain religions were subjected to considerable public reactions and their religious affiliations played a major role in electoral mobilization strategies. Data-based research also indicates that religious stories and endorsements are factors in voters' preference formation. One research project that focused on electoral behaviour in Nigeria unveiled that during elections religious leaders and institutions have a major impact on the way voters understand political issues and rate candidates (Rufai, Aliyu, & Alkhamees, 2024). On the other hand, academics highlight that a religious identity

does not necessarily function independently from other factors. The manner in which people vote in Nigeria at times is the result of the interplay of different elements such as ethnicity, local loyalties, economic situations, and party loyalties. Hence religion as one of the various social identities, manifests its influence on electoral behaviour in Nigerias democratic society.

Religion, Democratic Participation and Civic Engagement

Religion not only plays a role in influencing voters but also helps the citizens engage in different forms of democracy in Nigeria. Through activities such as civic education, peacebuilding, and advocacy for good governance, religious institutions are helping to move citizens toward political involvement and the democratic process. Many religious bodies focus on strengthening their communities by teaching and preaching about accountability, ethical leadership, and social justice. They not only encourage their members to live ethical lives but also motivate them to be actively involved in the political process and to demand from their leaders high standards of transparency and integrity. Indeed, the religious community is a key actor when it comes to organizing peaceful elections and resolving conflicts. Besides, the partner and as a faith-institutes, interfaith dialogues that help in easing the existing tensions and promote social cohesion in communities characterized by religious diversity (Gadaghi & Armstrong, 2001). It is however important to note that the role of religion in democratic participation is a double-edged sword. It is true that religious institutions have the capacity to mobilize their members for civic engagement, but if religion

is over-politicized, it could lead to the divisions in the political environment and increase in electoral tensions. Some researchers argue that sometimes religious discourse may be used to fuel politically-driven competitions based on identity, which may have negative effects on national unity and in-turn result in democratic instability (Salaudeen & Isah, 2024).

On the whole, religion is still a major factor influencing political participation in Nigeria. Knowing about this interaction gives us a crucial basis to look at how religious bodies affect political involvement not only nationally but also in local levels, for example in Southwestern Nigeria and Oyo State.

Religion and Electoral Behaviour in Southwestern Nigeria

Southwestern Nigeria has become a unique area for the study of religion and electoral behaviour in the Nigerian political system. This is because the region, which is made up of the states of Oyo Lagos Ogun Ondo Osun, and Ekiti, remains very diversified in terms of religion where Christianity and Islam coexist with traditional religion. In fact, this religious diversity has, over time, impacted social interactions, political rallying, and voter behavior in the area. In contrast with some areas of the country where people's religious identity is the major factor that decides their political tastes, the Southwest shows a rather complicated mixture of religion and politics. The Yoruba community has long supported religious tolerance and it is even common to find families with members belonging to different religions. So such an environment with different religions often reduces the role of religion in determining the election results.

Nevertheless, religion is still one of the main factors in determining the kind of political talk and voter behaviour that prevail in the region. Religious places like churches and mosques are often the venues where political matters are aired and where voters learn about their civic duties. Politicians, on their part, know how powerful religious organizations are and they use them during the elections to influence and gather support.

Recent research on Nigeria's democratic evolution reveals that religious affiliation still plays a significant role in voting behavior nationwide. The examination of the political era of Nigeria's Fourth Republic reveals that religion is one of the factors alongside ethnicity, class, and regional that are taken into account when shaping one's political choice and voting behavior (Adewale & Temitope, 2024). Another reference in Nigerian politics to religion in 2023 general elections. Scholars who analyzed the elections reported publicly became very interest in religious leader in politics which on same time affected the voter mobilization strategies in different parts of the country (Maigari, 2024). In Southwestern Nigeria, the effects of religion on voter behavior are evidenced mainly by activities in religious groups, the use of religious leaders influence to sway votes, as well as the highlighting of the moral aspects of political issues by religion, during the campaigns. It is necessary first to get a notion of these factors in order to proceed with the study of Oyo State for political participation.

Religious Pluralism and Electoral Behaviour in Southwestern Nigeria

Southwestern Nigeria is significantly marked by its longstanding practice of religious pluralism. Christianity and Islam exist side by side with indigenous religions, thereby producing a varied religious landscape that not only affects social and political lives but also interacts with them. Researchers have noted that the presence of different religions in Yoruba land has at times functioned as a factor minimizing the chances of strictly religion-based political divisions. For instance, in parts of Nigeria where religious identity is the main factor in forming political blocs, in contrast, in Southwestern Nigeria, voters normally determine political candidates based on a blend of factors including competence, party ideology, and regional development priorities. However, religious identity continues to play a role in voting in a more indirect manner. Politicians often target in their appeals Christian and Muslim communities by the means of religious leaders and religious ceremonies. Such campaign tactics include churches and mosques visits, interactions with religious organizations, and involvement in faith-based events. Current studies on identity politics in Nigerian elections show that even in places like Southwestern Nigeria where there is a long tradition of religious tolerance, religion still has an impact on how voters perceive candidates (Salaudeen & Isah, 2024). From these we can see that religious pluralism lessens religious polarization but does not completely get rid of the role of religion in electoral politics.

Religious Institutions and Electoral Mobilization

Religious institutions are one of the main means of electoral mobilization in

Southwestern Nigeria. Besides being places of worship churches mosques, and religious organizations are often laid out for political talk and community engagements. Religious leaders are known to go to great lengths to sway their audience to vote by stressing the significance of democratic rights and the need to have good leaders. Preaching, teaching within the religious framework, and community get-togethers are some of the ways used to tackle corruption, critique of leaders, and nation-building. These kinds of discussions have the power to change voters' perceptions of politics and their judgments of candidates. Also, at the time of elections, politicians tend to work with religious bodies to dissect their campaigns. For instance, they may show up at church or mosque to share their visions, gain the approval of the religious fraternity, and spread the message. Besides being desirable to politicians, religious institutions have been figured out to be effective catalysts for mobilization. The role of religious leaders continues to be a focal point in Nigerian elections because they can sway one's mode of thinking about voting by portraying it as a virtue. The 2023 presidential election, in particular, saw religious leaders actively shaping political discourse and motivating people to exercise their franchise (Maigari, 2024).

Religion and Voter Decision-Making in the Southwest

Religion can play a role in a voter's decision-making process in a number of ways. Voters might decide to support candidates who belong to the same religion as them or who are considered to embody religious virtues such as integrity, justice, and moral leadership. Religious endorsements may also

sway voter preferences by offering assistance for making political selections. Nevertheless, religion alone is hardly the factor determining ones electoral behaviour in Southwestern Nigeria. Other factors such as political party affiliation, candidate withdrawal of trust, economic issues, and regional political environment may also significantly influence voter decisions in a local area. Studies on voting behaviour in Nigeria show that religious identity can be closely linked to other social elements like ethnicity and socioeconomic status in affecting electoral preferences (Kumo et al. 2025). These results reveal that religion acts as one of the factors determining electoral behaviour along with others rather than being the only reason for voting decisions. On the other hand, the religious institutions are usually perceived to be a moral authority; hence religious talk might result in changing the perception of voters regarding political happenings and character of politicians. Quite a few times, religious stories about justice, accountability, and ethical leadership influence the ways through which the public form their expectations of political governance.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory was initially created by Henri Tajfel and later further elaborated by John Turner. The theory reveals how people get a part of their identity and a feeling of being from the membership in groups like religion, ethnicity, or nationality. Social Identity Theory says that people naturally put themselves and others in categories of social groups and these group memberships determine their thoughts, feelings, and

behaviours. So, religious identity is one of the main elements that affect how people understand political events and how they position themselves in the political system. In a country with very strong religious communities, such as Nigeria where religious identity may impact political participation by fostering group unity and political preferences of the group. Members of religious communities may choose political candidates who have similar values or who are endorsed by the religious leaders they trust. Researchers studying religion and politics in Africa have pointed out that religious identities are often combined with other forms of social identity to produce political behaviour. Religious bodies also play a key role in maintaining these identities by offering common beliefs, values, and ethical guidelines that direct collective action (Basedau, Gobien, & Prediger, 2023).

In Nigeria, religious identity often serves as a means of differentiating one group from another especially when it is combined with aspects of ethnicity, geographical location and economic conditions. Sometimes, politicians during the run-up to elections use religion in a very deliberate way to rally people from one religion behind them. But in places like Southwestern Nigeria, where religious coexistence is quite strong, religious identity might affect political involvement in ways that are less obvious and more indirect rather than using it as a tool for political division. Social Identity Theory is a great lens to study the impact of changes in a person's religious group on their political opinions and actions in Oyo State. The theory explores how together with one's religious community, people shape common political viewpoints and how those religious political identities

sometimes determine voting behavior and general participation in politics.

DATA REPRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

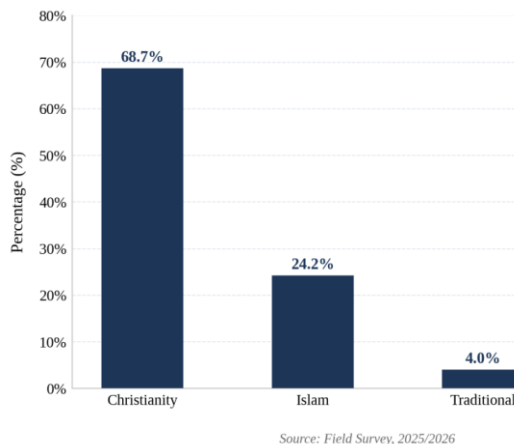


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Religious Affiliation

Most of the respondents (68.7%) were Christians with Muslims being the second largest group (24.2%), and 4% of traditional worshippers while others faiths only accounted for 3% as shown in Figure 3. This pattern corresponds to the religious situation of Oyo State where Christianity is more dominant in the urban areas whereas Islam still remains a major religion, That's why the reflection of the religious plurality of the state.

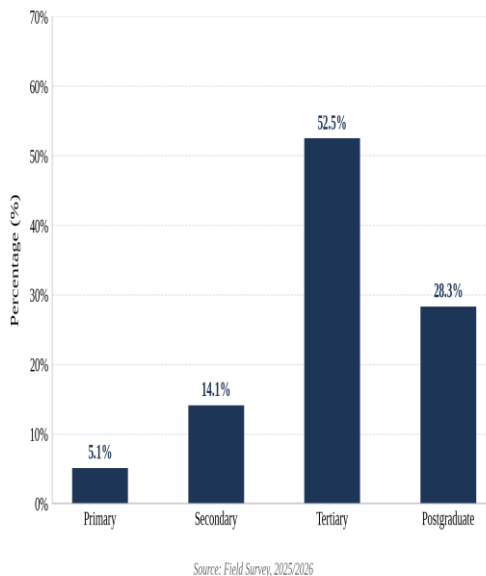


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Level

From figure 4, you can see the education level of the people who answered the survey. Most of the respondents were people with a tertiary education, who accounted for 52.5% of all respondents. The next largest groups were postgraduate degree holders, at 28.3%, followed by secondary school graduates, at 14.1%, and primary school completers, at 5.1%. The large percentage of people with tertiary and postgraduate qualifications, which in total is 80.8%, shows the urban and educated character of the areas where the study was conducted.

Influence of Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Institutions

This part of the report focuses on how the respondents viewed the extent of the influence of religious leaders and faith-based

institutions in political participation in Oyo State. Four statements related to the theme were provided to respondents and they expressed their level of agreement on a five-point scale: Strongly Agree Agree Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Results were illustrated in Figures 7 through 10.

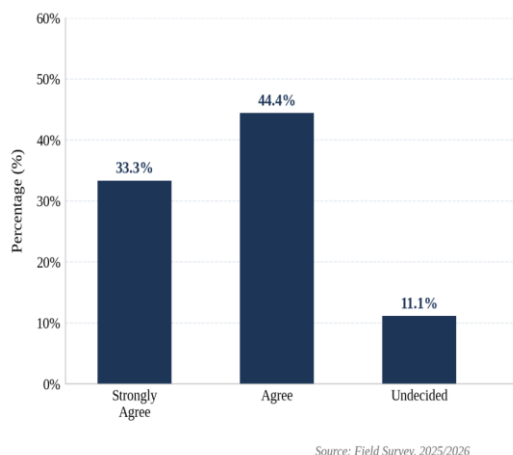


Figure 3: Religious Leaders Influence the Political Opinions of Their Followers

Figure 3 shows how people think about religious leaders influencing the political opinions of their followers. The total agreement of 77.7% (strongly agree: 33.3%; agree: 44.4%) shows a wide agreement that religious leaders matter a lot in shaping the political views of their congregations. 11.1% disagreed, and 11.1% didn't make up their mind.

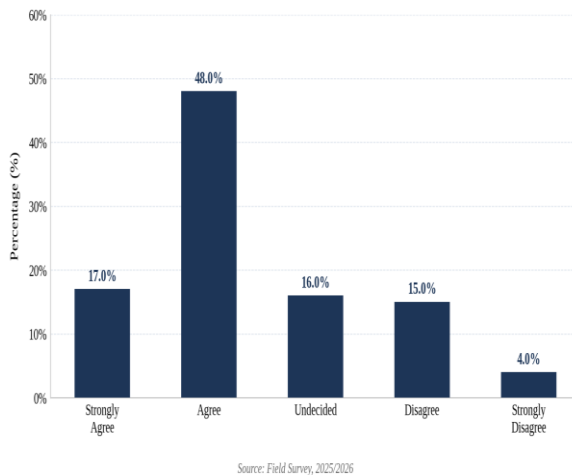


Figure 4: Faith-Based Institutions Encourage Citizens to Participate in Political Activities

Figure 4 shows that 65% of respondents thought faith-based institutions promote political participation (17% strongly agree, 48% agree), 19% did not agree, and 16% did not have an opinion. The high level of agreement implies that faith-based institutions are significant means of mobilizing the citizens for civic participation in the study area.

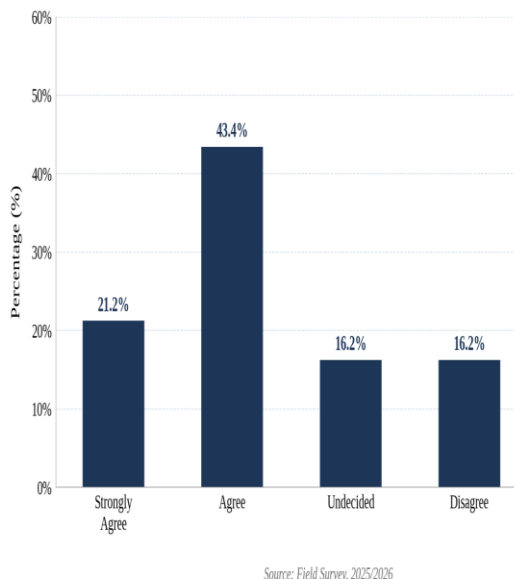


Figure 5: Religious Leaders Influence Electoral Decisions in Oyo State

Figure 5 looks at perceptions of religious leaders' influence on electoral decisions in Oyo State. Altogether, 64.6% were of the opinion (21.2% strongly agree; 43.4% agree), 19.2% disagreed and 16.2% were undecided. The large-scale agreement shows that religious leaders are generally viewed as the ones who have a real impact on people's electoral decisions.

Research Question: How Does Religion Influence Political Participation Among Citizens in Oyo State?

This research has revealed religion's great impact on political participation of Oyo State citizens. As shown in Figure 13, a huge majority, 78%, of respondents considered that religious beliefs affect civic engagement and

political participation, and 66.6% acknowledged that religion affects their personal willingness to vote or participate politically (see Figure 21). These results challenge the finding of Oseghale (2024), who conducted a study on Nigerian political culture and argued that religion forms voting blocs and influences the political orientations of citizens across faith communities. In Oseghale's (2024) view, while Christian southern Nigerians have been politically apathetic for a long time even considering politics as an activity incompatible with religious life northern Muslims usually view political participation as a religious duty, causing a disparity in civic engagement patterns across the country's religious landscape. The findings of this research in Oyo State, a mostly Christian area, coincides with what I just said as a great number of respondents admitted the role of religion in their political actions but a big number have also not taken that into account in elections.

Religious groups, at the societal level, also A lot influence political participation activities by mobilising people through their church halls and other physical and virtual infrastructures of religious communities (Norris and Inglehart, 2004). Chinecherem (2026) in her study of the 2023 Nigerian and 2024 American presidential elections, separated by a year, showed that in both cases, the candidates used 'religio-political strategies' to attract and mobilise faith-based constituencies, a practice which confirms the continuing importance of religion in electoral politics of the advanced democracies as well. The 55.1% of respondents who admitted not voting in a past election (Figure 6) reflects that the motivational role of religion is only

marginally effective to lead to electoral participation - a gap that can be explained by Putnam's (2000) argument that bonding social capital alone is not enough if there are no bridging networks and institutional supports that can assist in sustaining civic action.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall the findings of this study show that religion is an integral and multi-faceted factor in the political life of Oyo State. Rather than just being a private matter separated from the public sphere, religion actually permeates the social and political environment, changing the way people politically identify, their interaction with candidates, their political information processing, and their participation in democratic activities. From the evidence, four general conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, religion plays an important role in political participation in Oyo State. The survey data repeatedly indicated that people from various demographic groups are generally positive about the influence of religion on their civic engagement, voting behaviour, and political attitudes. This supports the Civic Voluntarism Model's main proposition that religious groups in Oyo State act as recruitment networks that help develop the skills of citizenship, provide political information, and encourage members towards democratic involvement. In addition, the demographic composition of the study largely dominated by well-educated young adults mainly students highlights even more the importance of religious centres as the places where Nigeria's future citizens' political awareness is shaped.

Also, religious leaders have a unique and powerful role in Oyo State's political

communication environment. The high levels of citizens' confidence in religious leaders as their political advisers, together with the extensive religious communication networks, make religious leaders one of the most effective state mobilising agents. This aligns with Social Identity Theory which claims that group members' political attitudes and activities are disproportionately influenced by leaders who symbolise and affirm the shared group identities. Initially, when the citizens shunned formal political institutions in a focus where their trust was minimal, religious leaders' credibility became a major civic resource.

In addition, religious identity First works as a resource in democratic politics, but However, it also becomes a risk. It is true that it inspires participation and gives a civic community feeling; Even so, it also leads to identity-based voting as well as political judgment bias among other things, the respondents themselves admit. The question for democratic governance in Oyo State So is not how to remove political influence from religion, since the evidence points to this being both outside the realm of possibility and not the right thing to do, but how one can use it for issue-based engagement rather than identity-driven polarisation. Fourthly, the research also points to the immense democratic positive in faith when it is guided properly. The majority percentage (84%) of people agreeing that religion can encourage civic responsibility and democratic participation shows that it is a very significant social resource for the democratisation of Oyo State and Nigeria in total. This potential in reality is obtained mainly through informal peer discussion and digital networks generated by religious communities

interacting. If used properly and responsibly, these channels can be one of the most promising and locally relevant ways of increasing the democratic participation of the state.

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