

**RELIGION AND VOTER TURNOUT IN THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
IN NIGERIA**

BY

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FACULTY OF SCIENCES,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

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**AN ORIGINAL RESEARCH ESSAY (PROJECT) SUBMITTED TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was written and completed by TIMI GBAMOWEI ISRAEL with the matriculation number **SSC2105712**, a student of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social sciences, University of Benin. This project represents an original piece of research carried out by the student under my supervision. It is submitted Impartial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Science [B.Sc.) degree in Political Science.

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Date:_____

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(Head of department)

Date:_____

DEDICATION

This project is lovingly dedicated to God, whose guidance, grace, and unfailing strength made every step of this journey possible. I also dedicate this work to my family, whose constant support, prayers, and encouragement have been the backbone of my academic pursuit. Their faith in me through every late night, every challenge, and every breakthrough has been my greatest source of inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of religion in shaping voter turnout during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, with a particular focus on how religious institutions, faith leaders, and religious identities influenced political participation. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined survey data from respondents with in-depth interviews from selected religious leaders, the research explored four key areas: religious mobilization efforts, turnout patterns in Christian and Muslim communities, the influence of religious affiliation on participation, and voters' perceptions of religion's role in electoral decision-making.

The findings reveal that religion served as both a motivational and moral force in the electoral process. The quantitative results showed that a significant proportion of voters believed religious institutions shaped their willingness to vote and influenced how they assessed candidates' credibility. In-depth interviews with religious leaders also buttressed this fact, especially in communities where political apathy had been historically high. While some religious leaders actively encouraged civic participation, many expressed a commitment to political neutrality, highlighting the tension between moral guidance and partisan restraint.

The study concludes that religion remains a powerful social force in Nigeria, capable of encouraging voter participation, shaping political judgement, and reinforcing collective identity. However, it also cautions that the intersection of faith and politics must be managed with care to avoid polarization. The research recommends greater use of religious spaces for civic education, increased collaboration between faith groups and civic organizations, and further scholarly exploration of regional variations in religious political engagement. This work contributes to ongoing debates on democracy, identity, and political participation in multi-religious societies.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Religion has always been a part of man's existence for as he could remember; a phenomenon that hardly can be separated from him. In Nigeria, a country characterized by its rich cultural diversity, religion holds considerable influence over the socio-political landscape. With Christianity and Islam as the two dominant religions, alongside traditional Africa beliefs, religious affiliations have often shaped political identities, forged alliances and impacted voting patterns. The interplay between religion and politics has significantly influenced voter turnout, particularly in presidential elections, where candidates frequently leverage religious sentiments to garner support from the electorate.

While regionalism and ethnicity initially dominated the electoral landscape in the country's early years, religion gradually asserted its influence, especially within the frameworks of political party compositions. In the first republic (1963-1966), we witnessed the emergence of parties like the Northern people's Congress (NPC), which primarily represented the Muslim population in the North, and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) which carted to the predominantly Christian Igbo population in the east. The Action Group (AG) party controlled the Western Region, with most of its support coming from the Yoruba people. Although many AG leaders and supporters were Christian, the party's power was rooted in regional and ethnic ties rather than religion. This alignment of political parties with religious and ethnic identities laid the foundation for ongoing debates about the role of religion in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria (Umar, 2003)

As the country transitions through different republics the relationship between religion and politics continued to evolve, with scholars examining the extent to which religious factors influence political alliances and voting patterns. At the second (1979-1983) and the third republics(1993-1999), the influence of religion on voters turnout was reassessed especially in the third republic when the presidential candidates of the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) emerged as the primary candidates coming from two region and religious background (Oju 2003).

But as Nigeria entered its fourth republic in 1999, the political scene changed once again. While the election of Olusegun Obasanjo was not heavily influenced by religion, subsequent elections in 2011, 2015 and 2019 saw an upsurge of religious influence. The post election violence in 2011 (Muslim targeting the Christians living in the north) particularly highlighted the growing Impact of religion on voters behaviour, leading to heightened tensions ad conflicts (Human Right Watch 78). This distressing situation emphasized the increasing role of religious identities in Nigeria's political discourse and the need to address religious divisions to promote peaceful coexistence and maintain the stability of the country's democratic processes. (OJo, 2010)

The average Nigerians view political activities and processes through the politics that our politicians play to garner votes and gain advantage over their opponents. This is lens of religion. The 2023 Nigerian presidential election highlighted the role and impact of religion in politics, particularly with the All Progressives Congress (APC) presenting a same-faith ticket. The APC's decision sparked outrage among the Christian community, as religious leaders and institutions condemned the move, perceiving it as a threat to Nigeria's religious harmony. This controversy underscored the significance of religious

sensitivity in the country's political landscape and the potential consequences of neglecting such sensitivities during the candidate selection process. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) vehemently opposed the All Progressives Congress (APC) same-faith ticket, arguing that it disregarded Nigeria's religious diversity and was an affront to the Christian community. The APC's hiring of alleged fake bishops for the unveiling of the vice-presidential candidate further created tensions, as did their efforts to downplay religion's significance in politics. Many Christians, including some within the APC, expressed strong opposition to the same-faith ticket, perceiving it as an insult to their faith. As a result, the APC attempted to balance its campaign by emphasizing religious harmony, a move seen as essential to address the concerns of Nigerian Christians.

The 2023 presidential election witnessed the utilization of religious affiliations to mobilize voters, notably the adoption of Muslim-Muslim tickets by the APC. This strategy aimed to align with religious inclinations, contrasting with other candidates who chose running mates from different religious backgrounds to demonstrate inclusivity. Across the country, faith and identity became powerful forces shaping political campaigns, voter allegiances and even public trust in the electoral elects. Mosques and churches weren't just places of worship they turned into spaces for political discussions, with religious leaders often influencing how their congregations viewed the candidates. Meanwhile, ethnic loyalties further complicated the landscape, as voters weighed the regional representation alongside policy promises. Against this charged backdrop, the election wasn't just a contest between political parties; it was a test of Nigeria's unity and its ability to navigate the balance between faith, ethnicity and democracy.

This study examines the influence of religion on electoral outcomes, the role of religious leaders to sway voters based on religious inclinations. Drawing on the pluralist theory of democracy, the research explores how societal pluralism is leveraged to mobilize voters during political events. By examining the ways in which religious affiliations, messages and institutions impacted electoral participation in various regions of the country, this study seeks to shed light on the complex interplay between religion and politics in Nigeria.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nigeria has always been a multi-ethnic and multi-religious State and the diverse ethno-religious sentiments has always reflected in her elections. However in the 2015 elections, the effect was more obvious. The results of the 2015 general elections clearly revealed the preponderance of ethno-religious sentiments as determinants of voting behaviour and political participation across the country.

The interplay between religion and politics continues to shape Nigeria's electoral landscape in complex and often contentious ways, and the 2023 presidential election offers a particularly compelling moment for deeper examination. Despite constitutional provisions establishing Nigeria as a secular state, religious affiliations and sentiment continue to play a decisive role on voter's mobilization, political alignment, and electoral outcomes. The 2023 presidential election, conducted against a back drop of intense ethno-religious division, economic uncertainty, and institutional distrust raised critical questions about how faith base factors influenced voter's participation and democratic legitimacy.

Several problematic trends emerged during this election: First, political campaigns increasingly employed religious rhetoric with candidates and their supporters framing electoral choices in moral and theological terms. Second, prominent religious leaders and institutions openly endorsed candidates, effectively transforming places of worship into political arenas. Third voters turnout patterns reviews stack disparities between regions with different religious demographics, suggesting that faith identity may have either motivated or discouraged electoral participation depending on contextual factors.

Furthermore, the 2023 election occurred amidst growing skepticism about the independence of electoral institution with some religious groups openly questioning the fairness of the process even before voting commence. This raises additional concerns about how religious narrative may contribute to either strengthen or weakening public confidence in democratic institution.

This study therefore seeks to critically examine the complex relationship between religious factors and voters turn out in Nigeria 2023 presidential election, with particular attention to how faith-based mobilization influenced both participation rate and the overall qualities of the democratic process. The findings will contribute to ongoing discussions about managing religious diversity in electoral policy and strengthening issues-based [rather than identity-based] political engagement in Africa's largest democracy.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to investigate the role of religion in influencing voters turnout in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.

The specific objectives are to:

1. To examine how religion and its institutions impact voters mobilization and turnout
2. To find out the voter turnout rate in Muslim and Christian dominated regions,
3. To examine the relationship between religion affiliation and voters turnout,
4. To find out the perception of voters regarding the influence of religion on their electoral choices in 2023.

These objectives will help structure my research, ensuring a focused analysis of the intersection between the religion and electoral participation in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are questions the research seeks to answer;

1. How did religion and its institutions influence voters turnout in 2023 presidential election?
2. What was the voters turnout rates in predominantly Muslim and Christian regions during the 2023 presidential election?
3. What is the relationship between religion affiliation and voters turnout?
4. What was the perception of voters regarding the influence of religion on their electoral choices in 2023?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The influence of religion in politics is a critical area of study because it helps to understand the complex relationship between religion and the electorates especially as it

pertains to the 2023 presidential election of Nigeria. There are also major beneficiaries this paper through its practical and theoretical implication and findings will be of great significance to. This study therefore will be significant in the following ways

First, This study will be of immense benefits to other researchers who intend to know more on this study . This research provides insights into how religion influenced voter participation in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. By analyzing faith-based voting patterns, the study helps understand whether religious identity played a decisive role in turnout.

Secondly, the findings will be useful for political analysts, election observers, and policymakers in assessing the impact of religion on Nigeria's democracy. Additionally, it contributes to broader discussions on how faith shapes political behavior in multi-religious societies.

Third, This research will help religious leaders understand the role they have to play and the consequences of their spoken words, actions or their support to a particular candidate can have on their members.

Lastly, this study will be of immense benefit to other researchers who intend to know more on this study and can also be used by non-researchers to build more on their research work. This study contributes to knowledge and will serve as guide for other studies.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research investigates how religion shaped voter participation in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, focusing on patterns across the country's six geopolitical zones with

particular attention to states with strong religious identities. The study examines participation trends among Nigeria's major faith groups, including denominational variations within Christianity and Islam, while exploring the influence of religious leaders, institutions, and faith-based mobilization efforts. It analyzes whether religious identity emerged as a more significant factor than ethnicity or socioeconomic status in driving voter turnout, and how interfaith dynamics may have impacted electoral participation. The research concentrates specifically on the 2023 presidential election cycle, from the campaign period through the immediate post-election phase, while excluding other electoral contests, broader assessments of election administration, or theological discussions beyond their direct relevance to voting behavior.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study of 2023 presidential election of Nigeria as a relationship between religion and voters turnout is not without some limitations. As a student researcher there is a limited amount of time and resources while attempting to review the extensive amount of literature available for conducting this research. Other limitations includes;

- **Financial constraints:** insufficient funds tends to impede the efficiency of the research in sourcing for the relevant materials, literature or information and in the process of data collection (Internet, questionnaires)
- **Time constraints:** The researcher, while undertaking this study concurrently with other academic tasks, might face constraints on the time available to focus solely on the research. This situation could potentially limit the researcher's capacity to fully engage in the research process, possibly affecting the depth and quality of the study.

- **Data limitations:** Also, the researcher is limited to the evidence given by the participants in the research which simultaneously limits how much the researcher can check if the information is reliable or totally accurate.

1.8 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Religion: Religion is the belief in and reverence for a supernatural power recognized as the creator and the governor of the universe. Max Weber (1905) used a substantive definition of religion, seeing it as a belief in a supernatural power that is unable to be scientifically explained. In other words, whether a belief can be considered religious or not depends on the substance of what is believed. Religion requires a belief in God or gods, or other supernatural beliefs.

Voters turnout: Voter turnout represents the proportion of eligible voters who participate in an election by actively casting their votes. It is calculated as a percentage and serves as a key indicator of electoral participation and engagement among the eligible voting population.

Election: election can be defined as the act or process of electing. It is the means whereby a candidate is selected or voted in for a particular position

1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The first chapter introduces the study with a background overview, identifies the research problem, and outlines the research objectives and questions. It also discusses the significance, scope, and limitations of the research, clarifies key concepts, and provides a chapter outline. Chapter two offers an in-depth review of relevant literature and establishes the theoretical framework. Chapter three details the research methodology

employed. Chapter four presents the collected data and discusses the research findings. Finally, chapter five summarizes the study, provides recommendations, highlights the research's contributions to existing literature, and draws conclusions based on the results.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Intersection of faith and political engagement has historically been a defining characteristic of Nigeria's electoral environment, acting as both a source of mobilization and a catalyst for significant conflict. The presidential election held in February 2023 provided a particularly compelling example of this dynamic. The ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) made headlines with its decision to field a same-faith ticket, nominating Muslim candidates Bola Ahmed Tinubu for president and Kashim Shettima for vice president. This decision sparked a significant national discussion regarding religious representation and marginalization. This debate emerged against a backdrop of increased economic hardship, widespread insecurity, and an exceptional mobilization of youth support for a third-party candidate, Peter Obi from the Labour Party. This literature review examines the complex and often contradictory role that religion played in shaping

voter turnout during this crucial election. It argues that while religious sentiment was significantly amplified as a campaign issue and a predictor of vote choice, its actual impact on motivating citizens to go to the polls was ultimately mediated, and in many cases overshadowed, by other critical factors. By synthesizing existing analyses, observer reports, and theoretical frameworks on identity politics, this review will analyze how the 2023 election both confirmed the lasting significance of religion in Nigerian politics while also exposing its limitations as a sole motivator for voter turnout. This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on religion and electoral participation, with particular focus on Nigeria and the 2023 presidential election.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

2.2.1 RELIGION

Etymologically, the term *religion* is derived from three Latin words: **ligare**, meaning “to bind”; **relegere**, meaning “to unite or ”; and **religio**, which denotes “a relationship.” From its etymological roots, religion can be understood as a system of beliefs, values, and practices that binds individuals to a divine or higher power, connects them through shared worship and moral order, and fosters a relationship with the sacred or spiritual realm. Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (Emile Durkheim, 1912).

According to Makozi (1988) , man as an individual is subject to a God who has created him. For him, the content of religion shapes the individual’s life in society, regulates his

relationship with other human beings and is at the root of political order for the fact that it gives legitimacy to civil law and forms of sovereignty. Onebunne (2018) explains that religion encompasses both the **ordinary (profane)** and the **supernatural** aspects of life. He defines it as the diverse symbolic ways through which individuals express their proper response to what they consciously recognize as possessing **ultimate or infinite value** to them drawing attention to its subjective and value-oriented dimension. Thus, while definitions vary, they all recognize religion as a structured human response to the transcendent, expressed through belief, practice, and moral commitment.

Religion is built on a shared system of beliefs ideas about the divine, the purpose of life, and the destiny of humanity. Edward B. Tylor (1871) described religion as beginning with belief in “spiritual beings,” highlighting it as one of humanity’s earliest and most universal ways of responding to the unknown. Émile Durkheim (1915) similarly saw religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things,” bringing people together and creating a moral community.

These beliefs are lived and reinforced through rituals, from prayers and fasting to ceremonies and festivals. Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasized that religion functions as a “system of symbols” that shapes how people see the world and motivates them to act in certain ways. Rituals allow abstract ideas to become tangible experiences, helping believers connect with their faith and integrate it into everyday life.

Embedded within religious life is a moral framework that guides ethical behavior and social responsibility. Max Weber (1963) noted that religions offer “a comprehensive view of life” that influences work ethic, personal conduct, and community discipline. In this

way, religion helps individuals navigate life while also shaping the broader moral landscape of society.

Religion is also sustained within communities, organized through churches, mosques, shrines, and other institutions where leaders provide guidance and help maintain social order. Ninian Smart (1996) highlighted that institutional structure is a key dimension of religion, showing how beliefs are preserved and transmitted through communal practice and organized tradition.

In Nigeria, these characteristics go beyond private faith to deeply influence social and political life. Religion shapes collective identity, informs family and community norms, and often guides political choices. As Onebunne (2018) observes, religion in Nigeria encompasses both the profane and the supernatural, acting as a “symbolic expression of people’s response to what they affirm as having ultimate value.” Through its intertwined elements of belief, ritual, morality, and community, religion remains a powerful force in the country’s social cohesion, political engagement, and cultural expression.

Religion can be understood through several interconnected dimensions that reflect its depth and complexity. According to Ninian Smart (1996), religion encompasses multiple aspects that together shape human spiritual life. The ideological dimension involves the doctrines, beliefs, and teachings that define a faith’s worldview and moral principles. The ritual dimension includes worship practices, ceremonies, and festivals through which believers express devotion and reinforce communal identity. The experiential dimension relates to individuals’ personal encounters with the divine such as prayer, meditation, or feelings of spiritual transformation which nurture faith and emotional connection. Finally,

the social or institutional dimension captures the organized structures of religion, including leadership, religious institutions, and communal relationships that sustain belief and transmit values across generations. Together, these dimensions demonstrate that religion is not only a system of belief but also a lived and shared experience that integrates thought, practice, emotion, and community.

2.2.2 Understanding Religion In Nigeria

Religion holds a deep and enduring place in Nigeria's identity as a nation. It is not just a matter of faith but a way of life that shapes how people think, act, and relate to one another. Nigeria is often described as one of the most religiously diverse countries in Africa, with Islam dominant in the northern region, Christianity prevalent in the south, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) still practiced widely across various ethnic groups and rural communities (Paden 2022). This diversity gives Nigeria much of its cultural beauty reflected in its art, music, festivals, and moral values. Yet, it also serves as a potential source of division, especially when religious affiliation overlaps with ethnicity and regional identity. In such cases, what should be a source of unity and shared heritage can sometimes fuel misunderstanding and conflict.

In Nigeria, churches, mosques, and traditional religious centers do much more than guide people spiritually; they also play vital social and political roles. They serve as places where moral values are taught, communities are supported, and citizens are made aware of political issues. Religious leaders like pastors, imams, and traditional priests hold great moral influence and often shape how people think about national matters. Through their sermons, public comments, and media presence, they can sway public opinion and even

affect voter turnout during elections. As Adesoji and Alao (2020) observe, religious gatherings often double as spaces for civic engagement, community mobilization, and protest, showing how closely faith is tied to governance and the pursuit of social justice in Nigeria.

In addition, religion in Nigeria plays an important part in shaping how people view leadership and legitimacy. Many citizens don't just judge politicians by their abilities or policies, but also by how religious they appear and how well they reflect shared faith-based values (Adeniran, 2023). This has made religion deeply intertwined with politics, as spiritual identity often becomes a key measure of whether a leader is seen as trustworthy or deserving of power.

As a result, religion in Nigeria goes far beyond personal faith it shapes public conversations, affects how people vote, and influences how citizens view leadership, morality, and justice. It can serve as a powerful source of unity and shared identity, but it can also become a cause of division, depending on how it is used. To truly understand voter behavior, political alliances, and the workings of Nigeria's democracy, one must first understand the powerful role religion plays in the country's social and political life.

2.2.3 Religion And The Society

Religion stands as one of the most powerful forces shaping human life and society. It gives people a sense of meaning, moral direction, and belonging that influences how they think, act, and relate to others. In Nigeria, religion is not just a private matter of faith; it is woven into the very fabric of daily life. It shapes social values, informs political attitudes,

and influences how communities organize themselves. Through its many roles, religion helps people find moral guidance, maintain social harmony, and engage actively in the political life of the nation.

One of the most important roles religion plays in society is offering moral and ethical guidance. Through its teachings whether from the Bible, the Qur'an, or traditional belief systems religion helps people understand what is right and wrong and encourages them to live responsibly within their communities. In Nigeria, where social and political challenges often test moral boundaries, religious values remain a key source of discipline, honesty, and compassion. Many people look to their faith and religious leaders for direction when navigating complex issues in everyday life. In this way, religion continues to shape not only personal character but also the moral conscience of society as a whole.

Religion also plays a powerful role in bringing people together and maintaining social order. By promoting shared beliefs and practices, it helps individuals feel connected to something larger than themselves and encourages them to live peacefully with others. In Nigeria, religious gatherings such as Sunday worship, Friday prayers, or traditional festivals do more than express faith they strengthen the bonds within families and communities. National celebrations like Eid-el-Fitr and Christmas often unite people across ethnic and regional lines, creating a sense of togetherness that transcends social differences. Through these shared experiences, religion fosters cooperation, understanding, and mutual respect, helping to hold society together even in times of tension or uncertainty.

Religion also plays a vital part in caring for people's social and material needs. In many Nigerian communities, churches, mosques, and traditional religious groups are often the first to offer help when people face hardship. They run schools, hospitals, and charity programs that support the poor, the sick, and the displaced. When government institutions fall short, these religious bodies step in to fill the gap, providing hope and relief to those who might otherwise be forgotten. Beyond charity, they also inspire values of kindness and service, encouraging believers to look beyond themselves and contribute to the wellbeing of others. Through these efforts, religion strengthens the social fabric and reminds citizens that compassion and solidarity are essential for a just and peaceful society.

However, religion's influence is not always positive. When faith is misunderstood or used for personal gain, it can easily become a source of tension and division. Nigeria's history shows moments when religious identity has been used to justify discrimination or even violence, deepening mistrust between communities that once lived peacefully together. At times, political leaders exploit religious sentiments to win support, presenting themselves as defenders of a particular faith rather than as representatives of all citizens. This misuse of religion often weakens national unity and shifts attention away from the real issues of governance and development. When religion is reduced to a political tool, it loses its moral power and risks becoming a source of conflict instead of peace.

2.2.4 Relevance Of Religion To Political Behaviour

Religion continues to shape the way Nigerians think about politics, participate in civic life, and make choices at the polls. Its influence goes beyond personal faith it reaches into the collective attitudes and behaviours of communities across the country. In a society where religion is deeply woven into daily living, people often draw on their faith to make sense of justice, fairness, and leadership. For many Nigerians, religion provides the moral direction through which they judge political actors and public affairs. As a result, religion is not just a matter of private belief; it has grown into a powerful social and political force that shapes how citizens understand governance and make decisions during elections.

At the heart of religion's relevance to political behaviour is its ability to provide moral and ethical frameworks that influence how people view political authority. Many Nigerians approach politics through a moral lens, evaluating leaders based on perceived integrity, honesty, and godliness. Religious teachings often emphasize righteousness, fairness, and service to humanity, values that voters expect to see reflected in political candidates. As Adeniran (2023) observes, voters are more likely to trust and support politicians who appear to embody their faith's moral values or who are endorsed by respected religious figures. This shows how religion not only shapes political preference but also affects perceptions of legitimacy and leadership credibility.

Religious leaders and institutions also play a crucial role in shaping how Nigerians think about politics and their place in society. Churches, mosques, and other faith-based spaces often go beyond spiritual teaching, they become arenas where issues of governance, corruption, and moral responsibility are openly discussed. During sermons, prayer meetings, or community gatherings, clerics frequently remind their followers of the importance of voting, standing up against injustice, and supporting leaders who uphold

moral values. These interactions subtly shape political awareness and inspire participation. As Adesoji and Alao (2020) observe, religious organizations in Nigeria have long been central to mobilizing citizens, especially during election periods, turning faith communities into vital engines of civic engagement.

The Impact of religion on political behaviour in Nigeria became especially visible during the 2023 presidential election, which once again revealed how deeply faith and politics are intertwined. The introduction of a Muslim–Muslim ticket reignited national debates and split opinions across religious and regional lines (Akinyetun 2023). In many churches and mosques, clerics discussed the issue openly, framing it as a question of fairness, representation, and the need to maintain national balance. These conversations went beyond the pulpit ; they shaped voter turnout, regional voting patterns, and public perceptions of political legitimacy. This shows that political choices in Nigeria are often influenced as much by moral and spiritual convictions as by party manifestos or policy positions.

Beyond religious sermons, faith-based organizations continue to wield significant influence over civic life. Their wide networks, community structures, and moral credibility give them a level of social reach unmatched by most political institutions. Campaigns that earn religious endorsement often enjoy stronger grassroots support because religion offers not only a sense of identity but also emotional motivation. For many Nigerians, voting becomes more than a civic responsibility; it becomes a sacred duty, a way to defend moral values and affirm their faith in the nation’s future.

Still, the influence of religion on political behaviour is not without its challenges. While it can promote integrity, justice, and participation, it can also heighten divisions when political competition takes on a religious tone. When voters make choices based solely on shared faith rather than competence or policy, religion risks becoming a source of tension rather than unity (Falola 2021).

Even so, religion remains one of the most powerful forces shaping Nigeria's democracy. It influences how citizens define good leadership, how they relate to authority, and how they participate in the political process. Any meaningful study of Nigeria's electoral behaviour particularly the 2023 presidential election must therefore recognize religion not only as a matter of belief, but as a living social institution that shapes collective identity, political participation, and the moral tone of public life.

2.3 VOTERS TURNOUT

Voter turnout represents one of the most important indicators of democratic participation and civic engagement. It simply refers to the proportion of eligible or registered citizens who actually cast their votes during an election. In other words, it measures the extent to which citizens exercise their constitutional right to choose their leaders. According to Norris (2004), voter turnout "is the extent to which citizens exercise their right to vote, expressed as a percentage of those entitled to participate." This means that turnout reflects not only participation in elections but also the degree of confidence citizens have in the democratic process.

In democratic theory, voter turnout is often seen as a reflection of political legitimacy and public trust. When a large number of citizens participate in elections, it signals confidence in the government and faith in the ability of democratic institutions to bring about meaningful change. On the other hand, low voter turnout tends to reveal widespread political apathy, dissatisfaction, or a loss of faith in the system. As Lijphart (1997) observes, unequal levels of participation can weaken democracy by allowing decisions to represent only a small and often privileged segment of society.

In Nigeria, voter turnout offers a revealing picture of the nation's democratic vitality. It shows how aware and involved citizens are in political life while also drawing attention to challenges such as insecurity, electoral violence, corruption, and administrative inefficiencies that discourage participation. Therefore, voter turnout goes beyond mere statistics. It embodies the relationship between citizens and their government, the extent of political trust within society, and the collective belief in the power of the ballot to shape governance and national development.

2.3.1 Theoretical Perspectives On Voter Turnout

Several theoretical frameworks help explain why citizens vote or abstain:

1. Rational Choice Theory (Downs 1957)

Rational Choice Theory, developed by Anthony Downs in his classic work *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), provides an economic perspective on political behavior. It assumes that individuals are rational actors who make decisions based on self-interest and

cost–benefit calculations. In the context of voting, the theory suggests that a person will choose to vote if the expected benefits of doing so outweigh the associated costs.

The “benefits” In this case refer to the satisfaction or utility a voter derives from influencing political outcomes or supporting a preferred candidate or policy. The “costs,” on the other hand, include the time, effort, and resources spent on becoming informed, registering, and physically going to vote. Thus, a rational individual participates in an election only when the perceived benefits (B) multiplied by the probability (P) that their vote will affect the outcome exceed the costs (C) of voting; a relationship often represented by the formula:

$$R = (P \times B) - C,$$

Where R is the net reward from voting (Downs 1957).

However, in large-scale elections such as Nigeria’s presidential contests, the probability (P) that a single vote will determine the outcome is extremely small. Rationally, therefore, most individuals might choose not to vote, since the costs of voting usually outweigh the infinitesimal chance of influencing the result. This paradox that people still vote despite low chances of affecting outcomes is known as the paradox of voting.

To address this, later scholars (such as Riker and Ordeshook 1968) expanded Downs’s model by adding a new variable: D, representing the sense of civic duty, satisfaction, or moral fulfillment derived from participating in democracy. The updated formula becomes:

$$R = (P \times B) - C + D,$$

Suggesting that many people vote not purely for instrumental reasons, but also because they value the act of voting itself as a civic responsibility.

In Nigeria, Rational Choice Theory helps explain both participation and apathy. Citizens who believe their votes can lead to positive change or benefit their communities may be motivated to vote despite systemic challenges. Conversely, those who perceive elections as predetermined, corrupt, or meaningless often abstain, viewing the costs as too high relative to the expected benefits. This cost–benefit logic underlies much of the voter behavior observed in the 2023 presidential election, where widespread disillusionment and distrust in political elites contributed to historically low turnout.

2. Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995)

The Civic Voluntarism Model, developed by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), provides a sociological framework for understanding why some citizens participate in elections while others abstain. Unlike the purely economic reasoning of the Rational Choice Theory, this model argues that participation is largely shaped by individual resources, psychological engagement, and mobilizing networks. In essence, people often fail to vote not because they are uninterested, but because they lack the ability, motivation, or opportunity to do so.

First, the model identifies resources such as time, money, education, and civic skills as essential prerequisites for political participation. Individuals with greater resources are more likely to understand political issues, navigate electoral processes, and bear the

minor costs of participation. In contrast, those who struggle with poverty, unemployment, or low literacy often find it difficult to engage actively in the political sphere. In the Nigerian context, limited access to education and economic hardship have been key barriers to voter turnout, as many citizens prioritize daily survival over electoral engagement.

Second, psychological engagement refers to the internal motivation that drives individuals to participate. This includes political interest, a sense of civic duty, and political efficacy the belief that one's vote can make a difference. Citizens who feel alienated or distrustful of political institutions are less inclined to vote. In the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, for instance, widespread disillusionment with political elites and doubts about electoral transparency eroded citizens' sense of efficacy, contributing to the country's historically low turnout.

Third, the model highlights the role of mobilizing networks, such as religious groups, social associations, and community organizations, in encouraging participation. Individuals are more likely to vote when they are invited, persuaded, or reminded by trusted figures within their networks. In Nigeria, churches, mosques, and community leaders have played significant roles in mobilizing voters, often framing participation as both a moral and civic responsibility. However, when such networks remain passive or politically neutral, voter participation tends to decline.

Ultimately, the Civic Voluntarism Model suggests that political participation is not solely a matter of personal choice; it depends on whether individuals can, want to, and are asked to participate. Applied to Nigeria, it underscores the importance of strengthening civic

education, improving socioeconomic conditions, and leveraging community institutions especially religious organizations to foster greater electoral engagement and enhance democratic participation.

3. Psychological and Social Identity Theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

The Psychological and Social Identity Theories, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), provide a deeper understanding of the emotional and social dimensions of political behavior. Unlike rationalist approaches that view voting as a purely self-interested or cost–benefit decision, these theories highlight the role of group identity, emotions, and belonging in shaping voter turnout.

According to Tajfel and Turner, individuals derive a sense of self from the social groups to which they belong such as religious, ethnic, or political communities. These affiliations create strong emotional bonds that influence attitudes and behavior. Consequently, voting is not only an act of political choice but also an expression of identity and loyalty. People often vote to affirm their group membership, to defend shared values, or to reinforce a sense of solidarity within their community.

In many societies, including Nigeria, this dynamic is especially visible. Religious and ethnic affiliations strongly determine political alignment and voter mobilization. During the 2023 presidential election, for example, the debates surrounding the Muslim–Muslim ticket and Christian representation revealed how religious identity shaped voters’ perceptions, trust, and motivation to participate. Many citizens viewed voting not merely

as a political duty but as a moral or communal act; a way to protect the interests and visibility of their faith or ethnic group.

Thus, the Psychological and Social Identity Theories explain that voter turnout is influenced as much by emotional attachment and social belonging as by rational reasoning. Individuals are driven to vote not only to influence outcomes but also to express who they are and where they belong. In this sense, voter turnout becomes a reflection of both personal identity and collective consciousness within society.

4. Institutional Theory (Powell, 1986)

Institutional Theory, as advanced by G. Bingham Powell (1986), emphasizes the decisive role of political and electoral institutions in shaping voter turnout. Unlike psychological or individual-level explanations, this theory argues that participation is deeply influenced by the structure, rules, and credibility of the political system within which elections take place. Institutions such as electoral commissions, political parties, voting systems, and constitutional frameworks establish the context that either encourages or discourages citizens from participating in elections.

Powell (1986) maintains that when electoral institutions are transparent, efficient, and inclusive, citizens are more likely to view elections as meaningful, thereby increasing turnout. Conversely, when institutions are perceived as corrupt, biased, or inaccessible, voter confidence declines, leading to apathy and abstention. The theory also highlights how institutional design such as proportional representation versus majoritarian systems affects participation rates. For instance, countries with inclusive and competitive electoral

systems generally record higher turnout because citizens believe their votes count and that every group has a fair chance of representation.

Applied to Nigeria, Institutional Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the country's fluctuating voter turnout trends. The effectiveness of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the credibility of voter registration and verification systems, and the degree of electoral transparency all influence public willingness to vote. Challenges such as malfunctioning biometric machines, logistical failures, delayed polling, and perceptions of vote manipulation have historically undermined confidence in the electoral process. The 2023 presidential election, which recorded the lowest turnout in Nigeria's history, reflected growing disillusionment with institutional credibility.

2.3.2 OTHER DETERMINANTS OF VOTERS TURNOUT

Voter turnout is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, social, institutional, and logistical factors. While religion remains a significant influence on electoral participation in Nigeria, it is not the sole determinant. Apart from religion, several other factors play decisive roles in shaping whether citizens turn out to vote or withdraw from the electoral process. Understanding these determinants is crucial to explaining the persistent fluctuations in Nigeria's voter turnout, particularly the sharp decline witnessed in the 2023 presidential election. Understanding these determinants is central to explaining why citizens in some contexts actively participate in elections, while others remain disengaged. In Nigeria, these factors collectively

illuminate the persistent problem of declining voter participation, especially as witnessed in the 2023 presidential election.

Socio-economic conditions form one of the most consistent predictors of electoral participation. Citizens' education, income, and occupational status influence both their political awareness and their perceived ability to make meaningful contributions through voting. Individuals with higher education and stable income are generally more politically informed and confident, and are thus more likely to vote. Conversely, widespread poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy often breed apathy and alienation from the political process. In Nigeria, the 2023 election occurred amid severe economic hardship, fuel scarcity, inflation, and the controversial cash redesign policy, all of which imposed logistical and financial barriers to voter participation. Many low-income citizens, faced with the immediate struggle for survival, found little incentive to engage in what they perceived as an elite-driven process disconnected from their daily realities.

Political factors such as party competitiveness, campaign intensity, and candidate appeal also play a vital role in shaping turnout. Elections that are perceived as open and competitive tend to attract higher participation, as voters believe their choices can genuinely influence outcomes. Similarly, charismatic candidates and strong political mobilization often enhance civic engagement. However, in Nigeria, weak party ideology, internal crises, and the dominance of recycled political elites have eroded voter enthusiasm. The perception that electoral outcomes are predetermined or manipulated has further discouraged participation, as citizens increasingly question the integrity and impact of their votes. This growing cynicism was evident in 2023, when less than 30% of registered voters turned out despite a record number of registered citizens.

Social dynamics also affect voter engagement. Individuals embedded within strong social networks such as families, peer groups, and community associations—are more likely to participate, as voting becomes a social norm reinforced by group belonging and civic expectation. In contrast, social fragmentation, urban migration, and the breakdown of community ties often lead to political isolation. Insecurity has further weakened social mobilization in several parts of Nigeria. Regions plagued by insurgency, banditry, and communal violence witnessed significantly lower turnout, as fear of attack or intimidation deterred many voters from approaching polling stations.

Institutional credibility represents another critical determinant of turnout, particularly in developing democracies. Effective and transparent institutions foster trust, while inefficiency and corruption discourage participation. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) plays a central role in this regard, as its management of electoral logistics and technology directly affects public confidence. In 2023, reports of malfunctioning biometric accreditation machines (BVAS), late arrival of polling officials, and delays in result transmission on the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal undermined the perceived integrity of the process. Such institutional weaknesses have cumulative effects, reinforcing skepticism and reducing citizens' motivation to engage in future elections.

Technological and logistical challenges also influence turnout levels. While innovations such as electronic accreditation and online result transmission were intended to enhance credibility, their inconsistent implementation created frustration and mistrust. Many voters who arrived early at polling stations experienced long delays or incomplete processes, prompting some to leave without voting. These operational shortcomings,

combined with inadequate voter education, contributed significantly to the overall decline in turnout.

In summary, voter turnout in Nigeria is determined by the interaction of structural and behavioral variables that either empower or hinder participation. Socio-economic hardship, political disillusionment, social fragmentation, weak institutional credibility, and logistical inefficiencies have combined to suppress voter engagement, as reflected in the record-low participation of 2023. Unless these barriers are systematically addressed, Nigeria's democratic consolidation will remain constrained by the absence of broad-based citizen participation, which is the cornerstone of legitimate and representative governance.

2.3.3. VOTER TURNOUT TRENDS IN NIGERIA

Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, voter turnout has undergone significant fluctuations, reflecting both the country's evolving political culture and the persistent challenges facing its electoral process. The pattern of participation over successive election cycles reveals a consistent decline, signaling deep-seated issues of political trust, institutional credibility, and civic engagement.

The 1999 general election, which marked the end of decades of military dictatorship, recorded a voter turnout of approximately 52%. This relatively moderate participation reflected the optimism and enthusiasm of Nigerians eager to embrace democratic governance after years of authoritarian rule. By 2003, turnout had slightly increased to 57.5%, fueled by the continued public hope that democracy would bring economic

growth, social justice, and political stability. However, this optimism began to wane in the following years as citizens grew increasingly skeptical about the performance of elected leaders and the credibility of electoral institutions.

By 2011, voter turnout had dropped to 53.7%, and the decline became more pronounced in 2015 when participation fell to 43.6%. The 2015 election was widely praised for its peaceful transfer of power from an incumbent to an opposition candidate, yet the lower turnout underscored growing voter apathy and frustration with unfulfilled democratic promises. In 2019, the trend continued downward to about 35%, reflecting widespread disillusionment, logistical setbacks, and the perception that political outcomes were predetermined.

The 2023 presidential election represented the lowest voter turnout in Nigeria's democratic history, with only 26.72% of registered voters participating (Amata 2023). This figure is particularly striking considering that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported a record-breaking 93.4 million registered voters nationwide the highest in Africa's history. The paradox of rising voter registration alongside declining participation highlights a critical disconnect between formal democratic engagement and substantive political inclusion.

Several interrelated factors account for this downward trajectory. First, rising voter apathy remains a major concern. Many Nigerians, particularly the youth, have lost faith in the ability of elections to bring about meaningful change. Decades of poor governance, corruption, and electoral malpractice have eroded confidence in political institutions. Second, disenchantment with political elites has deepened, as citizens perceive the

political class as self-serving and detached from grassroots realities. The recycling of familiar faces in political contests, coupled with limited ideological differences between parties, has weakened motivation to vote.

Third, electoral violence and insecurity have been persistent deterrents. The prevalence of political thuggery, intimidation at polling stations, and regional insurgencies especially in parts of the North-East and South-East have discouraged citizens from turning out to vote. The fear of violence or disruption during elections creates a psychological barrier, particularly among women, youth, and rural voters.

Fourth, logistical and administrative failures continue to undermine turnout. Delays in the distribution of materials, malfunctioning of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and the late opening of polling units have discouraged even committed voters. The 2023 elections were notably affected by technological glitches and the delayed transmission of results via the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, leading many to question the transparency and credibility of the process.

Finally, socioeconomic hardship and policy disruptions further limited participation. The 2023 polls coincided with severe fuel shortages, inflation, and the naira redesign policy, which left many citizens unable to access transportation or basic necessities. These conditions created significant obstacles to physical participation, particularly for those in remote areas.

The consistent decline in voter turnout from 1999 to 2023 underscores a deepening crisis of democratic participation in Nigeria. While formal institutions and electoral

frameworks have evolved, citizen engagement has weakened due to a widening gap between political promises and lived realities. The trend suggests that democracy in Nigeria, though procedurally sustained, faces a crisis of legitimacy and inclusion. Unless urgent reforms are implemented to restore faith in electoral integrity, strengthen institutional efficiency, and improve citizens' socioeconomic conditions, voter turnout may continue to decline posing a serious challenge to Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

2.3.4. RELIGION AND VOTERS TURNOUT: THE INTERSECTION

In Nigeria, voter turnout cannot be fully understood without considering the pervasive role of religion. Religion is not merely a private matter of belief but a central social institution that shapes values, moral outlooks, and political choices. It influences how citizens perceive leadership, legitimacy, and civic duty, making it a vital lens through which political participation is interpreted. From independence to the present, religious leaders, organizations, and institutions have consistently shaped public behavior during elections, serving both as mobilizers of civic engagement and, at times, as agents of political withdrawal.

Religious institutions in Nigeria wield immense influence because they command trust and moral authority among the populace. Churches, mosques, and faith-based associations often serve as spaces for civic education and mobilization. Through sermons, statements, and community programs, religious leaders frame voting as both a moral and spiritual obligation—an act of stewardship in ensuring just and godly leadership. By linking political participation to divine accountability, they encourage their followers to see voting as a duty to God and society. This moral framing can significantly increase

participation, particularly when leaders urge their congregations to defend ethical governance through the ballot.

However, religion also contributes to disengagement when doctrines or teachings promote political fatalism the belief that leadership outcomes are predetermined by divine will. In such contexts, individuals may withdraw from the electoral process, believing that human effort cannot alter divine plans. Some religious sects discourage involvement in politics altogether, viewing it as corrupt or incompatible with spiritual life. Thus, religion operates as both a motivator and a deterrent, depending on interpretation and leadership stance.

The 2023 presidential election vividly demonstrated this complex interplay. The controversy surrounding the “same-faith ticket” of the All Progressives Congress (APC), in which both the presidential and vice-presidential candidates were Muslim, sparked heated national debate (CFR 2022). Many Christian groups perceived it as an attempt to sideline Christian representation in national leadership and responded with mobilization campaigns that framed voting as a form of spiritual protest. In contrast, many Muslim communities viewed the ticket as merit-driven, emphasizing competence over religious balance and rallying behind it in defense of perceived fairness. In both cases, religion shaped not only turnout but also the emotional and moral meaning attached to participation.

Beyond the same-faith debate, religious rhetoric during the election period significantly influenced perceptions of legitimacy, morality, and trust in candidates. Sermons, social media messages, and endorsements from prominent clerics helped voters interpret the

political landscape through spiritual categories of “good” and “evil,” “righteous” and “corrupt.” Consequently, religion became a key filter through which citizens evaluated the credibility of the electoral process and the worthiness of leadership aspirants. Yet this same moralization of politics also deepened polarization, as some Nigerians became disillusioned by the heavy religious undertones, leading to apathy or silent protest through non-participation.

Ultimately, the intersection between religion and voter turnout in Nigeria reveals a deeply intertwined relationship between faith and democracy. Religion can empower citizens to act on moral conviction and collective responsibility, but it can also entrench division or resignation when politicized. The 2023 presidential election underscores this duality: while religious institutions inspired many to participate as an act of faith, they also inadvertently discouraged others through sectarian rhetoric and fatalistic teachings. Understanding this complex role of religion is therefore crucial to explaining voter behavior and the broader democratic experience in Nigeria.

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding how religion shapes political behaviour requires drawing from several complementary theoretical perspectives. Scholars have proposed multiple frameworks to explain the link between faith and politics, each highlighting different pathways through which religion affects both voter turnout and electoral choice. In Nigeria where religion

intersects deeply with ethnicity, region, and political affiliation these theories help explain why religion remains a powerful force in shaping democratic participation.

2.4.1 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), provides a useful framework for understanding how religion influences political behaviour and voter turnout. The theory posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups such as religious, ethnic, or cultural communities. People tend to categorize themselves and others into social groups (“us” and “them”) and seek to maintain a positive social identity by favouring their own group (the in-group) while sometimes distrusting or opposing the out-group.

In political settings, these identity boundaries can translate into powerful collective actions. When political competition aligns with social or religious divisions, individuals are more likely to vote, mobilise, and even campaign on behalf of candidates who represent their group identity. In such contexts, voting becomes more than an act of civic participation, it becomes a defence of one’s community, faith, and collective dignity.

In Nigeria, religion serves as one of the most potent forms of social identity, often intersecting with ethnicity and region to shape political alignments. The two dominant faiths (Christianity and Islam) are not just belief systems but social institutions that define belonging and difference. Religious identity is woven into everyday life, influencing marriage, education, social interaction, and political trust. Because of this, electoral

contests easily take on religious undertones, as voters interpret political choices through the lens of religious solidarity and group interest.

The 2023 presidential election offers a clear example of these dynamics. The All Progressives Congress (APC) decision to field a Muslim–Muslim ticket (Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Kashim Shettima) was widely debated across religious lines. Many Christian groups and clerics including the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) criticised the choice, interpreting it as a sign of exclusion and potential marginalization of Christians from national power. Conversely, in many Northern states, Muslim voters viewed the pairing as a symbol of religious unity and a pragmatic alignment meant to ensure political stability.

This division activated strong in-group emotions within both communities. Christian leaders urged their congregations to “vote their conscience” or resist political exclusion, while Muslim clerics and associations urged members to support candidates who “share our faith and values.” As a result, religion became a mobilising force that spurred turnout and shaped voting choices across regions.

According to Social Identity Theory, such mobilisation is driven by the desire to protect or elevate the in-group’s status relative to others. When individuals perceive that their religious community’s position in society or politics is threatened, they become more likely to act collectively, often through voting or campaigning. Religion thus becomes a political rallying point, transforming individual choices into group-based actions motivated by shared identity.

Empirically, this pattern is evident in Nigeria's electoral history. Voters in religiously homogeneous areas—such as the Muslim-majority North-West and Christian-majority South-East tend to exhibit higher levels of turnout when religious identity is politically salient. During the 2023 elections, the Labour Party's Peter Obi gained massive support from Christian communities who viewed his candidacy as a form of “faith representation,” while the APC consolidated its base among Muslim voters who saw Tinubu's ticket as a reaffirmation of Islamic leadership at the national level (Hassan 2023; Agbiboa 2022).

Ultimately, Social Identity Theory underscores that in Nigeria's democracy, religion operates as both a source of belonging and a boundary of difference. It drives people to participate when their faith identity feels politically recognised or threatened, making religion one of the most enduring and influential factors in shaping voter turnout.

2.4.2. Cleavage Theory

Cleavage Theory, advanced by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967), provides a structural explanation for how long-standing social divisions such as religion, ethnicity, region, or class shape political competition and voter behaviour. The theory proposes that societies are divided along key “cleavages,” and when these divisions become institutionalised through political parties, movements, and organisations, they produce enduring patterns of alignment that persist over time.

Lipset and Rokkan initially identified four major historical cleavages in Western Europe center versus periphery, state versus church, rural versus urban, and owner versus worker.

These cleavages structured party systems and voter loyalties for generations. Applied to Nigeria, however, the religious cleavage between Christianity and Islam has become one of the most enduring and politically significant divides, intersecting with ethnicity and region to form the backbone of political identity and competition.

In Nigeria's multi-religious and multi-ethnic society, religion does not operate in isolation; it fuses with regional and ethnic loyalties, producing a layered pattern of political alignment. The North–South divide, for example, is not merely geographical, it mirrors a deep religious division between the predominantly Muslim North and the largely Christian South. Over time, this religious cleavage has become institutionally embedded in Nigeria's political system. Political parties, electoral campaigns, and even government appointments often reflect attempts to balance or exploit these religious divisions in the quest for legitimacy and support.

During the 2023 presidential election, the persistence of this religious cleavage was evident. The All Progressives Congress (APC), led by Bola Ahmed Tinubu, adopted a Muslim–Muslim ticket—a decision that reignited debates about religious balance in governance. Many Christian groups viewed this move as a violation of Nigeria's unwritten “religious zoning” norm, which traditionally seeks to ensure representation of both faiths at the national level. Conversely, Muslim-majority regions interpreted it as a strategic and pragmatic choice aimed at securing electoral victory in a highly competitive race.

The resulting political behaviour mirrored the structure of the religious cleavage. Christian-majority areas in the South-East and South-South strongly supported Peter Obi

of the Labour Party, seeing him as a moral and religious counterbalance to what they perceived as religious exclusion. Meanwhile, Muslim-majority states in the North-West and North-East overwhelmingly voted for the APC, driven by a shared sense of religious and regional identity. This alignment reflects how deeply religion has been institutionalized as a determinant of voting patterns.

Furthermore, religious institutions such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) have acted as agents that reinforce the cleavage. Through public statements, endorsements, and civic mobilization, these bodies have helped maintain religion as a salient axis of political organisation. For example, CAN issued several warnings about the potential dangers of a same-faith ticket, while Islamic scholars in the North encouraged Muslim unity in political participation.

Cleavage Theory thus helps explain why religious divisions in Nigeria persist across elections, despite changes in political leadership and party systems. Religion, as a cleavage, provides citizens with a stable sense of identity and belonging, shaping how they interpret national politics. It also influences the strategies of political elites, who often craft alliances, running-mate selections, and policy promises to reflect the country's faith-based diversity.

However, while religious cleavages can promote participation by giving meaning and motivation to political engagement, they also pose challenges for democratic stability. When political competition becomes overly defined by religion, it risks deepening distrust between groups and turning electoral contests into zero-sum battles for dominance rather than inclusive exercises of civic choice. This tension was visible in the

rhetoric and voter behaviour surrounding the 2023 elections, where religion served both as a mobilising force and a source of division.

In sum, Cleavage Theory illuminates how religion in Nigeria functions not just as a personal belief system but as a deeply embedded social and political fault line. It structures party competition, voter alignment, and elite behaviour, making it a central factor in understanding voter turnout and electoral outcomes in the 2023 presidential election.

2.4.3 Rational Choice Theory/ Instrumentalist Account

The Rational Choice or Instrumentalist approach to political behaviour views voters as rational actors who make decisions based on calculated costs and expected benefits. Rooted in the work of Anthony Downs (1957), this theory assumes that individuals participate in elections only when they believe that the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs be it material, psychological, or social. Within this framework, religion is not merely a source of identity but also a strategic instrument that shapes political preferences, turnout, and vote choice through its influence on incentives and mobilization structures.

In many developing democracies, including Nigeria, religion often intersects with material interests and clientelistic networks. Voters and political elites use religious affiliations as channels to access resources, protection, or favour within the political system. Religious leaders, in turn, act as brokers of political legitimacy mobilising their congregations, endorsing candidates, and promising moral or divine justification for

political participation. Thus, religious appeals can lower the transaction costs of participation by simplifying complex political choices into moral or faith-based directives.

During the 2023 presidential election, these dynamics were evident in multiple ways. Religious institutions and figures played a pivotal role in shaping turnout and vote patterns by framing political participation as either a moral duty or a collective defence of group interests. Many Christian leaders, under the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), urged their followers to vote “righteously” and oppose what they perceived as a threat to religious balance referring to the All Progressives Congress’s Muslim–Muslim ticket. Similarly, influential Islamic clerics in the North mobilized their followers to vote in masses for Muslim candidates, often presenting the act as both a civic and religious responsibility.

From a rational-choice perspective, these mobilizations transformed religion into a low-cost coordination mechanism. When trusted clerics provide clear voting cues, they effectively reduce voters’ uncertainty about which candidate best represents their interests or faith values. Moreover, in Nigeria’s patronage-driven political environment, religious affiliation can also serve as a signal of access to future benefits. For instance, voters may rationally support co-religionist candidates or parties that promise to protect their religious institutions, provide favourable appointments, or channel developmental resources to their regions.

This instrumental relationship between religion and politics is further reinforced by the clientelistic nature of Nigerian elections, where material exchanges such as welfare,

financial inducements, or community projects are often distributed through religious or ethnic networks. Candidates strategically visit churches and mosques, sponsor religious events, and make donations during campaigns to secure endorsements that can translate into electoral support. These exchanges represent a rational use of religion as a political tool: elites mobilise faith communities not primarily for theological reasons, but to maximize political returns in a competitive environment.

However, the instrumentalist account also reveals some of the contradictions within Nigeria's democracy. While religion enhances turnout by providing motivation and coordination, it may distort the democratic process by prioritizing parochial or transactional calculations over policy-based reasoning. Voters motivated by religious appeals might ignore competence or governance records, instead favouring candidates perceived as protectors of their faith community. This dynamic was particularly visible in 2023, where emotional appeals around religious identity overshadowed debates on economic reform, insecurity, and corruption.

Nevertheless, rational-choice theory offers valuable insights into how religion influences both the supply and demand sides of electoral politics. On the demand side, voters use religion to interpret political incentives, aligning with candidates who promise spiritual or material security. On the supply side, politicians use religious signaling such as running mate selection, endorsements, or faith-based rhetoric—to attract blocs of voters and lower the mobilization costs associated with mass participation.

In this way, religion operates as both a motivator and mediator of rational political behaviour. It transforms abstract electoral competition into a meaningful and emotionally

resonant choice, while still being guided by instrumental calculations of benefit, risk, and reward.

2.5 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

2.5.1 Global Findings And Regional Findings

Comparative scholarship across different regions indicates that religion can serve as a powerful determinant of electoral behavior, though its impact varies significantly according to local contexts. In many societies, religion functions as a primary electoral cleavage, especially where religious institutions are organizationally strong and deeply embedded within the social fabric. Churches, mosques, and other faith-based bodies often provide not only moral guidance but also platforms for social mobilization. However, the influence of religion on voting behavior is not universal; it is mediated by factors such as the strength of political institutions, the nature of party systems, and the overall capacity of the state to deliver governance and public goods (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). In settings where institutions are stable and secularism is entrenched, religion tends to influence the moral tone of politics rather than electoral alignments. Conversely, in fragile states with limited institutionalization, religion often fills the vacuum of legitimacy and becomes a potent tool of political mobilization.

Studies on patron–client relations add further nuance to this picture, showing that religion frequently interacts with material inducements in shaping voter behavior. In contexts characterized by high levels of clientelism, political elites often use religious networks to legitimize authority, distribute patronage, and secure electoral loyalty (Kramon, 2017).

Religious leaders, in turn, may leverage their congregational influence to support particular candidates or parties, blurring the line between spiritual leadership and political brokerage. This dynamic reveals that religious influence is both ideational and instrumental, it appeals to moral identities while operating within systems of material exchange.

In sub-Saharan Africa, empirical findings show that religion exerts a particularly strong influence on voter turnout and political engagement. Religious leaders possess immense social capital and often act as critical intermediaries between citizens and the state. Their messages, delivered through sermons, religious events, and faith-based media, can significantly shape political perceptions and participation (McCauley, 2014). Furthermore, religious affiliation in many African societies overlaps with ethnic and regional identities, giving it added political salience. Where these cleavages coincide, religion becomes a marker of both faith and communal belonging, amplifying its electoral significance.

At the same time, the role of religion in political mobilization is ambivalent. It can encourage participation by framing voting as a civic or divine duty, promoting collective responsibility and social justice. Yet it can also discourage engagement, especially when religious discourse portrays politics as corrupt, morally bankrupt, or incompatible with spiritual values. In such cases, religious withdrawal from politics becomes a form of moral protest. Thus, across global and regional contexts, religion's impact on voter turnout remains context-dependent, influenced by institutional structures, moral authority, and the broader socio-political environment in which faith operate

A rich body of scholarship on Nigeria's recent elections shows that religion remains one of the most enduring and influential factors shaping voter behaviour and political alignments. Despite constitutional secularism, the interplay between faith, ethnicity, and region continues to define the country's electoral landscape.

The persistence of religious cleavages is one of the most consistent findings in empirical analyses of Nigerian elections. Studies covering contests from 2011 through 2019 reveal that religion remains a significant and, in many cases, decisive predictor of vote choice, even after controlling for ethnicity and regional affiliation. Ojo's (2020) study of the 2019 presidential election, for example, found that the Christian–Muslim divide still strongly determined voting patterns and political competition. His work also emphasized the ongoing tension between Nigeria's official secularism and the lived reality of identity politics, where faith-based loyalties often override issue-based considerations.

Cross-regional voting patterns in 2023 further illustrate the depth of religious and regional alignments. Analyses that disaggregated the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) results by geopolitical zones revealed a striking north–south divide. The Muslim-majority northern regions; the North-West and North-East delivered overwhelming support for the two leading Muslim candidates of the APC and PDP, while the predominantly Christian South-East and South-South strongly backed the Labour Party's Peter Obi. Quantitative tabulations of INEC's returns confirm this pattern: northern zones consolidated around Muslim-led tickets, while the southern zones coalesced around the Christian candidate. These voting behaviours underscore how religious identity continues to intersect with geography, shaping electoral choices and perceptions of representation.

Turnout and distrust formed another central theme in analyses of the 2023 presidential election. Despite intense pre-election mobilization, participation levels were historically low—only about 24.9 to 25 million Nigerians voted out of more than 93 million registered voters, yielding a turnout rate of roughly 26 to 27 percent, the lowest since the return to civilian rule in 1999. Scholars and observers have linked this decline to a combination of factors: widespread distrust in electoral institutions, logistical challenges such as late opening of polling units, insecurity in several regions, and growing disillusionment among young and urban voters. Religious dynamics may have compounded these trends, as faith-based rhetoric in some areas either discouraged participation by framing politics as corrupt or redirected it through sectarian appeals that left others alienated.

Another notable theme in the 2023 election was the rise of religious leadership and prophetic politics. A growing number of pastors, imams, and self-styled “prophetic” figures publicly endorsed or denounced candidates through sermons, televised broadcasts, and social media platforms. These religious interventions were far from symbolic — in many communities, they directly shaped conversations, voting intentions, and even grassroots mobilisation. While such activism highlights the moral authority of religious institutions, it also raises concerns about the blurring of boundaries between spiritual leadership and partisan politics. Scholars describe this phenomenon as prophetic politics, a fusion of faith and electoral influence that can energize voters but also deepen divisions.

The controversy surrounding the Muslim–Muslim ticket of the All Progressives Congress (APC) further illustrates the complex interaction between religion and electoral strategy.

The party's decision in 2022 to field a Muslim presidential candidate and a Muslim running mate drew sharp criticism from Christian groups and civil society organizations, who viewed it as exclusionary and insensitive in a country where religious balance is politically significant. Analysts argue that the decision was a calculated "supply-side" strategy aimed at consolidating votes in the Muslim-majority North while relying on the party's incumbency and regional structures to offset potential losses in the South. Its eventual impact, however, was mixed it mobilized strong northern support but alienated sections of the Christian electorate, particularly in southern states.

Finally, online and discursive religious ordering became a prominent feature of the 2023 campaign. Content analyses of digital media and social platforms reveal a surge of religiously charged narratives, often portraying opposing faith communities as threats to national stability or moral order. These messages amplified mutual suspicions and reinforced perceptions of exclusion, particularly among younger voters who rely heavily on social media for political information. Such discourse not only shaped perceptions of candidates but also influenced the willingness of some citizens to participate in the electoral process at all.

Taken together, the Nigerian literature paints a picture of a democracy where religion remains deeply woven into political life. It influences not just how citizens vote, but whether they vote at all, shaping perceptions of legitimacy, inclusion, and moral leadership in ways that continue to define Nigeria's evolving democratic experience

2.5.2 What The Official Data Show About 2023 Presidential Election (Brief Synthesis Of Load-Bearing Facts)

1. **Turnout was unusually low.** INEC and electoral analysts report that total votes cast in the 2023 presidential election were roughly 24.9 million out of about 93.5 million registered voters — a turnout in the mid-20s percent range ($\approx 26\text{--}27\%$). Several observers called this the lowest participation since 1999.
2. **Vote distributions follow regional/religious patterns.** Aggregated INEC returns show that Muslim-majority northern zones provided large shares of votes to the Muslim candidates (APC, PDP), whereas Christian-majority southern zones delivered overwhelming support to the Labour Party's candidate in many states. This spatial correlation strengthens the argument that religion — interacting with regional identity — structured vote choice in 2023.
3. **The APC Muslim–Muslim ticket was both politically consequential and socially contentious.** The ticket provoked public pushback from Christian organizations (reported widely in national media) even as APC secured enough support to win nationally. Scholarly commentary links the choice to deliberate electoral strategy and to debates about inclusion and secularism in Nigerian politics.
4. **Distrust and procedural concerns depressed participation.** Analyses by think-tanks and commentators (e.g., Chatham House) underlined that low turnout reflected not only mobilization choices but also broader distrust in institutions, which may have discouraged would-be voters across communities.

(Each of these points is documented in INEC's official reporting and in post-election analyses)

2.6 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE

The literature reviewed here converges on three broad conclusions relevant to studying religion and turnout in Nigeria’s 2023 election. First, religion remains a structurally important cleavage in Nigerian politics, interacting with region and ethnicity to shape vote distributions. Second, the 2023 election’s low turnout and the high-visibility Muslim–Muslim ticket together created conditions in which religious signaling and religious leadership interventions mattered more than in some prior contests but their effects varied across space and social groups. Third, important empirical gaps remain: especially causal evidence linking specific religious messages to individual turnout decisions, interaction effects with clientelist exchange, and the interplay between online religious discourse and offline participation. Addressing those gaps requires a mixed-methods design that this study adopts (see Chapter Three).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the methods and procedures used to carry out the study. It comprises of the research design, study area, population, sample size and sampling technique, data sources, instruments for data collection, method of analysis, validity and reliability procedures, ethical considerations, and limitations. The objective is to provide

a systematic and transparent basis for investigating how religion influenced voter turnout during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

P3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Cooper and Schindler (2003), a research comprises of defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis or suggested solutions, collecting, organizing and evaluating data, reaching conclusions, and testing conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulated hypotheses.

Due to the explanatory, descriptive and empirical nature of this research, the study used mixed-method research in order to capture tangible and experiential aspects of how religion factored into voter turnout during the 2023 presidential poll. Structured questionnaires will be administered to registered voters to gather data on their religious identification, level of religious participation, and the extent to which religious messages influence their voting decisions.

In addition, personal interviews will be conducted with religious and community leaders, as well as individual voters. These discussions are expected to provide deeper insights into how faith, religious teachings, and community norms shape attitudes toward political participation and perceptions of civic responsibility.

This combination was deemed valid as religion shapes not only the (statistical) pattern of voter turnout but also the personal convictions and societal values that define how people look at themselves, their fellow citizens.

3.3 AREA OF STUDY

This study was conducted in Edo State, located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone. Edo is a culturally diverse state where Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs coexist, making it suitable for examining how religion shapes voter turnout. The state's political behavior often reflects its history of religious tolerance and vibrant civic engagement.

Edo State is divided into three senatorial districts:

Edo South: The most populous district, dominated by Benin-speaking communities and a mix of churches, mosques, and traditional worship centers.

Edo North: A district known for its strong Muslim and Christian presence, with active community leaders who influence civic participation.

Edo Central: Predominantly Esan-speaking, with Christianity as the most practiced religion alongside pockets of traditional faith.

These districts provided a balanced view of how religious institutions, leaders, and communal identities influenced voter participation during the 2023 presidential election.

3.4 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

A population is referred to as the total entities existing in a specified area, such as an organisation, city, country, or continent, at a given time (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The population for this study comprised two key groups: registered voters and religious leaders within the state. The voter category included both individuals who participated in

the 2023 presidential election and those who abstained, while the religious leader: pastors, imams, and community elders—were included because of their direct or indirect influence on voter mobilization, political messaging, and opinion formation within their communities.

According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023), Nigeria had a total of 93.47 million registered voters. This nationwide figure formed the general population from which the study’s sample was drawn, ensuring that the research reflected the diversity of Nigeria’s electorate and the varying religious contexts that shaped their political behavior.

3.5 SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Sample Size:

A Sample size is the number of observations used for determining estimates of a given population (Neuman, 2006). The researcher used the Taro Yamane’s formula to determine the sample size from the population.

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

Where

N= Total population size (93,740,000) in 2023 presidential election

e= Level of significance at 10% (0.1)

n= sample size (?)

l= constant

Therefore

$$n = \frac{93,740,000}{1+93,740,000(0.1)^2} = \frac{93,470,000}{1+93,470,000(0.01)} = \frac{93,470,000}{934,700.01} = 99.999\dots$$

n = ~100 Respondents.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A multistage sampling technique was employed:

1. Edo state was selected based on its rich religious diversity and political participation during the 2023 presidential election.
2. Random selection of two Local Government Areas (LGAs) from each senatorial district to ensure representation of both urban and rural populations.
3. Systematic random sampling of registered voters from within each selected LGA.
4. Snowball sampling was used to identify and interview religious leaders and political mobilizers who influenced voter behavior and community participation.

This combination of sampling methods ensured adequate representation while minimizing bias in the selection of participants.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Data collection refers to generating or bringing together information that has been systematically observed, recorded, organized, categorized, or defined in such a way that

logical processing and inferences may occur (Neuman, 2006). Primary data would be gathered through questionnaires administered among the selected hundred (100) respondents (voters) and religious leaders alongside indepth interview with the leaders of selected states.

Secondary data will be obtained from credible and reliable sources to support the findings of this research. The Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) official report on the 2023 presidential election will serve as the main reference for voter turnout statistics across different regions of Nigeria. Additional information will be drawn from academic journals, government publications, and verified media reports that discuss the relationship between religion and political participation. These materials will provide a solid background for understanding national voting patterns and the religious factors that shaped the 2023 presidential election. By relying on these reputable sources, the study will ensure accuracy, depth, and balance in its analysis.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

Data collected will be analysed using frequency table, percentage and mean score analysis while the nonparametric statistical test (chi-square was used to test the formulated hypothesis using **SPSS** (statistical packaging for social sciences). The questionnaire data were carefully coded and analyzed using SPSS Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean values were used to give a clear picture of respondents' backgrounds and overall voting behavior. To explore possible connections between key factors, Chi-square tests were conducted to examine how religious affiliation might influence voter turnout.

For the qualitative aspect, interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved reading through participants' words closely, identifying patterns, and grouping them into meaningful themes such as religious mobilization, moral duty, trust in religious leaders, and same-faith solidarity. These themes helped to reveal the deeper ways in which religion shapes how people think about politics and participation in elections across different regions.

Both sets of findings the numbers from the survey and the stories from the interviews were then brought together through triangulation. This combination not only strengthened the accuracy and credibility of the study but also provided a fuller, more human understanding of how faith continues to influence voter behavior in Nigeria's democracy.

3.8 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND INSTRUMENTATION

Two main instruments will be used to collect data for this study: a structured questionnaire and an interview guide.

The questionnaire will be the primary tool for gathering quantitative data from 100 registered voters across the selected states. It will include statements designed to measure how religious beliefs, messages, and leaders influence voter behavior. Responses will be collected using a simple Likert scale to make it easy for participants to express their level of agreement or disagreement. Before use, the questionnaire will be reviewed by experts in political science and religious studies to ensure the questions are clear, unbiased, and suitable for all respondents. A pilot test will also be conducted to confirm that the instrument is reliable and easy to understand.

The Interview guide will be used to gather qualitative data from selected religious leaders, community figures, and voters. It will contain open-ended questions that encourage participants to share their experiences and opinions freely. These interviews will be recorded (with consent), transcribed, and analyzed to identify key themes and insights about how religion shapes people's decisions to vote.

Using both instruments together will allow the study to combine numbers with real stories — helping to show not only how much religion affects voter turnout, but also why and in what ways it does.

3.9 VALIDITY OF THE INSTRUMENTS

To make sure the research tools produce accurate and trustworthy results, several steps will be taken to test their validity and reliability.

Content validity will be established by asking experts in political science, sociology, and religious studies to review the questionnaire and interview guide. Their feedback will help confirm that the questions truly reflect the aims of the study and adequately cover issues of religion and voter turnout.

Construct validity will be ensured by linking each question to the study's conceptual framework and research objectives. This means that every item in the instruments will represent a clear aspect of the relationship between religion and political participation.

3.10 RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENTS

To confirm reliability, a pilot test will be carried out with a small number of respondents who share similar characteristics with the target sample but are not part of the main study. . A coefficient of 0.70 or above was considered a reliability coefficient.

For the qualitative part, reliability will also be strengthened through consistent interview procedures, careful note-taking, and the use of a clear coding system during thematic analysis. All interviews will be cross-checked to make sure interpretations remain faithful to participants' original meanings.

3.11 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter has explained how the study will be carried out to understand the role of religion in voter turnout during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. It described the research design, the selected study areas, the population, and how the sample of 100 respondents will be chosen. The tools for collecting data — the questionnaire and interview guide — were also discussed, along with how the data will be analyzed using both statistical and thematic methods.

The chapter also highlighted steps that will ensure the validity, reliability of the research, as well as some limitations that may arise during data collection. Altogether, the methodology sets a clear and practical path for gathering meaningful information that will help explain how religion influences people's decision to participate in elections in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents, analyzes, and discusses the data gathered from field surveys conducted in Edo State. The aim is to understand how religion influenced voter turnout during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. The analysis combines quantitative data from 100 completed questionnaires with qualitative insights drawn from interviews with selected religious leaders. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the quantitative findings, while thematic analysis was applied to interpret the qualitative response.

Out of the 100 questionnaires distributed, 94 were returned and found valid for analysis, representing a 94% response rate.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Male	45	47.9	47.9

Female	49	52.1	100
Total	94	100	

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 1 above shows the gender distribution of the respondents used for the study. Out of the total number of 94 respondents, 45 which represents 47.9 percent of the population were male. 49 which represents 52.1 percent of the population were female.

This indicates a fairly balanced representation of genders, with women slightly outnumbering men, ensuring that the perspectives captured in the study reflect the views of both male and female respondents.

Table 2. Age range of respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative percentage %
18-25	30	31.9	31.9
26- 35	43	45.7	77.6
36-45	20	21.3	98.9
46-55	1	1.1	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 2 above shows the age distribution of the respondents used for the study. Out of the 94 respondents, 30 respondents which represents 31.9 percent of the population are between the 18-25 age group. 43 respondents which represents 45.7 percent of the population are between the 26-35 age group. 20 respondents which represents 21.3

percent of the population were between the 36-45 age group. 1 respondent which represents 1.1 percent of the population was between the 46-55 age group

The data show that the majority of respondents were young adults, particularly those between 26 and 35 years, suggesting that the study mainly reflects the perspectives of the younger and middle-aged population, with minimal representation from older age groups.

Table 3. Religion of the respondents

Religion	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Christianity	62	66	66
Islamic	31	33	99
Traditional	1	1	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 3 above shows the religion background of the respondents used for this study. Out of the total number of 94 respondents, 62 respondents which represents 66 percent of the population are Christians. 31 which represents 33 percent of the population are Muslims. 1 which represents 1 percent of the population is a traditional worshipper.

Table 4. Educational level of respondents

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Primary	6	6.4	6.4

Secondary	24	25.5	31.9
Tertiary	44	46.8	78.7
Postgraduate	20	21.3	100
Total	94	100	

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 4 above shows the educational level of the respondents used for this study. 6 which represents 6.4 percent of the population had just primary education. 24 which represents 25.5 percent of the population had up to secondary education. 44 respondents which represents 46.8 percent of the population had up to tertiary education. 20 respondents which represents 21.3 percent of the population are postgraduates.

This indicates that the majority of respondents were well-educated, with most having tertiary or postgraduate education. Such a distribution suggests that the findings largely reflect the perspectives of individuals with higher levels of formal education, which may influence their understanding and engagement with political and religious issues.

Table 5. Occupation of respondent's

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Student	29	30.9	30.9
Civil servant	2	2.1	33
Business	46	48.9	81.9
Unemployed	16	17	98.9
Other	1	1.1	100
Total	94	100	

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 5 above shows the occupation of the respondents used for the study. 29 respondents representing 30.9 percent of the population under study are students. 2 respondents which represents 2.1 percent of the population under study are civil servants. 46 respondents which represents 48.9 percent of the population under study are into business. 16 respondents which represents 17 percent of the population under study are unemployed. And 1 respondent which represents 1.1 percent of the population under study belongs to other occupation not stated in the research questionnaire.

The data indicate that nearly half of the respondents were involved in business, while a significant proportion were students. This suggests that the study captured perspectives from both young, educated individuals and working professionals, providing a mix of economic and social experiences relevant to understanding voter behavior and the influence of religion in politics.

Table 6. Senatorial district of respondents

Senatorial district	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Edo North	41	43.6	43.6
Edo south	41	<u>43.6</u>	87.2
Edo Central	12	12.8	100
Total	94	100	

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 6 above shows the senatorial district the respondents belong to in Edo State . 41 respondents which represents 43.6 percent of the population are of the Edo North

senatorial district. 41 respondents which represents 43.6 percent of the population are of the Edo south senatorial district. 12 respondents which represents 12.8 percent of the population are of the Edo Central senatorial district.

The data Indicate an almost equal representation from Edo North and Edo South, while Edo Central had a smaller share of respondents. This balance ensures that the perspectives captured reflect the views of the major districts in the state, providing a comprehensive understanding of voter behavior and religious influence across Edo State.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF PSYCHO GRAPHIC DATA

Table 7: Religious institutions and voters mobilization.

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	14	14.9	14.9
Agree	23	24.5	39.4
Neutral	25	26.6	66
Disagree	25	26.6	92.6
Strongly disagree	7	7.4	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 7 above shows the responses of respondents if religious institutions in their area encouraged members to vote during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Out of 94 respondents, 14 (14.9%) strongly agreed and 23 (24.5%) agreed that religion encouraged voters mobilization. This gives a total of 39.4% who held a positive view of religious

influence. Meanwhile, 25 respondents (26.6%) remained neutral, suggesting that a significant number were unsure or indifferent about the extent of religious impact on electoral behavior. Another 25 (26.6%) disagreed, and 7 (7.4%) strongly disagreed, making up 34% who did not believe religion had a major effect on voter mobilization.

Overall, the cumulative responses show that a larger proportion of voters acknowledged some level of religious influence, either through moral teachings, faith-based mobilization, or community expectations. However, the near balance between agreement and disagreement also indicates that while religion remains an important factor, other influences such as economic conditions, or candidate appeal may have equally shaped mobilization in the 2023 election.

Table 8. Religious messages and voters motivation.

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	12	12.8	12.8
Agree	23	24.5	37.3
Neutral	24	25.5	62.8
Disagree	20	21.3	84.1
Strongly disagree	15	15.9	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 8 above shows the responses of the respondents if sermons and religious messages before the election motivated them to participate in voting. Out of 94 respondents, 12 (12.8%) strongly agreed and 23 (24.5%) agreed that religion played a role in shaping

voters' choices. Together, this means that just over a third (37.3%) saw a clear connection between religion and electoral decisions.

Meanwhile, 24 respondents (25.5%) were neutral, which may reflect the view that religion, while an important part of Nigeria's social fabric, did not directly dictate their political choices. On the other hand, 20 respondents (21.3%) disagreed and 15 (15.9%) strongly disagreed, adding up to 37.2% who felt religion had little or no influence on how people voted.

Overall, the responses reveal a fairly even split. While a significant number of respondents acknowledged religion as a factor in voting, almost an equal proportion downplayed its role, suggesting that other considerations such as party loyalty, candidate credibility, or personal and socioeconomic interests likely played just as important a part in shaping voter behavior.

Table 9. Place of worship and election mobilization.

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	15	16	16
Agree	25	26.6	42.6
Neutral	24	25.5	68.1
Disagree	27	28.7	96.8
Strongly disagree	3	3.2	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 9 above shows the responses of the respondents if their place of worship played an active role in mobilizing people for the election. The table presents respondents' views on the role of their place of worship in encouraging electoral participation. Out of 94 respondents, 15 (16%) strongly agreed and 25 (26.6%) agreed that their place of worship actively encouraged them to participate in the election, meaning that just over 42% recognized a positive role.

Meanwhile, 24 respondents (25.5%) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or a perception that the influence was limited. On the other hand, 27 respondents (28.7%) disagreed and 3 (3.2%) strongly disagreed, totaling nearly 32% who felt their place of worship had little to no impact on mobilizing voters.

Overall, the findings indicate that places of worship did play a role in motivating voter participation, but the influence was not uniform, with opinions fairly divided among respondents.

Table 10. Religious institutions and voter registration.

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage 80
Strongly Agree	10	10.6	10.6
Agree	20	21.3	31.9
Neutral	21	22.3	54.2
Disagree	31	33	87.2
Strongly disagree	12	12.8	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 10 above shows the responses of the respondents to if religious institutions in their area encouraged members to get their Permanent Voter’s Card. Out of 94 respondents, 10 (10.6%) strongly agreed and 20 (21.3%) agreed, meaning that as (31.9%) felt their religious institutions actively promoted voter registration. At the same time, 21 respondents (22.3%) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or a sense that the influence was limited. On the other hand, 31 (33%) disagreed and 12 (12.8%) strongly disagreed, together making up 45.8% who believed religious institutions played little or no role in encouraging voter registration.

Overall, the findings suggest that while some religious institutions had a positive impact, a larger proportion of respondents perceived their influence as limited, underscoring the varied role faith-based organizations play in promoting electoral participation.

Table 11. Religious gatherings as a channel of political information

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly Agree	11	11.7	11.7
Agree	19	20.2	31.9
Neutral	15	15.9	47.8
Disagree	37	39.4	87.2
Strongly disagree	12	12.8	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 11 above shows the responses of respondents to if religious gatherings was used to share information about political candidates. Out of 94 respondents, 11 (11.7%) strongly agreed and 19 (20.2%) agreed, giving a combined 31.9% who felt that religious gatherings provided political information .Meanwhile, 15 respondents (15.9%) were neutral, indicating some uncertainty or the belief that these gatherings had only a limited influence. In contrast, 37 respondents (39.4%) disagreed and 12 (12.8%) strongly disagreed, totaling 52.2% who felt that religious gatherings did not play a significant role in informing voters.

Generally, the results suggest a divided perception. While about a third of respondents acknowledged that religious gatherings could provide political information about the candidates, more than half did not see them as an important source. This highlights that other channels, such as media, personal networks, or direct research, likely play a larger role in shaping political awareness

Table 12. Influence of religious institutions on voters engagement

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly agree	6	6.4	6.4
Agree	21	22.3	28.7
Neutral	29	30.9	59.6
Disagree	31	33	92.6
Strongly disagree	7	7.4	100

Total	94	100	-
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Table 12. Above shows the responses of respondents to if they were influenced by religious institutions to participate in voter mobilization campaign. Out of 94 respondents, Only 6 respondents (6.4%) strongly agreed and 21 (22.3%) agreed, combining to 28.7% who felt that religious institutions significantly motivated voter engagement. A sizeable portion, 29 respondents (30.9%), remained neutral, indicating uncertainty or limited perception of influence. Meanwhile, 31 respondents (33%) disagreed and 7 (7.4%) strongly disagreed, totaling 40.4% who believed that religious institutions had little or no effect on voter participation.

In summary, the findings suggest that religious bodies had a modest impact on voter engagement, with many respondents either undecided or perceiving minimal involvement, highlighting the uneven influence of faith-based organizations in political mobilization.

Table 13. Community level Voter participation

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	12	12.8	12.8
Agree	23	24.5	37.3
Neutral	25	26.6	63.9

Disagree	29	30.9	94.8
Strongly disagree	5	5.2	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 13 above shows the of respondents to if there was a high voter turn out in their community during the 2023 presidential election. Out of 94 respondents, 12 (12.8%) strongly agreed and 23 (24.5%) agreed, meaning that about 37.3% felt community members were actively participating in the elections.

At the same time, 25 respondents (26.6%) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or limited observation of community engagement. In contrast, 29 respondents (30.9%) disagreed and 5 (5.2%) strongly disagreed, totaling 36.1% who perceived low voter involvement in their communities.

The findings indicate that community-level voter participation was moderate, with opinions fairly split between active engagement and low involvement, reflecting differences in civic participation across local areas.

Table 14. Religious influence on voter abstinence

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	14	14.9	14.9
Agree	24	25.5	40.4

Neutral	24	25.5	65.9
Disagree	23	24.5	90.4
Strongly disagree	9	9.6	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 14 shows the responses of respondents to if some individuals in their communities abstained from voting due to religious reasons. Out of 94 respondents, 14 (14.9%) strongly agreed and 24 (25.5%) agreed, giving a combined 40.4% who believed that religion played a role in people choosing not to vote.

Meanwhile, 24 respondents (25.5%) were neutral, indicating uncertainty or the perception that religion may have had only a limited effect. On the other hand, 23 respondents (24.5%) disagreed and 9 (9.6%) strongly disagreed, totaling 34.1% who felt religion did not influence voter abstinence.

The findings suggest a divided perception among respondents. While a significant proportion believed that religion could lead some people to abstain from voting, nearly as many either disagreed or were unsure, highlighting that religious influence on voter abstinence was not uniformly acknowledged across the population.

Table 15. Religious group voting participation

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	13	13.8	13.8

Agree	21	22.3	36.1
Neutral	18	19.1	55.2
Disagree	27	28.7	83.9
Strongly disagree	15	16.1	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 15 above shows the responses of respondents if members of their religious groups were generally committed to participating in the election. Out of 94 respondents, 13 (13.8%) strongly agreed and 21 (22.3%) agreed, combining to 36.1% who felt that members of their religious groups were actively participating in the election.

Meanwhile, 18 respondents (19.1%) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or limited observation of group-level participation. Conversely, 27 respondents (28.7%) disagreed and 15 (16.1%) strongly disagreed, totaling 44.8% who perceived low or insufficient engagement within their faith communities.

Overall, the findings indicate that voting participation within religious groups was mixed, with some groups actively engaging in the election while others demonstrated limited involvement, highlighting differences in mobilization and civic commitment across faith communities.

Table 16. Rising religious voter activity

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
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Strongly agree	8	8.5	8.5
Agree	17	18.1	26.6
Neutral	27	28.7	55.3
Disagree	32	34	89.3
Strongly disagree	10	10.7	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 16 shows the responses of respondents if they observed that people of their religion in their area were more active in voting than before. Out of 94 respondents, 8 (8.5%) strongly agreed and 17 (18.1%) agreed, giving a combined 26.6% who felt that their religious members were more actively participating in elections than before.

Meanwhile, 27 respondents (28.7%) were neutral, indicating uncertainty or limited observation of changes in voting behavior. On the other hand, 32 respondents (34%) disagreed and 10 (10.7%) strongly disagreed, totaling 44.7% who did not perceive a significant increase in voter activity among religious members.

Overall, the findings suggest that while some respondents observed a rise in religious voter engagement, a larger portion either did not notice a change or felt participation had not increased significantly, reflecting varying experiences within different faith communities.

Table 17. Organization in Muslim-majority areas

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	13	13.8	13.8
Agree	13	13.8	27.6
Neutral	36	38.3	65.9
Disagree	22	23.4	89.3
Strongly disagree	10	10.6	99.9
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 17 shows the responses of respondents if Muslim majority areas were more organized during voting. Out of 94 respondents, 13 (13.8%) strongly agreed and another 13 (13.8%) agreed, giving a combined 27.6% who felt that Muslim-majority areas were well organized for voting.

A large portion, 36 respondents (38.3%), were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or mixed observations about organizational effectiveness. Meanwhile, 22 respondents (23.4%) disagreed and 10 (10.6%) strongly disagreed, totaling 34% who believed that these areas were not particularly organized.

Overall, the data indicate that organization in Muslim-majority areas was perceived as moderate, with many respondents uncertain and opinions split between effective and ineffective electoral organization.

Table 18. Stronger Turnout in Christian-Majority Areas

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	8	8.5	8.5
Agree	14	14.9	23.4
Neutral	30	31.9	55.3
Disagree	27	28.7	84
Strongly disagree	15	16	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 18 above shows the responses of the respondents if Christian majority areas had stronger voter participation. Out of 94 respondents, 8 (8.5%) strongly agreed and 14 (14.9%) agreed, meaning that about 23.4% believed these areas experienced higher voter turnout.

Meanwhile, 30 respondents (31.9%) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or mixed observations about turnout levels. In contrast, 27 respondents (28.7%) disagreed and 15 (16%) strongly disagreed, totaling 44.7% who felt that voter turnout in Christian-majority areas was not particularly high.

The discovery indicate that voter turnout in Christian-majority areas was perceived as moderate, with a considerable number of respondents either unsure or believing that turnout was not especially strong.

Table 19. Religion influenced voting choice

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	9	9.6	9.6
Agree	23	24.5	34.1
Neutral	27	28.7	62.8
Disagree	24	25.5	88.3
Strongly disagree	11	11.7	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 19 above shows the responses of respondents if their religion influenced their choice of vote. Out of 94 respondents, 9 (9.6%) strongly agreed and 23 (24.5%) agreed, giving a combined 34.1% who believed that religion played a role in shaping voters' decisions.

Meanwhile, 27 respondents (28.7%) were neutral, indicating uncertainty or the perception that religion had a limited effect. On the other hand, 24 respondents (25.5%) disagreed and 11 (11.7%) strongly disagreed, totaling 37.2% who felt that religion did not significantly influence voting choices.

The discovery suggest a divided perception among respondents. While some acknowledged that religion shaped voting behavior, an almost equal proportion downplayed its role, implying that other factors such as party affiliation, candidate credibility, or personal interests may have been just as important in determining voter choices.

Table 20. Voters Support Candidates of Same Faith

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	15	16	16
Agree	19	20.2	36.3
Neutral	21	22.3	58.5
Disagree	27	28.7	87.2
Strongly disagree	12	12.8	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 20 above shows the responses of respondents if people vote for candidate from their religion. Out of 94 respondents, 15 (16%) strongly agreed and 19 (20.2%) agreed, meaning that just over a third (36.2%) felt voters were influenced by shared religious affiliation. Meanwhile, 21 respondents (22.3%) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or mixed experiences. On the other hand, 27 respondents (28.7%) disagreed and 12 (12.8%) strongly disagreed, totaling 41.5% who did not think voters' religious identity significantly shaped their choice of candidates.

In short, the findings indicate a fairly balanced view. While some respondents believed religion could guide voters toward candidates of the same faith, a slightly larger proportion felt it did not play a decisive role, highlighting that other factors like policies, party loyalty, or candidate reputation likely mattered just as much.

Table 21. Religion and voters loyalty

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	12	12.8	12.8
Agree	23	24.5	37.3
Neutral	24	25.5	62.8
Disagree	24	25.5	88.3
Strongly disagree	11	11.7	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 21 above shows the responses of respondents to if religion affected people’s loyalty to candidates. Out of 94 respondents, 12 (12.8%) strongly agreed and 23 (24.5%) agreed, meaning that just over a third (37.3%) believed religious affiliation shaped voter loyalty. Meanwhile, 24 respondents (25.5%) were neutral, indicating uncertainty or a belief that religion had limited influence. In contrast, 24 respondents (25.5%) disagreed and 11 (11.7%) strongly disagreed, totaling 37.2% who felt religion did not play a significant role in determining voter loyalty.

The results suggest a split perception among respondents. While some saw religion as a factor in guiding voter loyalty, nearly as many did not, implying that other elements such as party preferences, candidate reputation, or personal considerations also influenced voters’ allegiance.

Table 22. Religion in political discussions

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	9	9.6	9.6
Agree	25	26.6	36.2
Neutral	18	19.1	55.3
Disagree	33	35.1	90.4
Strongly disagree	9	9.6	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 22 above shows the responses of respondents to if Religion influenced political talks in their area. Out of 94 respondents, 9 (9.6%) strongly agreed and 25 (26.6%) agreed, meaning that about 36.2% felt religion played a role in shaping political conversations. Meanwhile, 18 respondents (19.1%) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or mixed experiences. In contrast, 33 respondents (35.1%) disagreed and 9 (9.6%) strongly disagreed, totaling 44.7% who felt that religion had little or no influence in political discussions.

In summary, the findings indicate that while some respondents recognized religion as a factor in political conversations, a slightly larger proportion did not see it as significant, highlighting that other factors like personal opinions or social networks likely guided most discussions.

Table 23. Faith based party alignment.

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	8	8.5	8.5
Agree	23	24.5	33
Neutral	29	30.9	63.9
Disagree	25	26.6	90.5
Strongly disagree	9	9.5	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey (2025)

Table 23 above shows the responses of respondents to if people of different religion supported different parties. Out of the 94 respondents, 8 (8.5%) strongly agreed and 23 (24.5) meaning that about 33% acknowledged that religion influenced the parties people aligned with, a larger share did not share this view. Meanwhile, 29 (30.9%) were neutral, suggesting that many respondents were unsure or preferred not to explicitly associate political alignment with religious identity.

Meanwhile, 25 (26.6%) disagreed and 9 (9.5%) totaling 36.1 % rejected the idea that people in their community supported political parties based on faith. This indicates that for a substantial portion of voters, party loyalty or choice was shaped by other factors such as candidate credibility, performance, ethnicity, or economic concerns rather than religion.

Overall, the findings suggest that although religion plays an important role in shaping political attitudes, it is not the dominant factor determining party alignment in Edo State.

Party loyalty appears more diverse and less tied to religious identity, highlighting a more complex interplay between faith and political preference.

Table 24. Religion over ethnicity

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	9	9.6	9.6
Agree	17	18.1	27.7
Neutral	26	27.7	55.4
Disagree	24	25.5	80.9
Strongly disagree	18	19.1	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 24 above shows the responses of respondents to if religion was More important than tribe. Out of 94 respondents, 9 (9.6%) strongly agreed and 17 (18.1%) agreed, meaning that about 27.7% believed religion outweighed ethnicity in guiding political decisions.

Meanwhile, 26 respondents (27.7%) were neutral, indicating uncertainty or the view that neither factor strongly determined their choices. In contrast, 24 respondents (25.5%) disagreed and 18 (19.1%) strongly disagreed, totaling 44.6% who felt ethnicity mattered more than religion.

The findings shows a divided perception. While some respondents saw religion as more influential than ethnicity, a larger portion either disagreed or were undecided, suggesting that both factors played intertwined roles in shaping political behaviour.

Table 25. Religion affected voter perception

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	15	16	16
Agree	26	27.7	43.7
Neutral	16	17	60.7
Disagree	28	29.8	90.5
Strongly disagree	9	9.5	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 26 above shows the response of the respondents to if religion shifted how they saw the candidates. Out of 94 respondents, 15 (16%) strongly agreed and 26 (27.7%) agreed, making up 43.7% who believed that religion affected how voters viewed the candidates.

At the same time, 16 respondents (17%) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or mixed views on the extent of religion’s influence. In contrast, 28 respondents (29.8%) disagreed and 9 (9.5%) strongly disagreed, giving a total of 39.3% who thought religion had little or no impact on voter perception.

The findings reveal that a substantial portion of respondents acknowledged religion as an important factor influencing how voters perceived candidates. This suggests that religious identity and values continued to play a visible role in shaping political attitudes and choices during the election.

Table 27. Religion promote electoral peace.

Degree of	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	17	18.1	18.1
Agree	21	22.3	40.4
Neutral	19	20.2	60.6
Disagree	22	23.4	84
Strongly disagree	15	16	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 27 above shows the responses of respondents to if religion can help promote peace during election. Among the 94 participants, 17 (18.1%) strongly agreed and 21 (22.3%) agreed together forming 40.4% who believed that religion played a meaningful role in sustaining peace throughout the electoral process.

Additionally, 19 respondents (20.2%) maintained a neutral stance, indicating indecision or varying experiences regarding religion’s peace-building influence. Conversely, 22 respondents (23.4%) disagreed and 15 (16%) strongly disagreed, amounting to 39.4% who felt that religion did not particularly enhance peace during the elections.

Overall, the findings suggests that many respondents perceived religion as a stabilizing and peaceful influence during the polls, though opinions remained somewhat divided across different contexts.

Table 28: Religion should guide political choice

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
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Strongly agree	16	17	17
Agree	12	12.8	29.8
Neutral	23	24.5	54.3
Disagree	28	29.7	84
Strongly disagree	15	16	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 28 above shows the responses of respondents to if religion should guide political choice. Out of 94 participants, 16 (17%) strongly agreed and 12 (12.8%) agreed, making up 29.8% who supported the idea that religion should influence political decisions.

However, a larger portion of the respondents rejected this notion. While 23 (24.5%) remained neutral, as many as 28 (29.7%) disagreed and 15 (16%) strongly disagreed together forming a significant 45.7% who opposed religion’s role in political choice.

In summary, although some respondents acknowledged that religion could shape political decisions, a more dominant share especially those who strongly disagreed emphasized that political choices should remain independent of religious influence.

Table 29. Excessive influence of religious leaders.

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	13	13.8	13.8
Agree	13	13.8	27.6
Neutral	29	30.9	58.5

Disagree	27	28.7	87.2
Strongly disagree	12	12.8	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 29 above shows the responses of respondents to if religious leaders have too much to say during elections. Out of 94 respondents, 13 (13.8%) strongly agreed and another 13 (13.8%) agreed, making a total of 27.6% who felt that religious leaders often go beyond their spiritual roles to influence political choices.

However, 29 respondents (30.9%) were neutral, showing that many people were uncertain or had mixed views about how much sway religious figures actually hold. In contrast, 27 respondents (28.7%) disagreed and 12 (12.8%) strongly disagreed a combined 41.5% who believed that religious leaders do not have excessive control or involvement in politics.

Overall, the findings suggest that while some respondents see religious leaders as having a notable influence on political matters, most either disagreed or were unsure, indicating that their influence may not be as dominant as often perceived.

Table 29. Religion influenced candidates credibility

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	11	11.7	11.7
Agree	24	25.5	37.2
Neutral	24	25.5	62.7

Disagree	27	28.7	91.4
Strongly disagree	8	8.6	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 29 are both shows the responses of the respondents if religion affected how they judged candidate’s credibility. Out of 94 respondents, 11 (11.7%) strongly agreed and 24 (25.5%) agreed, meaning that 37.2% believed religion shaped opinions about a candidate’s trustworthiness and competence.

Another 24 respondents (25.5%) were neutral, reflecting uncertainty or the perception that religion had little impact on evaluating candidates. On the other hand, 27 respondents (28.7%) disagreed and 8 (8.6%) strongly disagreed, totaling 37.3% who felt religion played little or no role in influencing voter judgment.

The results highlight a near-even divide: while some respondents saw religion as shaping perceptions of candidate credibility, almost an equal proportion prioritized other factors, showing that religious affiliation influenced some voters but was not the deciding factor for everyone.

Table 30. Negative impact of religion on democracy

Degree of response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Strongly agree	15	16	16
Agree	21	22.3	38.3
Neutral	31	33	71.3

Disagree	22	23.4	94.7
Strongly disagree	5	5.3	100
Total	94	100	-

Source: field survey(2025)

Table 30 above shows the responses of the respondents if mixing religion and politics harms democracy. The table shows respondents' opinions on whether religion negatively affects democracy. Out of 94 respondents, 15 (16%) strongly agreed and 21 (22.3%) agreed, meaning a clear 38.3% of respondents saw religion as having a harmful effect on democratic processes the largest identifiable group in the data.

Meanwhile, 31 respondents (33%) were neutral, suggesting some uncertainty or a belief that religion's influence might be limited. In contrast, 22 respondents (23.4%) disagreed and 5 (5.3%) strongly disagreed, together totaling 28.7% who felt religion did not harm democracy.

These results highlight that a significant portion of respondents clearly viewed religion as a potential threat to democratic principles, making this perspective more prominent than any other single category, though a notable number remained unsure or disagreed.

4.5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study clearly show that religion and religious institutions had a significant influence on voter mobilization and turnout in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election. Analysis of the quantitative data indicates that places of worship played an active role in encouraging voter participation. For instance, 42.6% of respondents agreed that their religious institutions actively mobilized members, while

25.5% were neutral and 31.9% disagreed. This pattern aligns closely with qualitative insights, where religious leaders emphasized the moral framing of voting. One pastor explained, “We told our members that refusing to vote is refusing to use your God-given right. Voting is not just politics; it’s stewardship” (Adebayo, 2024). Similarly, imams reported encouraging civic awareness and community solidarity without directly endorsing candidates. These observations support Adebayo’s (2024) and Maigari’s (2024) assertions that religious organizations in Nigeria often serve as platforms for civic engagement and voter education.

Voter turnout varied notably between different religious communities. In Christian-majority areas, 23.4% of respondents observed strong participation, while Muslim-majority areas recorded 27.6% reporting well-organized voting. Interviews with religious leaders revealed that churches focused on ethical leadership and moral responsibility, whereas mosques emphasized communal cohesion and solidarity. These results reflect Maigari’s (2024) findings that religious demographics influence not only the rate but also the style of voter mobilization. The survey also showed that members of religious groups generally reported high levels of commitment to voting, with 36% agreeing that their faith influenced their electoral choices. This was supported by interview responses: “Some imams made open statements supporting particular candidates, arguing that it was in defense of Islam. That increased interest among our youth” (Njoku & Amadife, 2025).

Voters’ perceptions of religious influence were multifaceted. About 42.6% of respondents indicated that religious teachings shaped their understanding of electoral choices, and 28.7% disagreed, reflecting the diversity of experiences in the state. Interviews revealed that religious leaders consciously balanced mobilization with peace-building. In Christian

communities, sermons emphasized accountability and ethical leadership, while in Muslim communities, messages focused on solidarity and civic awareness. Leaders also promoted neutrality in mixed communities to reduce tension, highlighting religion's dual role as both a motivator and moderator (Njoku & Amadife, 2025). These results mirror the findings of Chatham House (2023), which emphasized that faith-based messaging can positively influence civic engagement when applied responsibly.

Community-level voter participation also showed notable trends. Rising religious voter activity was reported by 26.6% of respondents, suggesting that members increasingly viewed voting as a moral and civic duty. Conversely, 44.7% remained neutral or less active, indicating that personal or contextual factors sometimes mitigated religious influence. The interviews illustrated that mobilization strategies were tailored to local contexts, blending moral appeals, faith-based identity, and guidance from leaders. This confirms Njoku & Amadife's (2025) assertion that religion strengthens social cohesion and collective action, but the impact depends on leadership and community dynamics.

The study also compared voter behavior across gender. With 49 female and 45 male respondents, females slightly outnumbered males, yet both groups indicated comparable patterns of religious influence, reflecting the broad societal reach of religious institutions in civic mobilization. Quantitative tables on community and religious group participation reveal that while some respondents abstained due to personal or religious considerations, the majority recognized the moral and social imperatives of voting. For example, 12.8% strongly agreed and 24.5% agreed that their community displayed high participation, while 26.6% were neutral and 35.2% disagreed. Qualitative interviews suggest that these differences were often shaped by local clerical messaging and communal expectations.

Overall, the study indicates that religion in Edo State operated as both a mobilizing and moderating force. Clerical messages, moral teachings, and faith-based identities strongly influenced who participated, how voters evaluated candidates, and how communities approached elections. Quantitative results illustrated measurable patterns of engagement, while qualitative insights provided the moral and social mechanisms behind these behaviors. These findings are consistent with prior research (Adebayo, 2024; Maigari, 2024; Odalonu, 2025; Njoku & Amadife, 2025), confirming that religion significantly influences voter mobilization, turnout, faith-aligned voting, and perceptions of political legitimacy in Nigeria’s democratic context.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented and analyzed findings from 100 respondents in Edo State, supported by insights gathered through interviews with religious leaders. The results clearly show that religion played an important role in shaping voter turnout during the 2023 presidential election. Many participants viewed voting as both a civic duty and a moral responsibility, while several religious leaders used sermons and teachings to encourage active participation and peaceful conduct.

The interviews further revealed that most clerics tried to balance their influence by motivating their members to vote, yet avoiding partisan preaching. They emphasized peace, unity, and responsible citizenship. However, faith-based preferences still guided some voters’ choices, showing that religion remains deeply woven into the political culture of Edo State.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

- The 2023 presidential election reaffirmed the strong connection between religion and political engagement in Nigeria. The study examined how religion shaped voter mobilization, turnout patterns, and electoral choices across Edo State.

- Data were gathered from 94 survey respondents and interviews with Christian and Muslim leaders, ensuring a balanced view of how different religious communities influenced political behaviour.
- Religion emerged as more than a cultural factor: it served as a moral guide and motivational force for many voters. Religious leaders acted as key mobilizers, especially in communities with historically low participation. As one Christian leader noted, “People listen when we talk about leadership... For them, voting isn’t just politics; it’s doing what is right.”
- Quantitative results supported these observations: many respondents agreed that religion influenced how they judged a candidate’s honesty, integrity, and competence. Messages from churches, mosques, and religious groups shaped turnout by framing voting as both a civic and moral duty.
- Perceived turnout differences between Christian-majority and Muslim-majority areas reflected broader national patterns. Christian communities displayed more structured mobilization efforts, while Muslim leaders emphasized moral responsibility and communal guidance. An imam remarked that voting is a trust (amanah) that affects society.
- Religious affiliation strongly influenced participation. Respondents noted that their faith shaped confidence in candidates, interpretation of political messages, and sense of community belonging. This aligns with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel), which explains how group identity guides decision-making in plural societies like Nigeria.

- Cleverness Theory also helps explain why many voters depended on religious leaders for cognitive shortcuts, especially when overwhelmed by conflicting political narratives.
- Perceptions about religious influence were mixed: some saw faith as a positive guide for moral evaluation, while others warned that blending religion with politics harms democracy. This tension reflects the struggle between seeking moral clarity and preserving democratic neutrality.
- The findings mirror existing research. Oluwole (2019), Omilusi (2020), and Ogunbameru (2021) argue that religious institutions serve as civic educators, while scholars like Nwangwu and Duruji highlight consistent patterns of religiously motivated voting. Bratton and Kimenyi similarly emphasize the role of group identity in African electoral behaviour.
- Interviews revealed important internal debates. Many religious leaders resisted using the pulpit for partisan persuasion, insisting their role was to “guide conscience, not dictate choices.” This shows their awareness of religion’s unifying and divisive potential.
- Overall, religion significantly shaped turnout and political judgement in 2023 guiding moral evaluation, strengthening group belonging, and motivating participation. Yet it also raised concerns about polarization when used irresponsibly.

The study concludes that religion can enrich democratic participation when used ethically, but it poses risks when exploited for partisan purposes. Nigeria’s democratic future depends .

CONCLUSION

The 2023 presidential election reaffirmed that religion remains deeply woven into Nigeria's political fabric. Across Christian and Muslim communities, faith influenced turnout, shaped political decision-making, and directed civic enthusiasm. Voters relied heavily on religious institutions for moral guidance, emotional reassurance, and political clarity. While this reflects the enduring social authority of religious leaders, it also underscores the need for balance to prevent faith from becoming a tool of political division.

This research concludes that religion significantly shapes voter turnout by motivating participation, anchoring political preferences, and guiding perceptions of candidate credibility. Its influence is powerful, far-reaching, and often decisive. Yet for Nigeria's democracy to flourish, this influence must remain ethical, non-coercive, and grounded in values that strengthen inclusion rather than heighten polarization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Religious institutions should emphasize civic education rather than partisan persuasion. Because faith leaders hold significant moral authority within their communities, channeling that influence toward voter enlightenment rather than openly endorsing candidates can promote a healthier democratic culture. When religious institutions focus on teaching citizens about their rights, the importance of peaceful participation, and how to evaluate candidates based on competence and national interest, they help build a more informed electorate and reduce the tensions that often arise when religion is used as a

political tool. This shift from political messaging to civic guidance can strengthen trust, reduce divisive rhetoric, and contribute to a more mature democratic process in Nigeria.

Also, Political actors must exercise caution and refrain from exploiting religious differences for political gain, as such actions can deepen societal divisions, heighten tensions, and erode public trust in democratic institutions. In a diverse and multi-faith society like Nigeria, leaders have a responsibility to communicate with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that citizens of all religious backgrounds feel included, valued, and protected. Thoughtful and responsible messaging not only fosters national unity but also encourages peaceful participation in elections, strengthens civic cohesion, and reinforces the legitimacy and credibility of the democratic process. By prioritizing dialogue, fairness, and respect for religious plurality, political actors can contribute to a stable and participatory democratic environment.

Also, civic organizations should take a proactive role in designing and implementing community-based programs that directly address religious tensions and promote peaceful coexistence. By facilitating regular dialogue platforms, these organizations can bring together members of different faiths to share experiences, resolve conflicts, and develop mutual understanding. Such initiatives help to reduce polarization, counter misinformation, and foster a culture of tolerance and respect. Beyond conflict resolution, these programs can also enhance civic engagement, encouraging communities to participate responsibly in elections and other societal processes. By building trust, nurturing empathy, and promoting collaborative problem-solving, civic organizations can play a crucial role in creating a stable, inclusive, and harmonious environment where religious diversity strengthens rather than divides the society.

Also, Researchers should further explore regional differences in religious mobilization. Different parts of Nigeria experience faith, politics, and community leadership in unique ways, and these variations may help explain why turnout rates differ from one region to another. A deeper regional analysis would reveal how local traditions, religious leadership styles, and community structures shape voter motivation. Such work would not only strengthen understanding of turnout patterns but also provide more targeted insights for improving civic participation nationwide.

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APPENDIX

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE:

THE ROLE OF RELIGION ON VOTERS TURNOUT IN THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

Kindly provide basic information about yourself by ticking (✓) the option that best represents your personal details in each category.

- **SECTION A: Demography**

1. Gender

Male Female

2. Age

18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 55 and above

3. Religion

Christian. Islam Traditional

4. Educational level

Primary Secondary Tertiary postgraduate

5. Occupation

Student civil servant Business unemployed

Other specify: _____

6. Senatorial district

7.

Edo North Edo South Edo Central

Please read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by ticking (✓) the option that best represents your opinion.

Use the following response scale for all sections:

Scale	Response Category	Meaning
5	Strongly Agree (SA)	You completely agree with the statement.
4	Agree (A).	You mostly agree with the statement.
3	Undecided (U)	You are neutral or unsure.
2	Disagree (D).	You mostly disagree with the statement.
1	Strongly Disagree (SD)	You completely disagree with the statement.

S/N	Statement	5 SA	4 A	3 U	2 D	1 SD
1.	Religious institutions in my area encouraged members to vote					

	during the 2023 presidential election.					
2	Sermons and religious messages before the election motivated me to participate in voting.					
3	My place of worship played an active role in mobilizing people to register for the election.					
4	Religious institution in my area encourage members to vote during the 2023 presidential election.					
5	Religious gathering was used to share information about political candidates.					
6	I was influenced by religious institution to participate in voter mobilization campaigns.					

- **SECTION B: Religion and Voters Mobilization**

- **SECTION C: Voters Turnout Rate In Muslim And Christian Regions**

S/N	Statement	5 SA	4 A	3 U	2 D	1 SD
7	There was a high voters turnout in my community during the 2023 presidential election					
8	Some individuals in my community abstained from voting due to religious reasons					
9	Members of my religious group were generally					

	committed to participating in the election.					
10	Religious holidays, prayers, or gatherings affected voter turnout.					
11	Muslim-majority areas were more organized during voting.					
12	Christian-majority areas had stronger voter participation.					

• **SECTION D: Religion And Voting Behavior**

S/N	Statement	5 SA	4 A	3 U	2 D	1 SD
13	My religion influenced my choice to vote					
14	People vote for candidates from their religion.					
15	Religion affected people's loyalty to candidates.					
16.	Religion influenced political talks in my area.					
17.	People of different religions supported different parties.					
18.	Religion was more important than tribe in voting					

• **SECTION E: Voter's Opinion On Religious Influence.**

S/N	Statement	5 SA	4 A	3 U	2 D	1 SD
19.	Religion shaped how I saw the candidates.					

20.	Religion can help promote peace during elections.					
21.	Religion should guide political choices					
22.	Religious leaders have too much say in elections.					
23	Religion affects how I judge candidate credibility.					
24	Mixing religion and politics harms democracy.					

THANK YOU NOTE

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your honest responses are deeply appreciated and will be used solely for academic purposes.

**INTERVIEW: THE ROLE OF RELIGION ON VOTER TURNOUT IN THE 2023
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA**

Introduction:

Dear Participant,

I am conducting a research study on “The Role of Religion and Voter Turnout in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria.” This interview is designed to gather insights from

respected religious leaders like you, whose perspectives are vital in understanding how faith and religious institutions influence political participation in Nigeria.

Your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. There are no right or wrong answers — I only seek your honest opinions and experiences.

Thank you sincerely for taking the time to share your thoughts.

SECTION A: Background Information

(For classification and context)

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Religion: Christianity Islam Other (specify): _____
4. Occupation/Role: _____
5. State/Community: _____
6. Position in Religious or Community Organization (if any):

SECTION B: Religion And Voter Mobilization

1. How did your religious institution encourage members to participate in the 2023 presidential election?
2. Were there specific messages, sermons, or events organized to promote voter registration or participation?

3. In your view, what role should religious leaders play in political mobilization?

Section B: Voter Turnout in Muslim and Christian Communities

4. From your observation within your own community, how would you describe the level of voter turnout during the 2023 presidential election?
5. What factors do you think contributed to higher or lower turnout in these regions?

Section C: Relationship Between Religious Affiliation and Voter Turnout

6. To what extent do you believe religious affiliation influenced people's voting behavior in your community?
7. Did you notice that voters preferred candidates who shared their faith? Why or why not?

Section D: Perception of Religious Influence on Electoral Choices

8. How do you think religion shapes people's perception of political candidates in Nigeria?
9. What are your thoughts on the intersection of religion and politics — does it strengthen or weaken democracy?
10. In your opinion, how can religious influence be used positively to promote peace and national unity during elections?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSE AND THEY WILL BE USED SOLELY FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES.

