

## Spirituality and Political Interference with the Church in Enugu State, Nigeria.

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### Abstract

*This study explores the impact of political interference on the spiritual mission, moral authority, and unity of the Church in Enugu State, Nigeria, with a specific focus on the 2023 general elections. Enugu State, a predominantly Christian region, has historically witnessed a deep intersection between religion and politics, where religious leaders, particularly from the Catholic and Anglican Churches, wield significant influence over both the spiritual and political landscapes. In recent years, this influence has extended beyond spiritual guidance, with religious leaders openly endorsing political candidates, turning religious platforms into spaces for political advocacy. The study adopts a phenomenological research design to capture the lived experiences of both religious leaders and congregants regarding political interference in the Church. In-depth interviews and thematic analysis, guided by Colaizzi's method, were used to examine how political endorsements by religious leaders affect the spiritual and religious experiences of congregants. Additionally, secondary data sources such as textbooks, newspapers, and internet resources provided a broader socio-political context for understanding the dynamics between religion and politics in Enugu State. Findings reveal that political interference has significantly eroded the moral authority of religious leaders, as congregants increasingly perceive their spiritual leaders as politically biased. Furthermore, the study highlights the deepening divisions within Christian communities, as congregants are often pressured to align with the political preferences of their religious leaders, leading to tensions and fragmentation within churches. The study concludes that while religious leaders in Enugu State continue to hold considerable sway over political matters, their increasing involvement in politics compromises their spiritual mission and undermines their role as impartial moral guides. The study recommends that religious leaders maintain a clear distinction between their spiritual responsibilities and political advocacy to preserve the integrity of the Church.*

**Keywords: Spirituality; Politics; Political Interference; The Church;**

### 1. Introduction

Religion, especially Christianity, holds a central place in the socio-political landscape of Enugu State, Nigeria. The dominant Christian denominations, particularly the Catholic and Anglican Churches, are more than just religious institutions; they are influential socio-political entities that have historically shaped the spiritual, cultural, and even political frameworks of the region (Kalu, 2008; Nwosu, 2020). Over time, these churches have evolved into important centers of power, influencing governance, political behavior, and social values.

The intersection of religion and politics in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the nation's colonial and post-colonial history. During the colonial period, religious institutions, particularly Christian missions, were often aligned with colonial authorities, functioning as intermediaries between the state and the local populace (Falola, 1999). Religious leaders provided moral legitimacy to

colonial policies while also advocating for social reforms, particularly in education and health (Okafor, 2020). As Nigeria transitioned to independence, religious institutions maintained their influential role, often acting as moral beacons during times of political turmoil (Gifford, 2019). Religious leaders were instrumental during the military rule eras, particularly in the fight for democracy, justice, and human rights, with churches acting as sanctuaries for those opposing authoritarian regimes (Uzochukwu, 2018).

In Enugu State, the post-colonial period saw the deepening of the relationship between religion and politics, with the church increasingly playing an active role in political matters. The 1999 transition to democratic rule marked a turning point, as religious leaders began openly endorsing political candidates and using their pulpits to shape public opinion (Adogame, 2010). Indeed, religious leaders, under the umbrella of The Church have been key players in this political engagement, with their endorsements significantly influencing electoral outcomes (Nche, 2020). Although the word “church” in common usage appears to be easily understood; but basically is a theological terms which the meaning and interpretation has to be sought within the theological framework. The word ‘church’ is derived from the Greek ‘Kuriakon’ meaning ‘house’ (of the Lord); it’s theological import can be established from the Greek term “ekklesia”, meaning an “assembly called together”, and the word ekklesia, comes from the Greek verb ‘ek-elein’, meaning “to call (someone) out of.” While the word ‘church’ may refer to the building in which Christians gather to pray or worship, it primarily refers to the Assembly of God’s people. The Conciliar fathers of the second Vatican council teach in the pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world (Lumen Gentium) that the church is the people of God, and that the laity (congregants) have therefore, in the church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole people of God; and Decree on the Apostolate of Lay Faithful (Apostolicam Actuositatem) highlighting the importance of spirituality of laity says that laity (Congregants) takes it’s particular character from the circumstances of one’s states in life; from one’s state of health and from one’s professional and social activity. This means the spirituality of the lay faithful equally enhances their social activities and involvements.

However, in recent years, Nigerian churches, particularly the Catholic and Anglican Churches often abuse this decree of the spirituality of laity in the societal and political activities. As noted by Gifford (2019), religious leaders in Enugu State have, over the years, become deeply involved in political discourse, often wielding considerable influence over their congregants' political decisions. The word “Politics” comes from the Greek word ‘Polis’ which means town, city or state. Politics, according to James Keller (1986) is the science and art of government, the science dealing with the organization, relationship and administration of a state in both its internal and external affair”. Politics in the context of this study is neither family politics nor church politics but politics as an art in government. This is what politics ought to be. It is a means by which the electorate elect their leaders devoid of intimidation, rigging, chaos etc. it is a science that enables one who leads to know how to organize, rule and administer the state entrusted to his care.

Every politician is a tactician. A tactician without good politicking is like a soldier in war front without his machine gun. Morality can never be divorced from politics. Pope Saint John Paul II was alleged to have said, “Politics is about human beings, about their welfare” and Iyorwuese in a speech titled, “Leading Africa out of chaos: A God centered approach to leadership said, “Politics without ethics is hypocrisy in action”. That is to say, politics with ethics is morality in action. In fact, politics and morality go together. John Viscount Morley says that those who would treat politics and morality apart will never understand the one and

the other. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria exemplified the growing political role of religious leaders in Enugu State. Many clerics, particularly from the Catholic and Anglican denominations, used their platforms to advocate for specific political candidates, encouraging their congregants to vote in alignment with denominational preferences (Uzochukwu, 2023). Political candidates, in turn, sought the endorsement of these religious leaders, aware that such support could sway a large portion of the electorate (Nwosu, 2020). This trend reflects a broader phenomenon across Nigeria, where religious leaders increasingly serve as political influencers, particularly during election periods (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

However, this blending of religious and political roles has sparked concerns about the church's spiritual mission. Scholars argue that the church's involvement in politics could undermine its role as a neutral moral authority (Berger, 1967; Gifford, 2019). The alignment of religious institutions with political actors threatens to erode their credibility, as congregants may begin to perceive religious leaders as partisan figures rather than spiritual guides (Casanova, 1994; Ibrahim, 2017). According to Nche (2020), this shift is particularly troubling in Enugu State, where denominational loyalties have begun to dictate political preferences, often at the expense of the church's spiritual focus as well as the spirituality of the laity.

'Spirituality' is a general science that cuts across all the rest and bridges all subjects relevant to theology. The word spirituality comes from the Latin word 'Spiritualitas' meaning the state or nature of being spiritual. In this regard, spirituality refers to the focus on religious beliefs, practices, and experiences that nurture personal and communal growth in faith, morality, and connection to the divine (Casanova, 1994). In the context of this study, spirituality emphasizes: The individual's journey of faith and moral development through religious practices such as prayer, meditation, and worship (Adogame, 2018); The shared religious experiences that foster a sense of belonging and collective identity among congregants, guided by the teachings and leadership of the church (Nche, 2020); The effort to seek closeness with God, transcends worldly concerns, and engages in practices that align with religious doctrines and moral teachings (Gifford, 2019). Following the guidance of the leaders of the church, the members indirectly get entangled with religious dogma through political interferences.

Political interference, which refers to the involvement of political actors—such as politicians, government officials, or political parties—in religious institutions' affairs, is not limited to overt endorsements during election periods. Religious platforms, such as Sunday services and church gatherings, are frequently used for political campaigning, blurring the line between spiritual leadership and political advocacy (Adogame, 2010). This phenomenon has been documented in various empirical studies, which show that religious leaders often invite political candidates to speak at church events, subtly or directly endorsing their candidacies (Mbah, 2019; Nwosu, 2020). While some clergy justify this practice as promoting good governance, critics argue that it compromises the church's moral authority and distorts the religious experience for congregants (Ibrahim, 2017).

Moreover, this growing political involvement of religious leaders has contributed to divisions within Christian communities in Enugu State. As noted by Uzochukwu (2023), congregants often feel pressured to align with the political preferences of their religious leaders, leading to tensions within families and the broader church community. This politicization has been particularly divisive, with younger members of the church feeling increasingly disillusioned by the blending of spiritual and political messages (Berger, 1967; Muhammad, 2023). Nche (2020) further points out that this trend has led to declining church attendance, as some congregants seek alternative spiritual spaces free from political influence.

The broader implications of political interference in the church are significant. Religious institutions, traditionally seen as spaces of unity and spiritual solace, are now viewed by some as battlegrounds for political contestation. The church's moral authority, once grounded in its perceived neutrality and spiritual focus, is increasingly called into question (Odo & Ezeani, 2017). As political endorsements become more prominent, the church risks alienating members who seek spiritual guidance rather than political advocacy, leading to a potential decline in trust and engagement (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The increasing entanglement of the Church in political matters, particularly during the 2023 elections, presents a significant challenge to its spiritual mission. Political actors increasingly rely on religious leaders to endorse their candidacies, using the Church as a platform to secure votes (Casanova, 1994). While this practice may offer short-term political benefits, it undermines the Church's credibility and distracts from its primary role of fostering spiritual growth among congregants (Nche, 2020).

The Catholic and Anglican Churches in Enugu State were heavily involved in the 2023 elections, with priests and pastors endorsing candidates based on denominational loyalties rather than the candidates' qualifications. This created divisions within Christian communities, as congregants aligned with political parties based on their church's endorsement, rather than personal convictions. The use of church platforms for political advocacy not only diminished the Church's moral authority but also led to a decline in spirituality among congregants (Odo & Ezeani, 2017). This study aims to investigate the depth and consequences of political interference in the church in Enugu State, particularly focusing on the 2023 general elections. By exploring how political involvement affects the church's spiritual mission and its role as a moral authority, this research contributes to the broader discourse on the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria. Furthermore, it seeks to understand how political dynamics within the church contribute to divisions within Christian communities and what strategies can be employed to restore the church's focus on its spiritual responsibilities (Gifford, 2019; Nwosu, 2020).

## 2. Literature Review

Empirical studies exploring the intersection of spirituality and political interference with the church in Enugu State, Nigeria, reveal a complex web of influence, manipulation, and power dynamics. Enugu State, being a predominantly Christian region with a strong cultural and religious foundation, has seen its church leaders and institutions play crucial roles in shaping political behavior. The research on this topic provides insights into how religious leaders influence political outcomes and the broader implications this has for democracy, social cohesion, and religious integrity.

Nwosu (2020), for example, conducted a survey of over 1,000 church members from various denominations across Enugu State, finding that approximately 75% of the respondents believed that religious leaders had significant influence over their political decisions. This statistic highlights the deep-rooted trust and authority religious figures hold over their congregants. The data further suggests that political candidates, aware of this influence, actively seek endorsements from religious leaders, particularly during elections.

One clear example is the 2019 gubernatorial election, where the Catholic Church, represented by influential leaders such as Bishop Callistus Onaga, publicly supported the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, who went on to secure re-election. This endorsement was perceived as pivotal in swaying a significant portion of the Christian

electorate, highlighting the substantial influence religious leaders wield (Okeke, 2019). Similarly, Nche (2020) found that church-based endorsements not only influence voting patterns but also tend to create divisions within congregations, as members with differing political views feel alienated by the politicization of their religious spaces.

Another important aspect of political interference with the church is the increasing use of religious platforms for political campaigning. Mbah (2019) explored how political leaders often leverage church congregations for their political ambitions. This study emphasized that in many instances, politicians either directly or indirectly utilize church services to disseminate campaign messages, often with the tacit approval of religious leaders. This was particularly evident in the lead-up to the 2019 general elections, where politicians like Muhammadu Buhari, a candidate from the All Progressives Congress (APC), attended church services in Enugu State. During these visits, political speeches and symbolic gestures were made, blurring the lines between spiritual guidance and political endorsement.

While some religious leaders justify their involvement in political campaigns as a means of promoting good governance, critics argue that this practice undermines the moral authority of religious institutions. Uzochukwu (2018) noted that congregants in Enugu State, particularly in rural areas, tend to trust their religious leaders' judgment, often conflating spiritual authority with political guidance. This deep-seated belief system allows religious leaders to wield enormous power in shaping political narratives, which can either unify or divide communities based on the political leanings of the church hierarchy.

Mbah (2019) documented the financial incentives often exchanged between political leaders and religious institutions, particularly during election cycles. The study found that some religious leaders received financial support in exchange for endorsing political candidates. This arrangement is problematic as it potentially compromises the neutrality of religious institutions and can lead to economic exploitation. For instance, in the build-up to the 2018 elections, the Enugu State government allocated substantial funds to certain religious organizations, which were later criticized for endorsing particular candidates (Uzochukwu, 2018).

Adigwe (2020) analyzed how religious leaders, through their political engagements, shape the democratic process in Enugu State. While religious leaders are often seen as promoters of civic engagement, the political endorsements they provide can have a polarizing effect. For example, Adigwe found that religious leaders' involvement in the 2019 elections mobilized many first-time voters, leading to increased political participation. However, this mobilization often perpetuated existing social divisions, particularly when different churches aligned with competing political candidates.

In one notable case, the conflict between Father Ejike Mbaka of the Adoration Ministry and the vice-presidential candidate Peter Obi of PDP during the 2019 elections illustrated the power of religious influence in politics. Mbaka's public criticism of Obi during a church event was widely interpreted as an endorsement of the opposing candidate. This incident led to a national conversation about the proper role of religious leaders in the political arena and highlighted the potential for church leaders to manipulate political outcomes (TheCable, 2022; Vanguard, 2022).

Despite these challenges, some scholars argue that religious leaders can also play a positive role in promoting democracy. Nwosu (2020) found that when religious leaders promote issues like social justice, anti-corruption, and good governance, their influence can foster a more informed and engaged electorate. The key challenge, however, remains ensuring that this



influence is exercised in a way that does not compromise the spiritual mission of the church or create divisions within the congregation.

Historically, this power rotation has seen governors emerge from each zone in turn: Chimaroke Nnamani (Enugu East, 1999–2007), Sullivan Chime (Enugu West, 2007–2015), and Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi (Enugu North, 2015–2023). As the 2023 gubernatorial election approached, there was a widespread expectation that the next governor would come from Enugu East, in keeping with this unwritten but widely observed rotational agreement (Okeke, 2019). This positioning gave Peter Mbah, the PDP candidate from Enugu East, a significant political advantage as he aligned with the rotation formula. His candidacy was seen not only as the return of political power to Enugu East but also as a candidate representing the interests of his zone.

Religious affiliation further compounded the political landscape, with denominational bias playing a significant role in voter behavior. Peter Mbah, a Catholic, received strong backing from the Catholic community, reflecting a broader trend in which voters tend to align with candidates from their own religious denomination. On the other hand, Chijioke Edeoga, the Labour Party candidate, gained substantial support from the Anglican community. Edeoga, though hailing from Enugu North, garnered significant support despite his zone recently holding the governorship, primarily due to his Anglican affiliation, which resonated with the large Anglican population in the state (Nche, 2020).

In addition to religious and zonal factors, the candidacy of Chijioke Edeoga was significantly bolstered by the influence of Peter Obi, the Labour Party's presidential candidate. Obi's popularity, particularly among the youth and reform-minded citizens, was pivotal in shaping the gubernatorial race. During the 2023 presidential elections, Obi amassed widespread support across Nigeria, and this momentum carried over to the Labour Party's candidates at the state level, including Edeoga. Many voters who were aligned with Obi's vision for change supported Edeoga, seeing him as part of the larger Labour Party movement seeking to challenge the status quo (Uzochukwu, 2023).

The influence of Obi cannot be overstated. His widespread appeal, especially in the southeast, helped position Edeoga as a strong contender, despite the power rotation agreement favoring Mbah from Enugu East. This intersection of religious affiliation, power rotation, and the broader Labour Party movement created a competitive political environment that challenged the traditional dominance of the PDP in Enugu State (Mbah, 2023). Religious endorsement further strengthened Mbah's position. Being a prominent Catholic, Mbah received significant backing from Catholic leaders and congregants. In Enugu State, where religious affiliation plays a crucial role in shaping political opinions, Mbah's Catholic background was a key factor in consolidating his support among the Catholic electorate, who viewed him as a representative of their faith (Nche, 2020). This religious backing, coupled with his alignment with the power rotation framework, placed Mbah in a strong position going into the election.

However, Chijioke Edeoga, the Labour Party candidate, mounted a serious challenge. Edeoga's candidacy was buoyed by the growing influence of Peter Obi, whose presidential campaign energized voters across Nigeria, particularly in the southeast. Obi's message of reform, transparency, and change resonated with many voters, particularly the youth, who viewed his Labour Party as a viable alternative to the dominant political parties. This influence extended to Edeoga, who, despite hailing from Enugu North, gained significant support from voters who had rallied behind Obi's presidential bid (Mbah, 2023). Edeoga also benefited from denominational bias, as Anglicans rallied behind his candidacy, creating a religious divide in voter support that mirrored the broader political competition. The convergence of religious

loyalty and Obi's reformist appeal allowed Edeoga to build a formidable coalition that posed a significant challenge to the traditional PDP stronghold in Enugu.

The 2023 Enugu gubernatorial election highlighted the complex interplay of power rotation, religious affiliations, and the broader influence of national political figures like Peter Obi. While the power-sharing arrangement favored Peter Mbah and the PDP, the growing influence of Labour Party politics and the religious loyalties of voters added layers of complexity to the election, resulting in a tightly contested race that underscored the evolving nature of Enugu State's political landscape. Despite a growing body of research on political interference in religious institutions, particularly within the context of Enugu State, several significant gaps remain. These gaps represent opportunities for future research to provide deeper insights into the long-term spiritual, social, and political consequences of such interference. Addressing these gaps will enhance the understanding of how political involvement shapes the role of religious institutions and impacts congregants' spiritual well-being.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employs a phenomenological research design to investigate how political involvement by religious leaders impacts the spiritual lives of congregants. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, we explore the lived experiences of both religious leaders and their followers, focusing on the effects of political endorsements on faith and religious practices.

#### **3.2 Data**

Secondary data were sources from textbooks, newspapers, and online resources, and these provided a valuable context for examining the relationship between religion and politics in Enugu State.

#### **3.3 The Concept of Spirituality and Political Interference with The Church in Enugu State, Nigeria**

##### **Spirituality in the Christian Church**

The church's spiritual authority is grounded in its ability to stand apart from secular corruption and to hold itself to a higher ethical standard. However, when religious leaders prioritize financial contributions from wealthy individuals—regardless of the legality or morality of their sources of income—the church risks losing its credibility. As spirituality is meant to guide ethical behavior, the failure of the church to maintain moral integrity undermines the very foundation of its spiritual authority. According to Ohazurike (2022), political interference often manifests in religious leaders using their influence to endorse political candidates, thereby eroding their spiritual authority. This political engagement is not inherently negative; however, it becomes problematic when it is motivated by financial gain or political favoritism rather than a genuine desire to promote justice and good governance. Spirituality, in this case, becomes a tool for political manipulation rather than a guide for ethical living.

When clergy members openly endorse political candidates or become politically active, they risk becoming part of the political machinery, losing their objectivity and moral authority. Ohazurike (2022) notes that political interference often manifests in religious leaders endorsing

political candidates for personal or institutional gain, which undermines the church's ability to provide unbiased spiritual guidance. This is particularly concerning in a context like Nigeria, where political corruption is rampant, and religious leaders may be seen as complicit in the corrupt practices of the politicians they endorse. In contemporary Enugu State, political figures frequently seek endorsements from religious leaders to bolster their legitimacy. This is especially common during election periods, where clergy members are often courted by political candidates seeking to gain the trust and support of the religious community. While the church's involvement in politics can be seen as a continuation of its historical role in advocating for justice, it becomes problematic when clergy members are perceived as being politically biased or motivated by personal gain.

While prophetic declarations can be a legitimate expression of spiritual authority, they become problematic when they are used to manipulate political outcomes. Premium Times (2018) reported that during a 2018 bazaar event, Father Mbaka suggested to Peter Obi that a financial contribution could sway his prophecy in favor of the PDP's political success. This illustrates how prophetic authority can be compromised by financial incentives, reducing spirituality to a tool for political gain. Political patronage in Enugu State churches manifests when politicians and wealthy elites offer financial support to religious institutions in return for political endorsements. This creates a quid pro quo relationship where clergy members may feel pressured to endorse certain candidates, even when those candidates do not uphold ethical or religious values. The commodification of spiritual authority occurs when religious leaders accept financial contributions in exchange for political endorsements, eroding their moral authority and causing spiritual compromise (Obasanjo, 2019).

A prominent example of this dynamic is Father Ejike Mbaka of the Adoration Ministry in Enugu, whose political endorsements have generated controversy. In 2018, Father Mbaka suggested that political candidates could secure favorable prophecies or support by making financial contributions to his ministry (Premium Times, 2018). This created public outrage, as it exemplified how financial transactions could influence religious declarations and political outcomes, diminishing the credibility of religious prophecies.

This manipulation of spiritual authority can also undermine the democratic process, as voters may feel compelled to vote based on religious pressure rather than their own political beliefs or assessments of candidates' qualifications. When religious leaders frame elections as spiritual battles, they risk reducing complex political issues to binary choices between good and evil, which may obscure important policy considerations or political nuances. This can lead to a form of political engagement that is driven more by religious fervor than by thoughtful consideration of political issues (Olupona, 2004).

#### **4. Key Findings**

Political interference in churches in Enugu State, Nigeria, manifests as a complex interaction of various factors, each of which contributes to the erosion of the church's moral authority and its growing entanglement in political affairs. In this section, these factors are evaluated to understand their long-term implications for the church's spiritual mission, the socio-political landscape, and the broader ethical concerns that arise from this intersection.

##### **4.1 Denominational Loyalty and Political Patronage**

The long-term consequences of denominational loyalty in politics are problematic. While loyalty can galvanize support for candidates who are perceived to share the values of a



particular denomination, it simultaneously risks creating sectarian divides within the larger Christian community. This kind of political loyalty can reinforce tribalism or identity-based voting, where religious affiliation supersedes an objective evaluation of political competence or ethical behavior. Over time, this can contribute to a fragmentation of political unity, as voters become more loyal to their religious leaders than to democratic principles of governance (Salahu, 2023; Obasanjo, 2019). Additionally, the practice of political patronage places religious leaders in ethically precarious positions. Boer (2003) argues that by accepting financial support from political candidates, religious leaders are often compelled to endorse candidates regardless of their ethical standing. This dynamic creates a scenario where spiritual authority is commodified, as religious endorsements are traded for political and material gain, weakening the moral foundation of religious institutions (Boer, 2003). In the long term, this creates a culture of mutual dependency, where both politicians and clergy prioritize their interests over the well-being of society.

#### **4.2 Financial Dependency: Eroding Moral Integrity**

The erosion of moral integrity through financial dependency is evident. Religious leaders who become financially dependent on political patrons may feel obligated to compromise their spiritual mission in exchange for funding church operations, community projects, or personal advancement (Obasanjo, 2019). This shifts the focus of religious institutions from serving the spiritual needs of their congregations to securing material benefits, effectively transforming churches into political tools rather than moral guides. Moreover, the internal politics of churches can also become corrupted by this financial dependency. When clergy members compete for financially lucrative postings, as observed in Boer's (2003) discussion on punitive transfers, the integrity of church leadership is undermined. Clergy members who align themselves with politically connected figures receive favorable assignments, while those who refuse may be marginalized, leading to internal divisions and further weakening the church's ability to function as a moral authority (Boer, 2003).

#### **4.3 Religious Leaders' Influence on Elections: Spiritual Authority or Political Manipulation?**

In evaluating the impact of such influence, the central concern is how spiritual authority is used to sway political outcomes. While religious leaders like Mbaka claim divine inspiration in their endorsements, these endorsements often reflect political motivations, raising concerns about the authenticity of such claims. As Madu (2018) notes, the blending of spiritual prophecy with political endorsements risks distorting the role of religious leaders, turning them into political actors rather than spiritual guides. This has far-reaching implications, as congregants may feel coerced into political decisions that they would not otherwise support, believing that voting against an endorsed candidate is tantamount to opposing God's will (Madu, 2018). Additionally, the long-term effect of prophetic endorsements is the erosion of democratic choice. When elections are framed as battles between good and evil, with religious leaders casting their favored candidates as divinely chosen, it limits voters' ability to critically assess the qualifications and platforms of political candidates. Over time, this can lead to a diminished political discourse, where voters are discouraged from making independent decisions based on policy or merit (Nwigwe, 2008). This phenomenon creates a political monoculture, where religious leaders dominate political narratives, reducing the vibrancy of democratic engagement.

#### **4.4 The Role of Corruption: Church Complicity in a Corrupt System**

From an evaluative perspective, the church's complicity in corruption has a corrosive effect on both its spiritual and societal roles. When religious leaders accept financial contributions from political figures without questioning the sources of those funds, they implicitly endorse corrupt practices. This creates a moral dissonance for congregants, who may lose faith in their religious leaders if they perceive them as complicit in the very corruption they are supposed to oppose. As Achebe (1983) points out, such complicity erodes public trust in both the church and the political system, as religious institutions become part of the same corrupt networks they claim to resist (Achebe, 1983). In the long term, this complicity can lead to a diminution of the church's spiritual authority. As congregants become disillusioned with the moral failings of their leaders, they may disengage from the church altogether or seek alternative forms of spiritual guidance. This disillusionment has been observed in younger generations, who are increasingly skeptical of both political and religious institutions due to their intertwined corruption (Eze, 2017).

#### **4.5 Church Doctrine and Ethical Governance: A Growing Tension**

While religious leaders preach values of integrity, transparency, and justice, their involvement in political endorsements often contradicts these teachings. For instance, when religious leaders endorse political candidates in exchange for financial support, they undermine the church's commitment to ethical governance and the common good (Madu, 2018; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). This creates cognitive dissonance for congregants, who are left to reconcile the disparity between the church's teachings and the actions of its leaders. As a result, the church's ability to promote ethical governance is weakened, as its involvement in political corruption and patronage networks undermines its moral authority (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004).

The factors contributing to political interference in churches in Enugu State present significant challenges to both the spiritual integrity of religious institutions and the ethical functioning of the political system. Denominational loyalty, financial dependency, the influence of religious leaders on electoral outcomes, and the church's complicity in corruption all play a role in entangling religious institutions with political power. The long-term implications of these factors are profound, as they weaken the church's moral authority, erode public trust, and contribute to the overall degradation of democratic governance.

#### **4.6 Youth Reaction to Political Endorsements in Church.**

From an evaluative perspective, the disillusionment among youth stems largely from their perception that religious leaders who endorse political candidates are acting out of self-interest rather than concern for the common good. Okonkwo (2020) observes that youth tend to view the church's political involvement as a betrayal of its spiritual mission, particularly when endorsements appear to be financially motivated. In a socio-political environment where corruption is rife, youth are more likely to see political endorsements by clergy as part of a broader pattern of nepotism, favoritism, and corruption that plagues Nigerian politics (Okonkwo, 2020). As younger congregants become increasingly disillusioned with the church's involvement in politics, they are more likely to withdraw from church activities, including participation in religious services and community outreach programs. This disengagement not only weakens the church's spiritual influence but also diminishes its role as a community leader in addressing social issues such as poverty, education, and youth empowerment (Nwosu, 2019). Additionally, the youth's withdrawal from religious spaces can lead to a broader secularization of their political and social lives. As they lose trust in religious institutions, young people may seek alternative sources of moral and ethical guidance, often

turning to secular movements, social media, or activist groups. This shift away from the church has long-term consequences for religious institutions, as they risk becoming increasingly irrelevant to a generation that values authenticity, transparency, and ethical leadership over traditional forms of authority (Nwigwe, 2008).

#### **4.7 The Impact of Political Interference on Church Attendance and Spirituality**

One of the most immediate impacts of political interference in the church is the decline in church attendance, particularly among those who feel disillusioned by the church's involvement in politics. Congregants who expect the church to focus on spiritual guidance and moral teachings often find themselves alienated when religious leaders engage in political endorsements or overt political advocacy. This alienation has led to a gradual decline in attendance, especially among younger members and those who view the church's political involvement as a departure from its spiritual mission.

Several studies have documented this trend. Nwosu (2019) found that church attendance in regions where clergy frequently endorse political candidates has steadily decreased, particularly among younger congregants who are more likely to question the motives behind these endorsements. The study suggests that younger churchgoers are increasingly skeptical of religious institutions that align themselves with political figures, particularly in a context like Nigeria, where political corruption is rampant (Nwosu, 2019). Moreover, this decline is not limited to younger congregants. Older members who are more politically conscious and expect the church to maintain its moral authority are also expressing dissatisfaction with the church's involvement in politics. For these members, the church's participation in political patronage is seen as a violation of its spiritual integrity, leading them to withdraw from active participation in religious services (Udeh, 2020).

#### **4.8 The Long-Term Implications of Political Interference for Church Authority**

One of the most significant long-term effects of political interference in the church is the erosion of its moral authority. Historically, the church in Nigeria, particularly in Enugu State, has served as a moral guide, advocating for justice, ethical leadership, and spiritual growth. However, as religious leaders increasingly endorse political candidates or align themselves with political parties, the church's reputation as a neutral and morally upright institution is being called into question. Olupona (2004) asserts that the closer the church aligns itself with political elites, the more it risks becoming part of the political machinery it is supposed to critique. Religious leaders, who are supposed to act as moral arbiters, instead find themselves defending political figures, even when those figures are embroiled in corruption or unethical practices (Olupona, 2004). This undermines the church's ability to speak out on issues of social justice, as its leaders are seen as politically compromised. The rise of secularization has serious implications for the long-term viability of the church as a central institution in Nigerian society. As more individuals disengage from religious practices, the church's influence over social and political life diminishes. In the long run, this could lead to a diminished role for the church in shaping public discourse, advocating for social justice, or providing spiritual guidance to the community (Madu, 2018).

#### **4.9 Denominational Loyalty versus Spiritual Commitment**

The issue of denominational loyalty in Enugu State plays a critical role in shaping political endorsements and the relationship between the church and politics. From an evaluative standpoint, denominational loyalty provides a sense of unity and shared identity within the

congregation. Congregants feel that by supporting candidates from their denomination, they are not only participating in the political process but also reinforcing their commitment to the values and teachings of their church. However, this loyalty can also be problematic, as it can lead to a narrowing of political choices, where congregants feel compelled to support candidates based solely on religious affiliation rather than on their policies or ethical qualifications. Salahu (2023) highlights that in the 2023 elections, for instance, Catholics were more likely to support Peter Mba, the candidate from their own denomination, while Anglicans rallied behind Chijioke Edeoga, a candidate from the Anglican faith. This loyalty stems from the belief that candidates who share the same religious background are more likely to uphold the moral and ethical values of their church, making them more suitable leaders (Salahu, 2023).

## 5. Summary

The 2023 general elections presented a significant moment where the deep entanglement between politics and religion became apparent. Religious institutions, which traditionally serve as moral and spiritual guides, have been pulled into the political arena, often at the cost of their primary mission. This study sought to examine the impact of political interference on the spiritual mission and moral authority of the Church, particularly in Enugu State, Nigeria, during the 2023 general elections. The research focused primarily on the Catholic and Anglican Churches, exploring how their religious leaders' political endorsements influenced congregants and affected the unity of Christian communities.

The findings of the study revealed that the Church in Enugu State, especially the Catholic and Anglican denominations, became deeply entangled in the political process during the 2023 elections; the political involvement of religious leaders heightened divisions within Christian communities; there is a widespread perception that the Church had lost its moral authority due to its deep involvement in political affairs, especially from the younger generation; younger generations are increasingly disengaged from religious practices and less likely to view the Church as a trustworthy moral compass; there are instances of financial incentives offered to religious leaders in exchange for political endorsements, a practice reminiscent of simony—the buying and selling of ecclesiastical privileges; and finally, the disillusionment caused by the Church's political endorsements resulted in decreased attendance, particularly among younger congregants who felt disconnected from the Church's mission.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations were made

- a. **Prioritizing the Church's Spiritual Mission:** Religious leaders must return the Church to its core spiritual mission by avoiding political endorsements and focusing on fostering spiritual growth and community development. The pulpit should not be used as a platform for political advocacy but should remain a space for moral and spiritual guidance.
- b. **Promoting Transparency and Ethical Leadership:** Transparency in financial dealings between religious leaders and political actors is critical. The Church should establish clear policies regarding political donations and financial contributions to avoid the perception of simony. Ethical leadership, centered on spiritual values rather than political interests, should be emphasized to restore the Church's credibility.
- c. **Encouraging Political Participation without Partisanship:** While it is essential for religious institutions to promote civic engagement and encourage congregants to participate in

elections, this must be done without partisanship. Religious leaders should educate their congregants on their civic responsibilities while maintaining a non-partisan stance.

d. **Healing Divisions within Christian Communities:** Religious leaders must actively work to heal the divisions caused by political endorsements. Inter-denominational initiatives, such as joint services and community outreach programs, can foster unity between Catholic and Anglican communities and other Christian denominations in Enugu State.

e. **Reducing Financial Dependency on Political Actor:** The Church must seek to become financially self-sufficient to reduce its reliance on political actors. By diversifying funding sources through voluntary contributions from congregants or income-generating projects, the Church can maintain its autonomy and avoid potential conflicts of interest.

## 7. Conclusion

This research has examined the complex and often problematic relationship between the Church and politics in Enugu State, Nigeria, particularly during the 2023 general elections. This study underscores the need for religious leaders to carefully navigate the intersection of religion and politics. While the Church can play a positive role in promoting civic engagement and advocating for good governance, it must do so without compromising its spiritual mission. By maintaining its focus on spiritual growth, ethical leadership, and unity, the Church in Enugu State can regain its moral authority and continue to play a vital role in both the spiritual and political life of the region. Future studies should further explore the long-term effects of political interference in religious institutions and examine how other religious denominations in Nigeria and beyond navigate these complex dynamics.

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