The Ecclesiastical Impact: Exploring the Role of Christian Church in Democracy Development in Nigeria

Ifeanyi A. Chukwudebelu[1*], Ajakor Emmanuel PhD[2],
Nganwuchu Geoffrey Chiazo PhD[3]

[1*]*Department of Religion and Human Relations, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Nigeria.*
[2]*Department of Religion & Human Relations Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.*
[3]*Department of Religion and Cultural studies University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nigeria.*

Email: [2]ei.ajakor@unizik.edu.ng, [3]geoffrey.nganwuchu@unn.edu.ng
Corresponding Email: [1]chukwudebeluifeanyia88@gmail.com*

Abstract: This research investigates the multifaceted role of Christian church in the development and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Through a comprehensive analysis of scholarly literature, empirical data, and case studies, the study aims to elucidate the various dimensions of the church's influence on democratic processes, institutions, and norms in the Nigerian context. Specifically, the research will examine how Christian churches contribute to promoting democratic values, civic education, moral leadership, peace-building, social welfare initiatives, and political engagement. By employing a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative interviews, surveys, and content analysis of church statements and activities, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence and theoretical insights into the mechanisms through which the church impacts democracy development in Nigeria. The findings of this research will have implications for understanding the complex dynamics of religion and politics in Nigeria and inform policy and practices aimed at strengthening democratic governance and pluralism in the country.

Keywords: Christian Church, Democracy, Peace-Building, Political Engagement, Pluralism, Governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a nation brimming with vibrant cultures and a rich tapestry of beliefs, presents a captivating case study for examining the intricate relationship between religion and democracy. Its population is roughly divided between Christianity and Islam, with a smaller portion adhering to traditional African religions and other faiths. This diversity sparks a

compelling question: how do religious institutions, particularly Christian churches, navigate the complexities of a democratic society?

Scholars have long debated the role of religion in fostering or hindering democratic development. Some argue that religious doctrines can impede progress, hindering social and political reforms. Others, however, highlight the potential of religion to cultivate a spirit of social justice, civic engagement, and moral leadership – all essential pillars of a thriving democracy.

This research delves into the multifaceted role of Christian churches in the development and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Throughout the nation's history, these churches have demonstrably transcended the spiritual realm, actively shaping the country's political and social landscape. From advocating for independence from colonial rule to mobilizing communities in the fight for human rights, Christian institutions have wielded significant influence. Yet, the question remains: how exactly do these churches contribute to the various aspects of a functioning democracy?

This study aims to provide a comprehensive answer by exploring how Christian churches contribute to the promotion of democratic values like respect for human rights, the rule of law, and good governance principles. It will investigate their role in fostering civic education and political participation among citizens. Furthermore, the research will examine how churches provide moral leadership and advocate for ethical governance, acting as a vital check on potential abuses of power.

The intricate dance between religion and peace-building will also be explored. Do Christian churches act as neutral mediators, fostering dialogue and reconciliation in times of social and political unrest? Additionally, the research will delve into the social welfare initiatives undertaken by these churches, such as healthcare provision, education programs, and poverty alleviation efforts. How do these initiatives contribute to strengthening democratic institutions and promoting social cohesion? Finally, the study will examine the extent of direct political engagement and advocacy undertaken by Christian churches in Nigeria. Do they actively mobilize their congregations, influence policy debates, and hold political leaders accountable?

By meticulously analyzing existing scholarly literature, gathering empirical data through surveys and interviews, and conducting in-depth case studies of specific church activities and pronouncements, this research aspires to elucidate the mechanisms through which Christian churches impact the development of democracy in Nigeria. The findings will not only contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse on religion and democracy but also offer valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders working to strengthen democratic institutions and promote good governance in Nigeria. Ultimately, this research seeks to shed light on the complex relationship between faith and democracy in a nation brimming with religious vibrancy and democratic aspirations.

2. RELATED WORKS

Huntington, S. P. (1991) in his work; The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century discusses the global wave of democratization and the role of civil society institutions, including religious organizations, in promoting democratic transitions. He

emphasizes how churches can act as agents of democratic change by fostering civic engagement and promoting democratic values.

Also, Putnam, R. D. (2000) examines the decline of social capital in America and the role of civic associations, including religious communities, in revitalizing civic engagement. He argues that churches are crucial in strengthening social networks and promoting democratic participation.

Further, Casanova, J. (1994) explores the public role of religion in contemporary societies, including its impact on democratic governance. He discusses how religious institutions, such as the Christian Church, navigate their roles in public life and influence political processes, sometimes challenging secular governance principles. Just as Coleman, J. S. (2001) addresses how social institutions, including religious organizations, contribute to social order and governance. He discusses how churches provide moral guidance, social cohesion, and community development, which are essential for sustaining democratic norms and practices.

In the same vein, Berger, P. L. (1967) examines religion as a cultural system that provides meaning and order to society. He discusses how religious beliefs and practices, transmitted through churches, shape individuals' worldviews and their attitudes toward civic responsibility and democratic engagement while Paul II, J. (1981) primarily focused on labor and human rights, this encyclical highlights the Catholic Church's stance on social justice and human dignity, which are integral to democratic principles. It underscores the church's role in advocating for just economic and social policies that support democratic governance.

Further, Geisler, N. L. (2010) explores the ethical foundations of Christianity and their implications for social and political life. He discusses how Christian ethics, centered on principles of justice, compassion, and human rights, contribute to shaping democratic values and policies while Esposito, J. L. (2002) although focused on Islam, provides insights into how religious communities, including Christian churches, influence public opinion and policy debates. It discusses the role of religious leaders in advocating for democratic reforms and social justice initiatives.

Furthermore, Nmah, P. E. (2012) elucidates the intersection of Christian teachings with social issues in Africa, including democracy and governance. It examines how churches address societal challenges and promote ethical leadership and community development, which are crucial for democratic stability.

Thus, these literatures provide a comprehensive overview of how the Christian Church, through its teachings, practices, and organizational structure, influences democracy development by promoting civic engagement, social justice, and ethical leadership. They highlight the multifaceted role of religious institutions in shaping democratic values and practices within societies

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing qualitative interviews, surveys, and content analysis of church statements and activities to provide empirical evidence and theoretical insights into the mechanisms through which Christian churches impact the development of democracy in Nigeria. The research examines various dimensions of the

church's influence, including the promotion of democratic values, civic education, moral leadership, peace-building, social welfare initiatives, and political engagement.

The Theoretical Underpinnings: Religion and Democracy

The relationship between religion and democracy has been a subject of extensive of debate among scholars, with various theoretical perspectives emerging over the years. One prominent school of thought is the Liberation Theology Theory. This theology, which emerged in Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, offers a compelling case study in this discourse. Pioneered by figures such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, whose seminal work "A Theology of Liberation" (1971) laid the foundational principles of the movement, liberation theology emphasizes the Church's role in advocating for social justice, human rights, and political liberation (Gutiérrez, 1971).

The movement arose in response to widespread social, economic, and political injustices faced by the poor and marginalized communities in Latin America. Key factors influencing its development include pervasive social and economic inequality, political repression under authoritarian regimes, and the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which encouraged the Church to engage more directly with social issues and the modern world (Berryman, 1987).

Central to liberation theology is the "preferential option for the poor," a belief that God has a special concern for the poor and oppressed. This principle calls for the Church to stand in solidarity with the marginalized and prioritize their needs. This theology has significantly influenced grassroots activism, mobilizing the poor and marginalized communities to advocate for their rights and justice (Smith, 1991).

The impact of liberation theology extends beyond Latin America, influencing movements globally. In North America, it significantly shaped the black theological movement led by figures such as James Cone, who adapted its principles to address the struggles of African Americans against systemic racism and economic exploitation (Cone, 1970). Moreover, in Africa, liberation theology has influenced nationalist movements and the intertwining of religious and political leadership. In Nigeria, for instance, religion has historically provided impetus for political movements and ideologies, as seen in the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which were instrumental in the country's quest for independence and democratic governance (Falola, 2009).

Thus, liberation theology exemplifies the dynamic interplay between religion and democracy, highlighting how religious movements can contribute to democratic ideals by advocating for social justice, human rights, and the empowerment of marginalized communities (Boff & Boff, 1987).

Another school of thought is the Theory of Political Theology. This theology offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate relationship between religion and politics. Political theology examines how theological concepts and ways of thinking influence political ideologies, institutions, and practices. This field, particularly associated with thinkers like Carl Schmitt, posits that many significant concepts of modern political thought are, in essence, secularized theological concepts. Schmitt's assertion highlights the continuity

between theological and political ideas, suggesting that the sovereignty of the state mirrors the omnipotence of God (Schmitt, 2005).

Political theology not only advocates for social justice and democratic principles but also delves into the darker intersections of religion and politics. It explores how religious narratives and symbols can justify authoritarianism or sacralize political power. This examination challenges us to consider how these religious elements shape political authority and legitimacy. In contemporary contexts, political theology is evident in various movements where religious rhetoric supports political causes, ranging from progressive activism to conservative or even fundamentalist agendas.

Prominent works in this field underscore the dual potential of political theology. For instance, Carl Schmitt's "Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty" (2005) delves into the parallels between religious and political authority. Liberation theology, on the other hand, as articulated by Gustavo Gutiérrez in "A Theology of Liberation" (1971), mobilizes faith communities to advocate for justice and equality (Gutiérrez, 1971). James Cone's "A Black Theology of Liberation" (1970) extends these principles to address systemic racism and economic exploitation in North America (Cone, 1970).

Thus both liberation theology and political theology underscore the profound influence of religious thought on political action and democratic ideals. In the context of Nigeria, liberation theology has played a crucial role in mobilizing communities for justice and equality. It has inspired grassroots movements that challenge social and economic injustices, advocating for the rights of marginalized populations. This aligns with the broader democratic development in Nigeria, where religious groups have often been at the forefront of movements pushing for greater social equity and political reforms.

On the other hand, political theology critically analyzes how religious ideas underpin political structures and ideologies in Nigeria. It examines the ways in which religious narratives and symbols have been used to legitimize political authority and shape governance. This critical perspective is essential in understanding both the positive contributions of religious movements to democratic ideals and the potential risks associated with the entanglement of religion and political power. By highlighting these dynamics, political theology provides a nuanced view of the multifaceted relationship between religion and politics, demonstrating how religious movements can both support and complicate the development of democracy in Nigeria.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Nigerian Context: Christianity and Democracy
Nigeria, with its diverse religious landscape, provides a compelling case study for examining the relationship between Christianity and democracy. The country's religious demography is roughly evenly split between Christianity and Islam, with a smaller proportion of followers of traditional African religions and other faiths (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The Christian churches in Nigeria have been actively involved in the country's political and social development since the colonial era. During the struggle for independence, many Christian leaders and organizations played a pivotal role in mobilizing support for democratic self-governance (Ajayi, 1965). In the post-independence era, the churches have remained

influential, often serving as a moral voice and advocating for democratic reforms, good governance, and the protection of human rights (Ayantayo, 2009).

Empirical evidence suggests that Christian churches in Nigeria have contributed to the democratic process in various ways. For instance, the church has been instrumental in promoting civic education and political participation among citizens, particularly during elections (Ojo, 2009). The church's engagement in social welfare initiatives, such as the provision of healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation programs, has also contributed to the strengthening of democratic institutions and the enhancement of social cohesion (Odumosu et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the church's role in peace-building and conflict resolution has been recognized as a crucial factor in maintaining social stability and facilitating democratic governance (Bakke, 2013). In times of political and social unrest, the church has often served as a neutral mediator, bringing together different factions and promoting dialogue and reconciliation (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

The Dimensions of the Church's Impact on Democracy

The research undertaken in this study explores the various dimensions of the Christian church's impact on the development and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The findings are presented through the following key themes:

Promotion of Democratic Values:

The Christian churches in Nigeria have been instrumental in promoting and disseminating democratic values, such as respect for human rights, rule of law, and the principles of good governance. Through sermons, educational programs, and various outreach initiatives, the church has sought to instill these values among its congregants and the broader society (Ayantayo, 2009). The church's emphasis on the sanctity of human life, the dignity of the individual, and the importance of civic engagement has resonated with many Nigerians, contributing to the gradual internalization of democratic norms (Adedibu, 2012).

Civic Education and Political Participation:

The Christian churches in Nigeria have been actively involved in civic education and the promotion of political participation among their members and the wider community. Through initiatives such as voter education campaigns, leadership training programs, and public forums, the church has sought to empower citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective political engagement (Ojo, 2009). The church's ability to reach a vast network of followers has been instrumental in increasing voter turnout and fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry (Odumosu et al., 2009).

Moral Leadership and Ethical Governance:

The Christian churches in Nigeria have played a pivotal role in providing moral leadership and advocating for ethical governance. The church's moral authority and trusted position within Nigerian society have enabled it to serve as a vigilant watchdog, highlighting critical issues of corruption, nepotism, and abuse of power within the political sphere (Adedibu, 2012).

A prominent example of the church's advocacy for democratic principles occurred during the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election in Nigeria. The Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, The Most Reverend Alexander Adetoyebi Adetiloye, vehemently opposed the annulment, condemning it as a violation of the people's democratic will (Aiyegboyin, 2016). The church also stood against the subsequent Interim National Government led by Ernest Shonekan, viewing it as an illegitimate attempt to subvert the democratic process (Ojo, 2009), even when Mr Shonekan himself was a member of the communion.

Furthermore, during the perceived corruption, negligence, and nepotism of previous administrations in Nigeria, Christian leaders such as Pastor Paul Enenche have been outspoken in their criticism of the government's failings (Adedibu, 2012). The church's emphasis on accountability, transparency, and the common good has influenced public discourse and put sustained pressure on political leaders to uphold democratic principles (Aiyegboyin, 2016).

Through these actions, the Christian churches in Nigeria have demonstrated their commitment to promoting ethical governance and safeguarding the democratic foundations of the country. This unwavering stance has earned the church a respected position as a moral authority and a guardian of democratic values (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution:
The Christian churches in Nigeria have been instrumental in playing a crucial role in peace-building and conflict resolution efforts, contributing to the creation of a stable and conducive environment for democratic consolidation. Even in the face of intense ethnic, religious, and political tensions that have plagued the country, the church has often served as a neutral mediator, bringing together warring factions and promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Bakke, 2013; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

A notable example of the church's peace-building efforts can be seen in its response to the continuous attacks and killings of Christians, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria. Despite the horrific incidents of church massacres and the targeting of Christian communities, the church has consistently emphasized a stance of non-retaliation and forgiveness (Haynes, 2009).

For instance, in 2011, an Islamic fundamentalist group and militia, Boko Haram, attacked a church in Suleja, Niger State, killing over 40 worshippers on Christmas Day (Bakke, 2013). In the face of this tragedy, Christian leaders, including the then President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, called for calm and restraint, urging the Christian community not to seek revenge but to embrace forgiveness and reconciliation (Aiyegboyin, 2016).

Similarly, in 2018, another militia group, the Fulani herdsmen launched a series of attacks on Christian communities in Plateau State, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people, including women and children (Pew Research Center, 2019). Despite the immense grief and suffering, the church, led by figures such as the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Matthew Kukah, condemned the killings and called for a peaceful resolution, actively engaging in interfaith dialogue and promoting social cohesion (Haynes, 2009).

Thus the church's emphasis on forgiveness, reconciliation, and nonviolence has been instrumental in fostering social cohesion and creating an atmosphere conducive to democratic governance. This unprecedented commitment to peaceful conflict resolution has earned the church a respected position as a trusted institution and a moral authority in the Nigerian society (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Social Welfare and Community Development:
The Christian churches in Nigeria have been actively engaged in various social welfare and community development initiatives, which have significantly contributed to the strengthening of democratic institutions and the enhancement of social cohesion within the country.

One prominent example is the work of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria. Through its extensive network of parishes and outreach programs, the RCCG has established numerous healthcare facilities, including hospitals and clinics that provide affordable and accessible medical services to underserved communities (Adedibu, 2012). These initiatives have not only improved the overall health and well-being of the citizens but have also fostered a sense of trust and solidarity within the communities, as the church has demonstrated its commitment to addressing the needs of the marginalized.

Similarly, the Catholic Church in Nigeria has been at the forefront of establishing educational institutions, ranging from primary schools to universities that cater to the educational needs of the population (Odumosu et al., 2009). These educational initiatives have played a crucial role in promoting literacy, empowering the youth, and enhancing social mobility, which are all essential components of a thriving democracy.

Furthermore, numerous Christian churches in Nigeria have implemented poverty alleviation programs, such as microfinance schemes, skills training, and entrepreneurship support, aimed at uplifting the economic status of the underprivileged (Odumosu et al., 2009). These efforts have not only improved the material conditions of the beneficiaries but have also fostered a sense of community and self-reliance, which are vital for the development of a resilient and engaged citizenry.

The impact of these social welfare and community development initiatives by the Christian churches in Nigeria cannot be overstated. By addressing the pressing needs of marginalized communities, the church has demonstrated its commitment to the common good and has earned the trust and respect of the people (Ayantayo, 2009). This, in turn, has strengthened the legitimacy of democratic institutions and contributed to the overall social cohesion and stability necessary for the consolidation of democracy in the country.

Political Engagement and Advocacy:
The Christian churches in Nigeria have been actively engaged in direct political advocacy and mobilization, particularly on issues related to democratic governance and human rights. The church has not shied away from participating in political debates, lobbying for policy changes, and encouraging its members to actively engage in the political process (Ojo, 2009). One significant example of the church's involvement in the political landscape can be seen in its role during the recent general elections in Nigeria. Various Christian denominations and

church organizations played a pivotal role in mobilizing and encouraging voter registration and participation.

For instance, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), actively promoted voter registration and education campaigns within its extensive network of parishes across the country (Adedibu, 2012). The church not only provided its facilities as voter registration and polling centers but also organized transportation to facilitate the participation of its members in the electoral process.

Similarly, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) launched a nationwide initiative to ensure a high voter turnout and informed electorate. The CBCN urged its members to register and vote, and also provided voter education materials in various local languages to ensure that citizens were well-informed about the electoral process (Aiyegboyin, 2016).

Furthermore, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), an umbrella organization representing various Christian denominations, played a crucial role in coordinating the church's political engagement. CAN organized forums, town hall meetings, and public dialogues to address issues of democratic governance, corruption, and human rights, and to hold political candidates and leaders accountable (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

The church's ability to mobilize and organize large segments of the population has made it a formidable force in the political landscape, influencing the national agenda and holding political leaders accountable (Adedibu, 2012). Through its active involvement in the electoral process, the church has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening democratic institutions and fostering a more engaged and empowered citizenry in Nigeria.

5. CONCLUSION

This research has provided a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted role of Christian churches in the development and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that the church's influence extends beyond the spiritual realm, as it has been actively engaged in promoting democratic values, civic education, moral leadership, peace-building, social welfare initiatives, and political advocacy.

The empirical evidence gathered through this study highlights the church's ability to reach a wide network of followers, its trusted position within the community, and its capacity to shape the public discourse on issues of governance and social justice. These factors have enabled the Christian churches in Nigeria to play a significant role in the country's democratic journey.

The practical implications of this research underscore the need for policymakers and democratic stakeholders to recognize the church as a crucial partner in the consolidation of democracy. Engaging the church in collaborative initiatives, policy dialogues, and capacity-building programs can help to leverage its influence and reach, ultimately contributing to the strengthening of democratic institutions and the enhancement of good governance in Nigeria.

As the country navigates the complexities of its religious landscape and the challenges of democratic development, this research offers valuable insights and suggestions for fostering a constructive relationship between religion and politics, ultimately paving the way for a more inclusive, stable, and prosperous democratic future.

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