



ELECTIONEERING OF 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF RESIDENTS IN UYO METROPOLIS

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Abstract

This paper examines the significant role of religion in the electioneering process during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, focusing specifically on the residents of Uyo metropolis. Nigeria, being a multi-religious country with a diverse population, has witnessed the profound impact of religion on its political landscape. The study investigates how religious factors, such as religious affiliations, leaders' endorsements, and religious rhetoric, shape voter behavior and electoral outcomes in Uyo metropolis. A survey design approach was employed, combining qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, to gather data from a representative sample of residents in Uyo metropolis. The theoretical framework for this study was based on the planned behaviour theory, social judgment theory and the social identity theory. Using Taro Yamane sample size formula, a sample size of 400 was drawn from a population of 1,329,000 residents of Uyo Metropolis. The findings shed light on the multifaceted ways in which religion influences the electioneering process and provides insights for policymakers, political parties, and stakeholders seeking to promote a fair and inclusive democratic system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Affiliation, Communication, Elections, Influence, Politics, Uyo Metropolis.

Introduction

Religion plays a crucial role in Nigerian politics, and it has been a significant factor in the country's political and social developments. Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions in Nigeria, and both have a significant influence on the political landscape. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country has experienced numerous political and social challenges, including corruption, poverty, ethnic and religious tensions, and a series of military coups and dictatorships. These challenges have further complicated the role of religion in Nigerian politics, as religious institutions and leaders have often been involved in political issues.

The role of religion in Nigerian politics has often been controversial and divisive. One of the most significant challenges has been the use of religion to mobilize support for political candidates and parties. During elections, religious leaders have often endorsed political candidates and parties based on their religious affiliations, rather than their policies and programmes. This has led to the polarization of the electorate along religious lines and has often resulted in violence and social unrest.

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were keenly contested, with religion playing a crucial role in the electioneering process. The Uyo metropolis, being a significant political and religious hub in Nigeria, presents a unique case study to investigate the role of religion in the electioneering process.

Several scholars have examined the role of religion in Nigerian politics. For instance, Olurode (2013) argues that religion has become a dominant factor in Nigerian politics, and it has often been used to manipulate the electorate and gain political power. Similarly, Momoh (2015) contends that religion has become a potent tool for mobilizing support in Nigerian politics, particularly in the run-up to elections. He suggests that religious leaders often use their platforms to endorse political candidates and parties, and they sometimes coerce their followers to vote for these candidates, even if they are not the best options.

In recent years, several incidents have highlighted the complex relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria. For example, in the 2011 presidential elections, the country was divided along religious lines, with the Christian South supporting the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, and the Muslim North supporting the

challenger, Muhammadu Buhari. The election was marred by violence, and several people lost their lives (Adeniyi, 2013).

Similarly, in the 2015 general elections, religion played a significant role, with some religious leaders endorsing candidates based on their religious affiliations. For instance, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) endorsed Jonathan, while the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) endorsed Buhari (Akinwotu, 2015). Although the election was relatively peaceful compared to the previous one, there were still reports of violence in some parts of the country.

Religion played a significant role in the 2019 general elections, with religious leaders and organizations endorsing political candidates based on their religious affiliations. For instance, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) endorsed Atiku Abubakar, while the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) endorsed Buhari (BBC, 2019). Religious leaders also played a role in mobilizing their followers to vote for their preferred candidates, with some religious leaders going as far as threatening their followers with divine consequences if they voted against their endorsement (Premium Times, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is a multi-religious society with a history of religious leaders and organizations endorsing political candidates based on their religious affiliations. This practice has been a major source of concern in the country's democratic process, particularly during general elections. The 2019 general elections in Nigeria were characterized by religious endorsements, and this has led to debates about the role of religion in the country's politics.

The problem, therefore, is to understand the influence of religion in the electioneering process of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the Uyo metropolis. The study seeks to examine the extent to which religious affiliations influence the voting behavior of the electorate in the Uyo metropolis and the role of religious leaders in endorsing political candidates and parties. Additionally, the study aims to assess the impact of religious endorsements on the outcome of the elections in the Uyo metropolis and to identify the challenges and opportunities of separating religion from politics in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the impact of communication channels on voter behavior during the 2023 General Elections.
2. To examine the extent to which religious affiliations influence the voting behavior of the electorate in the Uyo metropolis.
3. To assess the impact of religious endorsements on the outcome of the elections in the Uyo metropolis.
4. To identify the challenges of separating religion from politics in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Communication

Communication can be broadly defined as the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, or feelings between individuals or groups through various methods or channels. It is a fundamental aspect of human interaction and can take many forms, including verbal and non-verbal communication, written communication, and visual communication. Communication plays a crucial role in conveying messages, sharing knowledge, and facilitating understanding among people. In the context of your research, understanding the different types of communication is essential for examining how religious affiliation influences electioneering in Nigeria.

Types of Communication

Intra-Personal Communication: Intra-personal communication refers to the internal dialogue and reflection that individuals engage in when considering their voting choices based on religious affiliation. It involves self-assessment, introspection, and personal contemplation. In the context of political decision-making, intra-personal communication plays a critical role as individuals evaluate their own values, beliefs, and religious affiliations before making a voting choice. This internal dialogue is a crucial step in the decision-making process and influences individuals' ultimate electoral decisions.

Inter-Personal Communication: Inter-personal communication involves the exchange of ideas, opinions, and information between individuals. During electioneering campaigns, inter-personal communication takes place when one individual tries to persuade or convince another to support a particular candidate or political party based on shared religious beliefs or affiliations. This form of communication often occurs in face-to-face interactions, within social networks, and through discussions among family, friends, and acquaintances. It serves as a significant channel for the dissemination of political information and can strongly impact electoral choices.

Group Communication: In the context of electioneering campaigns, group communication refers to the dissemination of political messages and discussions within organized groups, such as religious congregations, community associations, or interest groups. Group communication is strategically used to mobilize and influence voters who share common religious affiliations. Religious leaders and community influencers often play a vital role in group communication, shaping the political opinions and choices of their followers. Understanding the dynamics of group communication within religious communities is essential to comprehending the impact of religious affiliation on election outcomes.

Mass Communication: Mass communication is the widespread distribution of political messages and information through various media channels, including television, radio, newspapers, social media, and campaign rallies. Mass communication plays a pivotal role in electioneering campaigns, as it reaches a broad audience, transcending individual and group boundaries. Political candidates and parties employ mass communication strategies to disseminate their messages, shape public perceptions, and garner support from voters with diverse religious affiliations. Analyzing the use of mass media in conveying political messages and its influence on voters' decisions is crucial in understanding the broader electoral landscape.

Communication in the Context of Religious Affiliation and Election

The intersection of communication and religious affiliation in the context of elections is multifaceted. Intra-personal communication drives individual decision-making processes, with voters considering their religious values and beliefs. Inter-personal communication enables persuasion and information exchange within social networks. Group communication within religious communities fosters a sense of shared identity and mobilizes voters based on common religious affiliations. Mass communication, on the other hand, amplifies political messages and can either reinforce or challenge existing religious affiliations, ultimately shaping electoral outcomes.

The Relationship between Religion and Politics in Nigeria

The relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria has been extensively studied and is widely acknowledged. Nigeria's multi-religious landscape, with a significant population of Muslims and Christians, has led to the intertwining of religious beliefs and political ideologies. Adesoji (2017) argues that religion serves as a significant identity marker and mobilizing force in Nigerian politics, shaping political discourse and electoral outcomes.

Religious dynamics in Nigerian politics have been explored through various theoretical frameworks. The "instrumentalist perspective" posits that political actors strategically exploit religion to gain support and achieve their political objectives (Oladosu, 2015). In contrast, the "primordial perspective" suggests that religious affiliations have deep historical and cultural roots, influencing political behavior and preferences (Onuoha, 2017).

Influence of Religious Affiliations on Voter Preferences: Religious affiliations have been found to play a significant role in shaping voter preferences in Nigerian elections. For instance, Muslim voters tend to support Muslim candidates, while Christian voters lean towards Christian candidates. This religious alignment is attributed to the sense of familiarity, shared values, and the belief that candidates from their religious background will better represent their interests (Onuoha, 2017).

The influence of religious affiliations on voting behavior extends beyond shared religious identity. It also encompasses socio-cultural factors associated with specific religious communities. For example, certain religious groups may have a higher emphasis on particular policy issues, such as education, healthcare, or moral values, which can influence their voting choices (Ajayi & Oyesomi, 2016).

Impact of Communication Channels on Voter Behavior

Communication channels play a pivotal role in shaping voter behavior during elections, serving as conduits for political information, persuasion, and mobilization (Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022). In the context of the 2023 General

Elections in Nigeria, the influence of various communication channels on voter behavior has garnered significant scholarly attention.

Traditional Media Influence: Traditional media, such as television, radio, and newspapers, have traditionally been primary sources of political information for voters. Numerous studies have indicated that exposure to political debates, candidate interviews, and news coverage on these platforms can influence voter preferences and decision-making (McLeod & Becker, 2004). However, the relevance of traditional media has evolved in the digital age.

Digital Media and Social Networks: The proliferation of digital communication channels, particularly social media platforms, has reshaped political communication. Researchers have observed that platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have become vital for political engagement and information dissemination during elections (Howard & Hussain, 2013). These platforms enable rapid sharing of news, opinions, and campaign messages, potentially affecting voter behavior (Vergeer et al., 2011; Okoro et al., 2019).

Selective Exposure and Echo Chambers: Studies have also highlighted the phenomenon of selective exposure, where voters tend to seek information that aligns with their existing beliefs (Stroud, 2010). In the digital realm, this can lead to the formation of echo chambers, where individuals are exposed primarily to content that reinforces their views, potentially polarizing political opinions (Sunstein, 2017).

Misinformation and Disinformation: The digital space is also susceptible to misinformation and disinformation, where false or misleading information spreads rapidly (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Etumnu, 2020). The impact of such information on voter behavior is a growing concern, as it can distort perceptions and influence electoral choices (Guess et al., 2020).

Mobile Technologies and Outreach: Furthermore, mobile technologies have enabled political campaigns to engage directly with voters through text messages, phone calls, and mobile apps. Research suggests that personalized communication through these channels can be highly effective in mobilizing voters and influencing turnout (Nickerson et al., 2016).

Religious Rhetoric and Mobilization Efforts

Use of Religious Rhetoric in Political Campaigns: Political candidates often employ religious rhetoric as a strategy to appeal to voters and mobilize support. Religious rhetoric refers to the use of religious language, symbols, and references in political speeches, campaign materials, and communication with voters. It aims to establish a connection between the candidate and the religious beliefs and values of the electorate.

Studies have shown that the use of religious rhetoric can have a significant impact on voter perceptions and candidate popularity. Okeke-Uzodike (2019) found that candidates who strategically utilized religious language and symbols during their campaigns were perceived as more relatable and trustworthy by voters. Religious rhetoric can tap into emotional and deeply held beliefs, creating a sense of resonance and identification with the candidate.

Religious rhetoric also serves as a mobilization tool, rallying supporters and increasing voter turnout. Political candidates often deliver speeches in religious gatherings, such as churches and mosques, where they address congregations and seek their support. These interactions allow candidates to tap into existing religious networks, engage with influential religious leaders, and connect with voters who are more likely to respond to appeals based on their religious beliefs (Ajayi & Oyesomi, 2016).

Role of Religious Organizations in Political Mobilization: Religious organizations, such as churches and mosques, have become significant platforms for political mobilization and organization. They serve as social and community centers where political candidates can engage with a large number of potential voters.

Religious organizations often provide opportunities for candidates to address their congregations, participate in community events, and seek endorsements from religious leaders. These interactions enable candidates to reach a wide audience and establish personal connections with voters. In turn, religious organizations play a vital role in facilitating voter mobilization efforts, encouraging their members to actively participate in the electoral process (Ajayi & Oyesomi, 2016).

Ethical Dimensions and Challenges: While the use of religious rhetoric and mobilization efforts can be effective in political campaigns, it also raises ethical concerns. Critics argue that the instrumentalization of religion in politics undermines the separation of church and state, blurring the boundaries between religious and political domains. This can lead to the manipulation of religious sentiments for political gain and the potential exclusion of non-religious or minority religious groups (Oladosu, 2015).

Furthermore, the use of religious rhetoric can exacerbate religious tensions and contribute to religious polarization within society. It may reinforce divisions between religious groups and create an "us versus them" mentality, potentially undermining social cohesion and fostering intolerance (Onuoha, 2017).

It is important for political candidates and religious leaders to approach religious rhetoric and mobilization efforts responsibly, ensuring that they uphold democratic principles, respect religious diversity, and promote inclusivity. Balancing the use of religious language with respect for the rights and beliefs of all citizens is crucial for maintaining a harmonious and fair electoral process.

Impact of Religion on Electoral Outcomes

Electoral Significance of Religious Voting Blocs: Religious voting blocs, comprised of individuals who align their voting choices based on religious affiliations and values, can have a significant impact on electoral outcomes. In Nigeria, where religion holds a central place in the lives of many citizens, these voting blocs can shape the distribution of votes and influence the success or failure of political candidates (Ajayi & Oyesomi, 2016).

The concentration of religious voters in specific regions or constituencies can create a scenario where candidates who secure endorsements from influential religious leaders or effectively appeal to the religious sentiments of the electorate gain a substantial advantage. As a result, political parties and candidates often make concerted efforts to appeal to these religious voting blocs to secure their support (Onuoha, 2017).

Polarization and Fragmentation of the Electorate: The influence of religion on electoral outcomes can contribute to the polarization and fragmentation of the electorate. In Nigeria, where there is a diverse religious landscape, electoral campaigns that heavily rely on religious appeals can reinforce divisions along religious lines. This can lead to the segmentation of the electorate, with candidates focusing their efforts on mobilizing their respective religious bases rather than fostering broader social cohesion (Oladosu, 2015).

Furthermore, the competition for religious endorsements and the emphasis on religious identity in politics can deepen divisions between different religious groups. This can create an atmosphere of religious tension and animosity, potentially undermining national unity and social harmony (Ajayi & Oyesomi, 2016).

Overview of the outcome of the Presidential Election in Uyo LGA

The outcome of the just concluded 2023 general elections provides an interesting perspective on the influence of religion on politics. In this election, we observe that religious factors played a significant role in shaping the voting patterns and outcomes. The results reveal a complex interplay between religious affiliations, candidate tickets, and voter preferences.

The Labour Party (LP) presented a Christian-Muslim ticket, receiving a total of 27,534 votes. This suggests that a significant portion of the electorate was attracted to a ticket that encompassed religious diversity. It indicates that some voters prioritize inclusivity and the representation of multiple religious perspectives in their political choices. On the other hand, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) fielded a Muslim-Christian ticket and secured 12,245 votes. This result underscores the significance of religious considerations in the election. The All Progressives Congress (APC), with a Muslim-Muslim ticket, obtained 7,769 votes. This outcome highlights the influence of religious identity and its impact on voter behavior. It indicates that there was a significant support base for the ticket that aligned with a specific religious group.

While the results of this election provide a snapshot of the influence of religion on politics, it is essential to recognize that individual voting decisions are influenced by a multitude of factors, including socioeconomic considerations, party platforms, and candidate qualifications. Nonetheless, the results offer valuable insights into the

continued relevance of religion in the political landscape and the significant role it plays in shaping voter behavior and electoral outcomes.

Mitigating the Influence of Religion in Electioneering

Promotion of Secularism and Religious Neutrality:One approach to mitigate the influence of religion in electioneering is the promotion of secularism and religious neutrality in political processes. Secularism entails the separation of religion and state, ensuring that political decisions are not influenced by religious doctrines or biases. It upholds the principle of equal treatment for all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs or affiliations (Oladosu, 2015).

Promoting religious neutrality in electioneering requires creating a level playing field where candidates and parties refrain from using religious appeals and endorsements as primary campaign strategies. This encourages a focus on broader societal issues and allows voters to make informed choices based on policy platforms and candidates' qualifications rather than religious affiliations (Sanusi, 2017).

Education and Awareness Programs:Education and awareness programs can play a crucial role in mitigating the influence of religion in electioneering. By promoting civic education and emphasizing democratic values, citizens can develop a better understanding of the importance of separating religious beliefs from political decision-making processes. Such programs can encourage critical thinking, tolerance, and respect for diverse perspectives, fostering an environment where voters evaluate candidates based on merit rather than religious affiliations (Ajayi &Oyesomi, 2016).

Educational initiatives can also focus on raising awareness about the potential negative consequences of excessive religious influence on electoral processes, such as polarization, exclusion, and neglect of non-religious citizens. By highlighting the importance of inclusive and pluralistic democracy, these programs can contribute to a more informed and engaged electorate (Onuoha, 2017).

Strengthening Electoral Regulations and Institutions:Effective electoral regulations and institutions can help mitigate the undue influence of religion in electioneering. Clear guidelines can be established to prevent the exploitation of religious sentiments and to ensure fair and transparent electoral processes. These regulations may include provisions that discourage candidates from using religious rhetoric, prohibit the endorsement of candidates by religious leaders in an official capacity, and promote the accountability of candidates and parties in adhering to secular and inclusive principles (Oladosu, 2015).

Additionally, strengthening electoral institutions, such as electoral commissions and monitoring bodies, can enhance their capacity to monitor and address cases of religious bias or manipulation. By promoting fair electoral practices and enforcing regulations, these institutions can contribute to a more level playing field for all candidates, irrespective of their religious affiliations (Sanusi, 2017).

Interfaith Dialogue and Engagement:Promoting interfaith dialogue and engagement can foster a climate of understanding and cooperation, transcending religious differences in the political sphere. By encouraging dialogue between religious leaders, communities, and political actors, opportunities for shared values, common goals, and collective action can be identified (Ajayi &Oyesomi, 2016).

Interfaith initiatives can promote messages of peace, social justice, and inclusivity, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and mutual respect in the electoral process. By bringing together diverse religious communities and facilitating conversations on the appropriate role of religion in politics, these initiatives can help mitigate the potential negative consequences of excessive religious influence and foster a more harmonious and inclusive political environment (Onuoha, 2017).

Empirical Review

Godwin (2017) carried out a study on the influence of ethnicity and religion on the voting patterns of the Nigerian electorate. The study provided an insightful examination of the influence of ethnicity and religion on voting patterns in Nigeria, specifically focusing on the 2015 presidential election. Employing a content analysis approach, the research revealed that ethnicity played a significant role in shaping the election outcome. The study highlights the challenge of

having a Nigerian President of Igbo origin without the support of other ethnic groups, as the Igbo community is considered a minority in terms of population. Overall, this research offers valuable insights into the role of ethnicity and religion in Nigerian elections. The findings provide a basis for understanding the complexities of voting patterns and the need for inclusive governance to address the influence of ethnic and religious divisions. The study's recommendations for rotational presidency and inclusive government present potential avenues for promoting equal representation and reducing the negative effects of ethnicity and religion in Nigeria.

Similarly, Emmanuel (2020) carried out a research to explore the relationship between religion and political behavior in Nigeria's 2019 presidential election, focusing on the influence of religious cleavages on voting patterns across the country. The research highlighted the continued significance of religious divisions, particularly along the Christian-Muslim divide, in shaping political preferences. The study acknowledged the limited impact of indigenous African religions due to their diversity. It contributed to the growing interest in the intersection of religion and politics and raises the question of whether democracy requires the involvement of religion.

Overall, this research sheds light on the complex interplay between religion and politics in Nigeria, highlighting the importance of addressing religious cleavages and promoting a secular state as essential components of sustaining democratic governance in the country.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Planned Behaviour, Social Judgement and Social Identity Theories. The Planned Behavior Theory, proposed by Icek Ajzen in 1991, provides a relevant framework for understanding the relationship between individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and their planned behavior in the context of religion's influence on politics in the 2023 general elections. According to this theory, individuals' intentions to engage in a particular behavior, such as voting based on religious factors, are influenced by their attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

The social judgment theory, proposed by Muzafer Sherif and Carl Hovland in 1961, offers insights into how individuals process persuasive messages and make judgments based on their existing attitudes. In the context of the research on the influence of religion in the 2023 general elections, the social judgment theory can help explain how religious factors, such as religious affiliations and leaders' endorsements, influence voters' attitudes and decision-making processes.

The social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, is a theoretical perspective that relates to the study on the influence of religion in the electioneering of the 2023 general elections in Uyo metropolis. This theory explains how individuals' identification with social groups, including religious affiliations, affects their attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes. It suggests that people categorize themselves into social groups based on shared characteristics, such as religion, and this social identity influences their political attitudes and preferences.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The study will utilize a mixed-methods approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the influence of religion in the electioneering process of the 2023 general elections in the Uyo metropolis.

Population: The population for this study comprises of adults (18 years of age and above) residing in the Uyo metropolis, including registered voters, religious leaders, political candidates, and representatives from civil society organizations involved in the electoral process. The current Metro area population of residents in Uyo in 2023 is 1,329,000 (<https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/206379/uyo/population>).

Sample and Sampling Technique: Using the Taro Yamane Sample size formula given as;

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + Ne^2)}$$

Where; n= corrected sample size, N = population size, and e = Margin of error (MoE), e = 0.05 based on the research condition.

With a population of 1,329,000 and a margin of error at 0.05, the sample size is given as $399.8796 \approx 400$ respondents. Simple random sampling technique was employed to administer questionnaires to the respondents. The analysis is presented using simple percentage and frequency count in tables.

Data Analysis/Discussion of Findings

4.1 Data Analysis

Table 1: Which of these communication type would you say was most prevalent in Uyo Metropolis, during the campaign leading to the 2023 general elections?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Intra-personal Communication	123	30.8
Interpersonal Communication	210	52.5
Group Communication	67	16.8
Total	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

From the tale above 123 respondents representing 30.8% opined that Intra-personal communication was a common form of communication strategy during the 2023 general elections. and 210 respondents representing 52.5% opined that Inter-personal communication had been the major strategy used in campaign during the 2023 general elections. This shows that majority of respondents 333 (83.0%) agreed that inter-personal and inter-personal communication was most prevalent in Uyo Metropolis.

Table 2: How important is religion in your life?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very important	98	24.5
Somewhat important	237	59.3
Not very important	53	13.2
Not important at all	12	3
Total	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

From table 1 above, 98 respondents representing 24.5% believed that religion was very important in their life. 237 respondents representing 59.3% believed that religion was somewhat important. This showed that majority of respondents believed that religion plays an important role in their life.

Table 3: To what extent does your religious affiliation influence your voting decisions?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly influence	123	30.8
Somewhat influences	210	52.5
Does not influence	47	11.7
Not sure/Not applicable	20	5
Total	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

From the tale above 123 respondents representing 30.8% opined that religious affiliation had a strong influence on voting decisions and 210 respondents representing 52.5% opined that it had somewhat influence. This shows that majority of respondents 333 (83.0%) agreed that religious affiliations do influence their voting decisions.

Table 4: Do you think religious endorsements of political candidates or parties affect the overall outcome of elections in the Uyo metropolis?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	341	85.25
No	20	5.0

Unsure	39	9.75
Total	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

From the table above, majority of respondents (341; 85.25%) opined that religious endorsements of political candidates or parties affect the overall outcome of elections.

Table 5: If yes, in what ways do you believe religious endorsements impact the outcome of elections?

n=341		
OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Increased Voter Trust and Support	327	95.9
Mobilization of Religious Voting Blocs	311	91.2
Shaping Voter Perceptions	340	99.7
Influence on Swing Voters	339	99.4
Amplification of Campaign Messages	320	93.8

Source: Field survey, 2023

From the table above, it can be seen that majority of respondents believed that increased voter trust and support (95.9%); Mobilization of Religious Voting Blocs (91.2%); Shaping Voter Perceptions (99.7%); Influence on Swing Voters (99.4%); and Amplification of Campaign Messages (93.8%), are ways religious endorsements impact the outcome of elections.

Table 6: In your opinion, what are the main challenges associated with separating religion from politics in Nigeria?

n=400		
OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Resistance from Religious Leaders	243	60.75
Deep-rooted Religious Identity	380	95.0
Voter Behavior and Expectations	315	78.75
Historical and Cultural Factors	359	89.75
Political Instrumentalization of Religion	277	69.25
Socioeconomic Disparities	390	97.5

Source: Field survey, 2023

From the table above, majority of respondents opined that, Resistance from Religious Leaders(60.75%); Deep-rooted Religious Identity (95%);Voter Behavior and Expectations (78.75%)Historical and Cultural Factors (89.75%);Political Instrumentalization of Religion (69.25%);Socioeconomic Disparities (97.5%), are challenges associated with separating religion from politics in Nigeria.

Table 7: Do you believe that promoting the separation of religion from politics in Nigeria would enhance the democratic process and governance?

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	210	52.5
No	117	29.3
Not Sure	73	18.2
Total	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

From the table above, it can be seen that 210 respondents representing 52.5% bien the majority of respondents believed that promoting the separation of religion from politics in Nigeria would enhance the democratic process and governance.

Discussion of Findings

From the analysis, it is revealed that majority of respondents 333 (83.0%) agreed that religious affiliations do influence their voting decisions. This is in line with the studies of Ajayi & Oyesomi, (2016) which asserted that individuals often align themselves with political candidates who share their religious beliefs and values.

Also, findings revealed that majority of respondents believed that increased voter trust and support (95.9%); Mobilization of Religious Voting Blocs (91.2%); Shaping Voter Perceptions (99.7%); Influence on Swing Voters (99.4%); and Amplification of Campaign Messages (93.8%), are ways religious endorsements impact the outcome of elections. These finding is in tandem with Onuoha's (2017) assertion that political parties and candidates often make concerted efforts to appeal to these religious voting blocs to secure their support (Onuoha, 2017). This agrees with the result of the Presidential election in Uyo where it was observed that religious factors played a significant role in shaping the voting patterns and outcomes and revealing a complex interplay between religious affiliations, candidate tickets, and voter preferences. The Labour Party (LP) presented a Christian-Muslim ticket, receiving a total of 27,534 votes, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) fielded a Muslim-Christian ticket and secured 12,245 votes while the All Progressives Congress (APC), with a Muslim-Muslim ticket, obtained 7,769 votes. These results offer valuable insights into the relevance of religion in the political landscape of Uyo and the significant role it plays in shaping voter behavior and electoral outcomes. Hence, in Nigeria, where religion holds a central place in the lives of many citizens, these voting blocs can shape the distribution of votes and influence the success or failure of political candidates (Ajayi & Oyesomi, 2016).

Further findings from the data analyzed revealed that 210 respondents representing 52.5% of respondents believed that promoting the separation of religion from politics in Nigeria would enhance the democratic process and governance.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the influence of religion in the electioneering of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, specifically focusing on the residents of Uyo metropolis. Through a comprehensive analysis, several key findings have emerged.

Firstly, religion plays a significant role in shaping voter perceptions and mobilizing support. Religious voting blocs, comprised of individuals who align their voting choices based on religious affiliations and values, have a considerable impact on electoral outcomes. Candidates who secure endorsements from influential religious leaders or effectively appeal to religious sentiments gain a substantial advantage.

Secondly, the influence of religion in electioneering can lead to the polarization and fragmentation of the electorate. Heavy reliance on religious appeals can reinforce divisions along religious lines and deepen tensions between different religious groups. This poses challenges to national unity and social harmony.

Thirdly, the influence of religion on electoral outcomes has policy implications. Candidates may prioritize policies that align with the religious values of their supporters, potentially neglecting other pressing issues. The representation of minority religious groups and non-religious individuals may be marginalized.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendation were made;

1. Firstly, promoting secularism and religious neutrality is essential. The separation of religion and state ensures that political decisions are not influenced by religious doctrines or biases. Candidates and parties should refrain from using religious appeals as primary campaign strategies, focusing instead on broader societal issues.
2. Secondly, education and awareness programs should be developed to promote civic education and democratic values. Citizens need to understand the importance of separating religious beliefs from political decision-making processes and evaluating candidates based on merit rather than religious affiliations.
3. Additionally, promoting interfaith dialogue and engagement can foster understanding and cooperation among religious communities. Dialogue initiatives should emphasize shared values, peace, and inclusivity, addressing the appropriate role of religion in politics.

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