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THE CHALLENGES OF CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN TARABA STATE

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Abstract

Taraba State, Nigeria, presents significant challenges for Christians in politics due to systemic biases and structural impediments, which limit their effective participation and lead to religious bias influencing candidate selection, policy formulation, and electoral outcomes. Christian politicians often face systematic exclusion and marginalisation within political parties and electoral systems, hindering their ability to represent their constituencies effectively and raising ethical dilemmas regarding the intersection of religious principles with political pragmatism. This study explored these challenges, examining how historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and inter-religious tensions shape Christian participation in politics in Taraba State, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the moral implications of their involvement in governance. Employing a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including Christian leaders, politicians, and community members actively involved in politics in Taraba State. Additionally, document analysis of relevant church statements and political documents supplemented the interview data. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights derived from the qualitative data, providing a nuanced understanding of Christian involvement in politics. The findings revealed that ethical dilemmas are faced by Christian politicians in balancing their religious convictions with the demands of political responsibilities. Inter-religious tensions complicate the political environment, impacting coalition-building and governance dynamics in Taraba State. Systemic biases and structural impediments lead to the marginalisation and exclusion of Christian politicians within political parties and electoral systems in Taraba State. Findings also showed that strategic mobilisation of religious affiliations and communal grievances during electoral cycles influence voter behaviour and coalition dynamics. Also, allegations of corruption and misconduct among Christian politicians underscore the ethical imperative for transparency and accountability in public service. Recommendations included prioritizing initiatives aligned with Christian ethics, organizing educational programs to enhance ethical engagement, and promoting transparency and accountability in public service. In conclusion, the study underscored the importance of ethical leadership and the need for greater Christian engagement in politics to ensure inclusive governance and societal progress in Taraba State.

Keywords: Christian, Challenges, Politics and Taraba State



Introduction

Christian participation in politics in Taraba State, Nigeria, from 1999 to 2024, confronts significant challenges shaped by religious identity amidst a diverse socio-political landscape. Christians constitute a substantial demographic within Taraba State, yet their political engagement is fraught with systemic biases and structural impediments. The pervasive influence of religious bias permeates political processes, affecting candidate selection, policy formulation, and electoral outcomes (Omotola 115). These challenges highlight the complexities faced by Christians in navigating political roles amidst historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and inter-religious tensions.

According to Omotola, religious bias remains a critical issue where Christian politicians encounter systematic exclusion and marginalisation within political parties and electoral systems in Taraba State. This exclusionary practice not only limits their ability to effectively represent their constituencies but also perpetuates socio-political inequalities that undermine democratic principles of equal participation and representation (118). Furthermore, ethical dilemmas arise concerning the alignment of religious convictions with public policy, posing challenges for Christian leaders in balancing personal faith with broader governance responsibilities (Adeyemi 115).

Recent electoral cycles in Taraba State have witnessed the strategic mobilization of religious affiliations and communal grievances during campaigns, influencing voter behavior and coalition dynamics (Yakubu 125). The use of religious rhetoric in political discourse underscores its polarizing effect on electoral outcomes, complicating efforts towards inclusive and issue-based campaigning (125). Moreover, allegations of corruption and misconduct among Christian politicians underscore the ethical imperative for transparency and accountability in public service (Okafor 135).

The challenges of Christian participation in politics in Taraba State from 1999 to 2024 underscore broader issues of religious bias, ethical dilemmas, and institutional barriers that influence democratic governance. This essay aims to explore these challenges comprehensively, drawing on scholarly insights and empirical evidence to illuminate the complexities faced by Christians in engaging with political processes and advocating for inclusive political practices.

Conceptual Clarification

Politics: The term "politics" encompasses a diverse array of interpretations and definitions among scholars, illustrating its intricate and multifaceted nature. David Easton defines politics as "the authoritative allocation of values for a society" (Easton 129), emphasizing its role in determining societal norms and priorities. Harold Lasswell's perspective describes politics as "who gets what, when, and how" (Lasswell 5), highlighting the competitive distribution of resources and power among various actors. Max Weber's definition emphasises politics as "the striving to share or influence the distribution of power" (Weber 78), focusing on the dynamics of power and governance within states and societies, reflecting both conflict and negotiation.



These definitions, while insightful, also reveal certain limitations. Easton's broad definition lacks specificity regarding the mechanisms of value allocation, while Lasswell's focus on distribution oversimplifies the complexities of political motivations and strategies. Weber's emphasis on power dynamics overlooks cooperative aspects of political interactions. In the context of Christian participation in politics in Taraba State, these definitions are crucial for understanding how religious beliefs intersect with political responsibilities, influencing decision-making processes guided by ethical and moral considerations.

For this study, a nuanced definition of politics is essential one that incorporates traditional elements of power and governance while acknowledging the unique dynamics of religious involvement. Politics is defined here as the process by which societal decisions are made, allocating resources, influencing power structures, and reflecting collective values, with a particular emphasis on ethical considerations. This definition facilitates an exploration of Christian engagement in Taraba State's political landscape, highlighting both its pragmatic impacts and the ethical imperatives that shape Christian political actions.

Christian Participation: "Christian participation" encompasses a broad spectrum of activities where individuals identifying as Christians actively engage across social, political, and economic spheres, guided by Christian values and teachings to integrate faith into societal contributions. Recent scholarship offers varied perspectives on this concept: Banks and Ledbetter define it as applying Christian ethics in all aspects of life, emphasizing faith's influence on societal structures (22). Chaplin focuses on political involvement to advocate biblical principles in governance (45), while Bane and Mead highlight Christian activism addressing social injustices (33), each perspective contributing different insights into engagement forms and motivations.

These definitions reveal strengths and limitations: Banks and Ledbetter's broad view lacks specificity on engagement forms; Chaplin's political focus overlooks non-political dimensions, and Bane and Mead's activism-centric approach may narrow participation to social issues alone. In Taraba State's context, understanding Christian participation in politics requires integrating these perspectives amid regional complexities of religion, ethnicity, and socio-economics. Thus, for this study, "Christian participation" is defined as Christians' intentional involvement in political processes, informed by Christian ethics to foster justice, peace, and societal welfare. This definition acknowledges diverse engagement forms and ethical considerations, aiming to comprehensively explore Christian impact on Taraba State's political landscape.

Methodology

The study utilises a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach. This methodological framework aims to deeply investigate the phenomenon of Christian engagement in politics in Taraba State, allowing for a nuanced exploration of its moral implications within the region. Data collection involves conducting in-depth interviews with key stakeholders including Christian leaders, politicians, and community members actively involved in politics in Taraba State.



Additionally, document analysis of relevant church statements and political documents related to Christian participation supplements the interview data.

The analysis of collected data follows a thematic analysis approach, focusing on identifying recurring patterns, themes, and insights derived from qualitative data. This methodological choice enabled the researcher to uncover the underlying motivations, challenges, and impacts associated with Christian involvement in Taraba State's political landscape. The selected qualitative methodology is justified by its capacity to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding Christian participation in politics, aiming to capture diverse perspectives and experiences of stakeholders involved and enriching scholarly discourse on the subject matter.

The Challenges of Christian Participation in Politics in Taraba State

Christian participation in politics in Taraba State, Nigeria, from 1999 to 2024 is marked by intricate challenges deeply embedded in the region's socio-political fabric. This period has been characterised by pervasive religious bias and discrimination, which often marginalise Christians within the political sphere (Omotola 112). Moreover, issues of moral compromise and corruption pose significant ethical dilemmas for Christian politicians, influencing their roles and decisions (115). Inter-religious tensions further complicate the political environment, impacting coalition-building and governance dynamics (118). Additionally, socio-political pressures, stemming from economic disparities and historical grievances, shape electoral processes and governance outcomes, perpetuating inequities despite constitutional guarantees of secular governance (121). This study examines these complex dynamics to elucidate the enduring challenges faced by Christians engaging in politics in Taraba State.

Religious Bias and Discrimination

Religious bias remains a persistent challenge affecting Christian participation in politics within Taraba State, Nigeria. The state, situated in the Middle Belt region, reflects Nigeria's diverse religious landscape, predominantly comprising Christian and Muslim communities (James Yaro, oral interview). Historical and colonial legacies have contributed to the politicisation of religious identities, shaping contemporary political dynamics where discrimination based on religious affiliation influences electoral processes and political representation (Geoffrey Gashi, Oral Interview).

In the realm of political representation, Christians often encounter systematic hurdles that hinder their ability to secure nominations and hold significant offices compared to their Muslim counterparts. This disparity not only marginalises Christian interests but also perpetuates inequalities in decision-making bodies, impacting governance outcomes. Legislative biases further exacerbate these challenges, with policy decisions and legislative agendas occasionally favoring specific religious groups, thereby disadvantaging others (Istifanus Rokoba, Oral Interview).

Electoral violence and intimidation also play a crucial role in perpetuating religious bias in Taraba State politics. Reports indicate instances where elections have been marred by violence targeting



Christian candidates and their supporters, creating a climate of fear and obstructing democratic processes (Ojo 34). Such incidents not only undermine electoral integrity but also deter Christians from actively participating in political activities due to safety concerns.

Media portrayal significantly influences public perception and voter attitudes towards Christian politicians in Taraba State. Biased media coverage may reinforce stereotypes or negative narratives, thereby marginalising Christian voices and affecting electoral outcomes (Amadi 91). Moreover, legal and institutional frameworks occasionally reflect ambiguous or discriminatory practices that disadvantage Christian participants in political processes (Okonkwo 122). These legal interpretations and administrative practices contribute to an environment where equitable political engagement remains elusive for many Christians.

Moral Compromise and Corruption

Christian participation in politics in Taraba State, Nigeria, is often hindered by moral compromise and corruption, which undermine ethical governance and public trust. The state's diverse religious demographics present complex challenges for Christian politicians (Anthony Odey, Oral Interview). Moral compromise, where personal gain outweighs public service, contributes to widespread corruption, eroding the credibility of Christian political engagement. Corruption manifests through various forms such as embezzlement and abuse of power, significantly impacting governance in Taraba State (Saul John, Oral Interview). These unethical practices not only violate moral norms but also hinder socio-economic development and perpetuate inequalities, particularly affecting marginalised communities. Christian leaders implicated in corruption scandals compromise their integrity and erode public trust, diminishing their effectiveness as ethical leaders.

Moral compromise extends beyond individual actions to institutional practices and policy decisions. Corrupt legislative processes often prioritise personal or group interests over public welfare, undermining democratic principles like transparency and accountability (Saul John, Oral Interview). Such ethical deficiencies distort representation and governance effectiveness. Also, electoral processes in Taraba State reflect challenges of moral compromise, where Christian politicians resort to unethical tactics like vote-buying or electoral fraud to secure power (Karbon Philip Ben, Oral Interview). These practices distort democratic processes, disenfranchise voters, and perpetuate corrupt cycles that hinder genuine democratic progress.

Media influence plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of Christian politicians involved in moral compromise and corruption. Biased media coverage can expose or shield unethical practices, influencing voter attitudes and electoral outcomes. Negative portrayals stigmatize Christian leaders, reinforcing stereotypes and eroding public trust in their ability to govern ethically (Ashumato Repas, Oral Interview). Also, Ashumato Repas opines further that legal frameworks in Taraba State often struggle to effectively combat corruption among Christian politicians, with inadequate regulatory oversight and enforcement mechanisms. Accountability



gaps perpetuate unethical practices and hinder efforts to promote integrity in political leadership (Oral Interview).

Ethical Dilemmas of Christian Participation in Politics

Christian involvement in politics in Taraba State often confronts ethical dilemmas rooted in conflicting moral principles and societal expectations. These dilemmas arise from navigating between upholding religious values and participating effectively in the political process, which often requires compromise and negotiation. Christian participation in politics in Taraba State presents ethical dilemmas rooted in the intersection of religious principles and political pragmatism. Scholars such as Keneth Sunday highlight the challenge of maintaining ethical integrity while navigating the competitive and often corrupt political landscape. Christian politicians face pressure to compromise on moral principles in exchange for political support or advancement, which can undermine their credibility and the trust of their constituents (Oral Interview). This dilemma is exacerbated by socio-economic factors and systemic corruption, which incentivise unethical behaviour and compromise among political actors.

Furthermore, Geoffrey Shugabba discusses the ethical implications of alliances and coalitions formed by Christian politicians to gain political leverage. According to Geoffrey Shugabba, strategic alliances with non-Christian groups or individuals may raise questions about ideological consistency and loyalty to religious values (Oral Interview). Such alliances are often necessary for coalition-building and legislative effectiveness but can pose ethical challenges regarding policy alignment and accountability to Christian constituents.

In the context of electoral campaigns, ethical dilemmas arise concerning the use of religious rhetoric and identity politics to mobilise voters. Victor Elkanah observes that, appeals to religious identity and communal grievances can polarize the electorate along religious lines, undermining efforts towards inclusive and issue-based campaigning (Oral Interview). This strategy may yield short-term electoral gains but risks perpetuating divisions and sectarian tensions within Taraba State's diverse religious landscape.

Moreover, the ethical conduct of Christian politicians is scrutinised in their decision-making processes and policy advocacy. Uzzaja Dauda argues that the prioritisation of religiously motivated policies may conflict with broader public interests and constitutional principles of secular governance (Oral Interview). This tension raises ethical questions about the balance between religious convictions and the responsibilities of public office, particularly in a pluralistic society like Nigeria.

Case studies from recent political scandals underscore the ethical challenges faced by Christian politicians in Taraba State. For instance, allegations of corruption and misconduct among elected officials have tarnished the reputation of Christian leaders and eroded public trust in their ability to uphold ethical standards (Uzzaja Dauda, Oral Interview). Such incidents highlight the ethical



imperative for transparency, accountability, and integrity in governance, irrespective of religious affiliation or political allegiance.

In response to these dilemmas, ethical frameworks and codes of conduct have been proposed to guide Christian politicians in navigating their roles and responsibilities. Tongah Litus suggests that adherence to ethical principles such as honesty, accountability, and respect for the rule of law can mitigate the ethical risks associated with political participation (Oral Interview). Moreover, according to Lydia Andrew, civic education and leadership training programs aim to equip Christian politicians with the ethical tools and competencies necessary to uphold moral integrity in public service (Oral Interview).

Inter-Religious Tensions

Inter-religious tensions in Taraba State from 1999 to 2024 have been a significant challenge, marked by a series of conflicts and clashes between different religious groups. These tensions have often stemmed from a complex interplay of factors, including historical grievances, political manipulation, economic disparities, and social divisions. The re-introduction of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 brought about a resurgence of identity-based conflicts, with religion being a key fault line in Taraba State. The ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba State have had profound effects on the social fabric of the region, leading to loss of lives, displacement of communities, and a pervasive climate of fear and mistrust. Women and children have been particularly vulnerable in these conflicts, facing heightened risks of violence, displacement, and loss of livelihoods. The impact on children's education and psychological well-being has been severe, with many experiencing trauma and disrupted schooling (Beauty Sale, Oral Interview).

The dynamics of inter-religious tensions in Taraba State have been exacerbated by external influences, such as political actors exploiting religious identities for their own gain. This manipulation of religious sentiments has fueled animosities and deepened divisions within communities, making reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts more challenging. The lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms has further perpetuated the cycle of violence and distrust between religious groups (John Mamman, Oral Interview).

Inter-religious tensions in Taraba State have historically been rooted in colonial-era policies that favored one religious group over another. This historical backdrop has fueled distrust and marginalisation among Christians, impacting their political participation. Electoral processes often exploit religious identities, leading to divisive campaigning based on religious affiliations rather than merit or policy (Rebecca Anthony, Oral Interview). Such manipulation undermines democratic principles and exacerbates tensions between religious communities, hindering effective Christian involvement in politics.

Legislative bias and discriminatory policies further complicate the landscape. Laws perceived as favoring one religious group can marginalise others, limiting their political influence. For example, zoning policies may disproportionately affect Christian communities, curtailing their



representation (Gloria Gedda, Oral Interview). Moreover, inter-religious tensions frequently escalate into violent conflicts, disrupting governance and exacerbating socio-political instability (Ojo 2018, 92). These conflicts result in displacement, loss of life, and economic downturns, all of which impede efforts to foster inclusive political processes.

In response, civil society organisations and religious leaders have attempted reconciliation initiatives. These efforts aim to promote dialogue and understanding between Christian and Muslim communities, mitigating tensions and fostering peaceful coexistence (Cordelia Moses, Oral Interview). However, challenges persist due to deep-seated mistrust and the politicisation of religious identities.

Economic disparities also contribute to inter-religious tensions. Socio-economic inequalities can be exacerbated by political decisions perceived as favoring one religious group over another, further alienating marginalised communities (Cordelia Moses, Oral Interview). This economic dimension underscores the interconnectedness of social, economic, and political factors in perpetuating inter-religious tensions and hindering Christian participation in Taraba State politics.

Socio-Political Pressures

Taraba State, located in Nigeria, exhibits a diverse religious landscape, primarily divided between Christians and Muslims. This diversity often translates into complex inter-religious dynamics that influence political participation and governance. Historically, Taraba State has experienced significant inter-religious tensions rooted in demographic shifts and historical grievances. Christians and Muslims constitute the major religious groups, each seeking representation and influence in political decision-making processes (Tongah Litus, Oral Interview). The demographic distribution and historical interactions between these groups have shaped their political engagements and perceptions of power and influence.

The allocation of political power in Taraba State often exacerbates inter-religious tensions. Political offices and electoral processes are frequently contested along religious lines, leading to perceptions of marginalisation and exclusion among minority religious groups, including Christians. For instance, disputes over electoral outcomes have historically polarized Christian and Muslim communities, impacting their respective political engagements and representation (Geoffrey Gashi, Oral Interview).

Instances of electoral violence in Taraba State have been linked to religious identity politics. During elections, violence and intimidation tactics have targeted communities perceived to support candidates based on religious affiliations (Victor Elkanah, Oral Interview). Such incidents highlight the challenges Christians face in participating in politics without fear of reprisal or marginalisation based on their religious identity.

The formulation of policies in Taraba State often reflects religious influences, which can either facilitate or hinder Christian participation in politics. Islamic principles, at times, influence



legislative decisions and policy implementations that may not align with Christian beliefs (Uzzaja Dauda, Oral Interview). This dynamic presents a significant challenge for Christians seeking to engage politically while upholding their religious convictions. Christian organisations and leaders advocate for religious freedom and tolerance as crucial components of navigating inter-religious tensions in Taraba State (Anthony Odey, Oral Interview). Advocacy efforts aim to safeguard religious rights and promote peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities. However, challenges persist in translating advocacy into tangible political outcomes that benefit Christian communities.

Recommendations

The study indicates that Christian politicians in Taraba State encounter substantial challenges, such as systemic biases, moral compromise, inter-religious tensions, and allegations of corruption, which impede their effective participation in politics. To address these issues, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. The Taraba State Christian Association and faith-based advocacy groups should bring up initiatives that prioritize and align with Christian ethics, emphasizing integrity and transparency in politics to restore public trust in Christian leaders.
- ii. The Taraba State Ministry of Education and Christian educational institutions should develop and organize educational programs that equip Christian politicians and community members with knowledge about ethical governance and political responsibilities to foster accountability.
- iii. The Taraba State Government and anti-corruption agencies such as the ICPC should advocate for stronger legal frameworks and regulatory oversight to combat corruption effectively and ensure that ethical standards are upheld in political practices.
- iv. The Taraba State Interfaith Council and local religious leaders should facilitate interfaith dialogues to mitigate religious tensions, promote mutual understanding, and foster collaborative efforts among different religious groups in the political arena.
- v. Community development organizations and local government councils should promote grassroots mobilization to actively involve Christian communities in the political process, ensuring their voices are heard and represented in governance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that Christian politicians in Taraba State encounter significant challenges including systemic biases, moral compromises, inter-religious tensions, and allegations of corruption that hinder their effective participation in the political landscape. The study highlights the need for targeted initiatives to promote ethical leadership, enhance educational programs on governance, strengthen legal frameworks, encourage interfaith dialogue, and increase community engagement. Addressing these areas is crucial for restoring public trust, ensuring accountability, and fostering a more inclusive and ethical political environment. By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to mitigate the obstacles faced by Christian politicians and support a more transparent and effective governance system in Taraba State.



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List of Informants

SN	Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Location	Date
1.	James Yaro	63	Male	Farmer	Kwaji	11/04/2024
2.	Geoffrey Gashi	55	Male	Priest	Donga	13/04/2024
3.	Istifanus Rokoba	59	Male	Businessman	Jalingo	24/05/2024
4.	Anthony Odey	40	Male	Technician	Sunkani	18/06/2024
5.	Lydia Andrew	34	Female	Electrician	Baisa	19/05/2024
6.	Saul John	46	Male	Pastor	Mayo-Gwoi	22/05/2024
7.	Karbon Philip Ben	52	Male	Lecturer	Gembu	13/05//2024
8.	Ashumate Repas	30	Female	Trader	Wukari	10/05/2024
9.	Keneth Sunday	40	Male	Engineer	Donga	07/09/2024
10.	Geoffrey Shugabba	56	Male	Accountant	Bali	08/06/2024
11.	Victor Elkanah	40	Male	Journalist	Zing	13/06/2024
12.	Uzzaja Dauda	53	Male	Pastor	Kurmi	18/06/2024
13.	Beauty Sale	35	Female	Hairdresser	Kunini	08/05/2024
14.	Tongah Litus	48	Male	Teacher	Pantisawa	11/06/2024
15.	John Mamman	50	Male	Farmer	Gassol	11/05/2024
16.	Rebecca Anthony	55	Female	Teacher	Gassol	13/06/2024
17.	Gloria Gedda	60	Female	Retired Teacher	Bali	11/06/2024
18.	Cordelia Moses	42	Female	Nurse	Kpanti-Sawa	12/05/2024