

Christian politicians and good governance in Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the relationship between Christian politicians and good governance in Nigeria. Despite the significant number of Christians in Nigerian politics, the country still struggles with corruption, inequality, and ineptitude in governance. This paper aims at investigating the role of Christian values and principles in shaping government practices and influence of Christian politicians in Nigeria. This paper employs a mixed research approach including interviews and focus group discussions with Christian politicians, religious leaders, and civil society organizations. This research is grounded in the theoretical framework of Christian Ethics and Political Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The findings show that though Christians have been participating in politics and occupied leadership positions, a lot is still required from them. In conclusion, Christian politicians in Nigeria have crucial roles to play in promoting good governance and ensuring that the country's leadership reflects Christian values and principles. By applying biblical teachings to their governance practices, they can help create a more just, equitable, and peaceful society. It is therefore recommended that Christian politicians in Nigeria show that

they are light, salt and promote good governance by maintaining and demonstrating: integrity and accountability :Demonstrate transparency, honesty, and accountability in all governance practices, Christian Values-Based Policy : Formulate and implement policies reflecting Christian values like love, justice, and compassion, Inclusive Leadership : Foster inclusive decision-making processes, engaging diverse stakeholders and perspectives, Mentorship and Training : Develop mentorship programs, training, and capacity-building initiatives for Christian politicians and public servants , interfaith dialogue : encourage interfaith dialogue and collaboration to promote peaceful coexistence and national unity, Citizen engagement, foster active citizen participation in governance through education, awareness, and empowerment ,Prayer and Reflection: regularly seek divine guidance through prayer and reflection, ensuring governance decisions align with Christian values, collaboration and Partnerships :build partnerships with civil society, religious organizations, and international bodies to enhance governance and development,constitutional reform: advocate for constitutional reforms promoting Christian values, human rights, and good governance, and accountability mechanisms :establish robust accountability mechanisms, including independent anti-corruption agencies and judicial systems.

Keywords: *Christian Ethics, Christian politicians, Good governance, Nigeria, political theology*

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and one of its largest democracies, continues to grapple with chronic governance challenges such as corruption, inequality, insecurity, and weak institutional structures. Despite its immense natural and human resources, governance in Nigeria has often fallen short of promoting justice, transparency, and the common good. Paradoxically, this crisis persists in a nation where religion—especially Christianity and Islam—play a central role in both public and private life. Christians constitute a significant proportion of Nigeria's population and are substantially represented in its political class. Yet, the lived reality of governance in the country raises pressing questions about the practical impact of Christian values on political leadership and public administration.

This study explores the relationship between Christian politicians and good governance in Nigeria, critically assessing the extent to which Christian ethical principles are translated into governance practices. The concept of good governance is typically associated with accountability, transparency, equity, rule of law, and citizen participation. These ideals align closely with Christian teachings on justice, stewardship, compassion, and the pursuit of the common good. Yet, the gap between confession and practice remains troublingly wide in Nigeria's political landscape.

The theological foundations of this study are grounded in Christian Ethics and Political Theology, particularly drawing from the works of Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Niebuhr's "Christian realism" acknowledges the complexity of human nature and the corrupting influence of power, urging Christians in politics to balance idealism with practical wisdom. As Niebuhr aptly argued, "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."¹ Similarly, Bonhoeffer's call for responsible action and costly discipleship offers a moral imperative for Christian engagement in public life that transcends passive piety and calls for sacrificial leadership.²

In Nigeria, the presence of Christians in key political offices—governors, legislators, ministers, and even past presidents—raises the expectation that their influence should contribute to the promotion of good governance. However, the persistence of poor governance indicators suggests either a failure of Christian political engagement or a disconnect between faith and practice. This research, therefore, interrogates the integrity and effectiveness of Christian politicians in embodying and advancing the values of their faith within Nigeria's political system.

Methodologically, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with Christian politicians, clergy, and civil society actors. This enables a nuanced understanding of the experiences, motivations, and challenges that shape the ethical conduct and policy choices of Christian politicians. The study also benefits from secondary data sources including policy documents, public speeches, and theological literature to assess how Christian principles are articulated and implemented in governance processes.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the broader discourse on religion and politics in Africa by offering critical insights into how Christian politicians can serve as agents of transformation. Rather than viewing politics as a morally compromised sphere, this study aligns with the Christian vocation to be salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13–16), bringing redemptive witness to the public square. It argues that Christian politicians in Nigeria must be held to higher standards of integrity, service, and accountability, not merely by virtue of their religious identity, but because of the moral demands of the gospel they profess.

In conclusion, this paper contends that Christian engagement in politics must go beyond nominal affiliation to entail a radical commitment to justice, compassion, and the common good. The implications of this study are both theological and practical, offering concrete recommendations for how Christian politicians can bridge the gap between belief and practice to foster a more just and democratic Nigeria.

Clarification of Terms

Christian Ethics

Christian ethics refers to the moral principles and values derived from the teachings of the Bible, the life and example of Jesus Christ, and the theological traditions of the Church. It provides a framework for discerning right from wrong, especially in social, political, and personal conduct. Christian ethics emphasizes virtues such as justice, love, truthfulness, humility, and service to others. In the context of politics, Christian ethics calls for leaders to act justly, serve sacrificially, and pursue the common good.¹

Christian Politicians

Christian politicians are individuals who publicly identify with the Christian faith and participate in the political governance of a state. These individuals may hold elected or appointed positions and are expected to allow their Christian convictions to influence their political conduct, legislative decisions, and leadership styles. Their faith ideally serves as a moral compass guiding their policy-making, public service,

and response to ethical dilemmas.² However, the term does not assume moral superiority, and not all self-identified Christian politicians consistently apply Christian ethical principles in governance.

Good Governance

Good governance encompasses the processes, institutions, and practices through which a society is managed in an accountable, transparent, inclusive, and equitable manner. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), good governance is characterized by participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision.³ In Christian discourse, good governance is closely linked to biblical themes of stewardship, justice, servant leadership, and the protection of the vulnerable.⁴

Political Theology

Political theology is a branch of theology that explores the relationship between religious beliefs and political authority, public policy, and social order. It seeks to understand how theological concepts such as justice, power, sin, redemption, and the kingdom of God intersect with political life and civic responsibility. Political theology critically evaluates the ethical responsibilities of Christians in politics and challenges the misuse of religion for political gain.⁵ The works of theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer have profoundly influenced political theology, emphasizing realism, responsibility, and prophetic engagement.⁶

Nigeria

Nigeria is a West African nation with over 200 million people, marked by religious plurality, ethnic diversity, and a federal democratic system. The country is roughly divided between Muslims (primarily in the North) and Christians (primarily in the South and Middle Belt), with traditional religious practices also present. Despite its economic potential and religious fervor, Nigeria faces persistent issues of corruption, insecurity, weak institutions, and poor governance.⁷ The socio-political climate of Nigeria makes the intersection of faith and governance both significant and complex.

Christianity and Good Governance in Nigeria

Christianity has had a profound and enduring influence on Nigerian society since the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 19th century. The Christian faith has contributed significantly to the country's moral, educational, and political development. As one of the two dominant religions in Nigeria, Christianity plays a vital role in shaping the conscience and character of individuals, including those who ascend to political leadership. Given its emphasis on justice, accountability, compassion, and service, Christianity inherently advocates for the principles of good governance. However, Nigeria continues to face persistent challenges related to governance, prompting critical reflection on the relationship between Christian faith and public leadership.

Theological Foundations of Good Governance

From a biblical perspective, governance is instituted by God for the well-being of society (Rom. 13:1–7). Christian theology teaches that rulers are God's servants for the good of the people and are expected to exercise authority with justice and equity. The Hebrew Bible frequently emphasizes the responsibility of leaders to uphold righteousness, defend the poor, and resist oppression (Ps. 72:1–4; Isa. 1:17). Jesus Christ exemplified servant leadership (Mark 10:42–45), which offers a powerful model for political governance based not on self-interest but on sacrificial service and the pursuit of the common good.

Christian political theology further explores the tension between faith and political power. Reinhold Niebuhr's "Christian realism" underscores the moral ambiguity and fallibility of human institutions, warning against utopian idealism while insisting that Christian values must still inform social and political engagement.¹ Similarly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer advocates for "responsible action," where Christians must be willing to confront evil and injustice, even at personal cost, in both church and society.² These theological perspectives underscore the potential for Christianity to be a transformative force in governance.

The Nigerian Context

Nigeria's political landscape is marked by ethnic rivalries, religious pluralism, and systemic corruption. Despite being constitutionally secular, religion exerts considerable influence on national affairs. Christianity, predominantly practiced in Southern Nigeria and parts of the Middle Belt, is represented in political leadership at various levels. Numerous state governors, legislators, and national leaders—including former presidents—have publicly identified as Christians. Churches and Christian organizations also play a role in civic education, social services, and advocacy for justice.

Nevertheless, the quality of governance in Nigeria has often fallen short of Christian ethical standards. Corruption, nepotism, insecurity, and disregard for human rights remain endemic.³ The disconnect between Christian identity and political behavior among many politicians raises serious concerns about the authenticity and application of Christian principles in governance. In many cases, Christian politicians have failed to serve as moral exemplars or reformers of public institutions.

Christianity's Contributions to Good Governance

Despite these challenges, Christianity has the theological, institutional, and moral resources to contribute significantly to good governance in Nigeria. These contributions can be discussed under several headings:

Moral Formation and Conscience Building

The Church plays a critical role in shaping the moral conscience of individuals. Through preaching, catechesis, and social teachings, Christian communities instill values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and humility.⁴ If effectively internalized, these values can inform ethical leadership and public accountability.

Advocacy and Prophetic Witness

Historically, Christian leaders and churches have acted as moral voices against injustice. The prophetic tradition of the Church can serve as a check on political excesses and impunity. Notable examples include the Catholic Bishops Conference

of Nigeria and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which have often spoken out against corruption, electoral malpractice, and social injustice.⁵

Institution Building and Social Services

Christian missions established many of Nigeria's oldest schools, hospitals, and social service agencies. These institutions have not only provided essential services but also modeled organizational integrity and accountability. By extending this tradition to governance, Christian values can influence public institutions to function more effectively and ethically.⁶

Mentorship and Leadership Development

Christian organizations can nurture future leaders through mentorship, leadership training, and value-based education. By prioritizing character formation and civic responsibility, the Church can prepare competent and principled individuals for public service.

Promoting Democratic Participation

Christianity encourages active participation in societal life. Churches can educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities, encourage voter participation, and foster dialogue across ethnic and religious divides. This supports democratic governance and social cohesion.

Challenges to Christian Influence on Governance

Several obstacles hinder the transformative influence of Christianity on governance in Nigeria:

Nominal Christianity: Many politicians identify as Christians for cultural or political reasons rather than from genuine conviction. This weakens the integrity of their witness in public office.⁷

Ethno-Religious Politics: Politicians often exploit religious identity for electoral advantage, deepening divisions and undermining the ethical teachings of Christianity.

Weak Discipleship: Churches sometimes emphasize prosperity and personal success over character development and social responsibility. This distorts the gospel's ethical imperatives.

Fear and Complicity: In some cases, Church leaders are reluctant to challenge political leaders due to financial dependency or fear of retaliation.

Way Forward

To strengthen the link between Christianity and good governance in Nigeria, several steps are necessary:

Renewed Theological Emphasis: Christian leaders must teach a holistic gospel that includes justice, integrity, and public accountability.

Institutional Collaboration: Churches should partner with civil society and governmental institutions to promote transparency, voter education, and anti-corruption initiatives.

Holding Politicians Accountable: Christian communities should develop accountability structures for members in public office.

Training and Formation: Seminaries and theological institutions should incorporate civic education, political ethics, and public theology into their curricula.

Christianity has the potential to shape good governance in Nigeria through its ethical teachings, institutional resources, and prophetic role. However, for this potential to be realized, Christian politicians must embody the principles of their faith in tangible and consistent ways. The Church must also rise beyond institutional survival and reclaim its prophetic mandate to serve as a beacon of justice, truth, and compassion. By doing so, Christianity can significantly contribute to a more just, peaceful, and accountable Nigerian society.

The Christian Politicians in Nigeria.

Christian politicians in Nigeria represent a significant portion of the nation's political class due to the country's large Christian population, particularly in the southern and

central regions. Their presence in political leadership—from local government to the presidency—suggests a potential to influence governance outcomes positively through values informed by Christian teachings. However, the actual impact of Christian politicians on good governance remains a subject of concern and scholarly inquiry.

Historical and Demographic Context

Nigeria is religiously diverse, with Christianity and Islam being the two dominant faiths. According to the Pew Research Center, Christians make up nearly half of Nigeria's population, and this religious identity often intersects with political affiliation and leadership.¹ Since independence in 1960, Christian politicians such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, General Yakubu Gowon, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, and Goodluck Jonathan have played prominent roles in Nigerian politics. Despite these leaders' religious backgrounds, their political legacies are mixed with both commendable achievements and criticisms related to corruption, weak institutions, and systemic inefficiency.

Christian Identity and Political Conduct

Christianity espouses values such as honesty, justice, servant leadership, and compassion. These values are grounded in biblical teachings such as Micah 6:8 (“do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God”) and Romans 13:1–7 (regarding submission to governing authorities and fulfilling civic responsibilities). However, a critical examination reveals a gap between profession and practice among many Christian politicians in Nigeria.

Theologian John Stott warns that when Christians engage in politics without moral integrity and biblical convictions, they contribute to the secularization and moral decay of governance.² Christian politicians, therefore, must guard against the compartmentalization of faith from public duty—a phenomenon that leads to moral compromise and the betrayal of public trust.

Challenges Facing Christian Politicians

Several challenges hinder Christian politicians from fully embodying Christian values in governance. These include:

Systemic Corruption: Nigeria ranks poorly on global corruption indices, and political office is often viewed as a route to personal enrichment.³ Many Christian politicians, unfortunately, succumb to these pressures.

Ethno-Religious Politics: The intertwining of religion and ethnicity complicates the role of Christian politicians, who may feel pressure to serve narrow interests rather than the common good.

Lack of Discipleship and Accountability: Many Christian politicians operate without robust spiritual mentoring or accountability structures. The Church often celebrates their political success without providing ongoing discipleship or prophetic guidance.

Christian Political Theology and Ethical Responsibility

Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism offers a sobering reminder that while sin corrupts all human institutions, Christian politicians must strive for justice as the highest public good.⁴ Niebuhr acknowledges the tension between moral idealism and political pragmatism but insists that love must translate into justice in the public sphere.

Similarly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of responsibility calls Christian leaders to act on behalf of others, even when it involves risk and sacrifice. For Bonhoeffer, the Church must not only speak but also act on behalf of the oppressed.⁵ In Nigeria, where governance often fails the poor and marginalized, Christian politicians must see public office as a divine calling to serve.

Opportunities for Transformation

Despite the challenges, there are opportunities for Christian politicians in Nigeria to reform the system:

Servant Leadership: Inspired by Jesus' example (Mark 10:45), Christian leaders should model humility and service rather than domination.

Value-Based Policy Making: Policies rooted in love, justice, and compassion can promote equity and social cohesion.

Mentorship and Discipleship: Churches and Christian institutions should provide platforms for equipping emerging leaders with theological and ethical training.

Interfaith Collaboration: Christian politicians must engage with leaders of other faiths to promote national unity, peace, and tolerance.

Christian politicians in Nigeria occupy a crucial space within the nation's sociopolitical framework. However, their effectiveness in promoting good governance depends on the degree to which they align their political conduct with biblical values. It is not enough to claim a Christian identity; they must embody Christlike virtues in public life. The Church has a critical role in nurturing, supporting, and holding these leaders accountable. When Christian politicians act as true stewards of God's justice and righteousness, they can be agents of transformation in Nigeria's complex and fragile democratic landscape.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and theological insights explored in this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and integrity of Christian politicians in promoting good governance in Nigeria:

Promote Integrity and Accountability in Public Office

Christian politicians should actively model ethical governance rooted in biblical values. They must commit to transparency, honesty, and accountability in all their dealings, understanding that public office is a sacred trust.

As Reinhold Niebuhr argues, while perfection is unattainable in politics, striving for justice and integrity is essential to Christian witness in public life.¹

Develop Value-Based Policies Rooted in Christian Ethics

Christian politicians should champion policies grounded in biblical principles such as love, justice, compassion, and service to the marginalized (cf. Micah 6:8; Luke 4:18–19). Such policies should address inequality, poverty, corruption, and insecurity.

John Stott reminds us that Christian public engagement must be deeply ethical and socially responsible, avoiding both privatized piety and political compromise.²

Encourage Inclusive and Participatory Leadership

Christian politicians must foster inclusive governance by engaging diverse ethnic, religious, and social groups. This includes consulting grassroots communities and civil society in policy formation and implementation.

Inclusive leadership is essential for justice and peace in pluralistic societies like Nigeria (Matt. 22:39; Gal. 3:28).³

Establish Mentorship and Leadership Development Programs

Churches and Christian institutions should create intentional mentorship structures to nurture young Christians aspiring to political leadership. Training programs should include political theology, ethics, and public administration.

As Bonhoeffer emphasized, leadership must be formed through disciplined responsibility, sacrificial service, and community accountability.⁴

Promote Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Tolerance

Christian politicians should actively engage with Muslim, traditionalist, and other religious communities to foster peace and national unity. Building bridges across religious lines is not only politically wise but biblically mandated (Rom. 12:18).

Interfaith dialogue enhances national cohesion and mitigates sectarian violence, especially in religiously diverse nations like Nigeria.⁵

Encourage Citizen Engagement and Political Education

Christians in public office should support civic education campaigns that empower citizens to demand accountability, participate in governance, and understand their democratic rights and responsibilities.

Civic engagement is essential for the health of any democracy, and Christian politicians can lead in educating the public about justice and rights.⁶

Integrate Prayer and Reflection in Leadership Practice

Governance must be undergirded by prayer, reflection, and spiritual discernment. Christian politicians should regularly seek God's wisdom and align their decisions with biblical truths.

Scripture teaches that leaders are stewards of God's authority and must seek divine direction (Prov. 3:5–6; James 1:5).⁷

Build Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations

Christian politicians should collaborate with faith-based organizations, civil society groups, development agencies, and international bodies to implement reforms and promote sustainable development.

Effective governance requires synergy between the Church, state, and civil society for holistic societal transformation.⁸

Advocate for Constitutional and Institutional Reforms

Christian politicians should advocate for legal frameworks that uphold justice, equity, human dignity, and the rule of law. Reforms should strengthen institutions like the judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, and electoral bodies.

Structural justice requires reforming unjust laws and systems that perpetuate oppression and inequality.⁹

Establish Robust Accountability Mechanisms

To fight corruption, Christian politicians should champion the establishment of independent anti-corruption bodies, judicial integrity mechanisms, and public performance monitoring frameworks.

Accountability is not merely a legal obligation but a moral duty for those entrusted with leadership (Luke 12:48).¹⁰

Conclusion

The findings of this study have demonstrated that Christian politicians occupy strategic positions in Nigeria's political landscape, yet the nation continues to grapple

with the entrenched issues of corruption, injustice, and misgovernance. While the Christian faith offers a rich ethical and theological foundation—rooted in principles of justice, service, integrity, and the common good—there remains a significant disconnect between professed Christian beliefs and political conduct among many officeholders.

Drawing from the Christian ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr and the political theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, this paper underscores the moral responsibility of Christian politicians to embody their faith in the public sphere. As public servants, they are called not only to personal piety but also to prophetic and transformative leadership. Niebuhr's realism reminds Christian politicians of the limitations of human nature and institutions, yet insists on the necessity of justice as a public virtue.¹ Bonhoeffer's insistence on responsible action compels believers to confront injustice courageously, even when it comes at great personal cost.² These theological insights provide a compelling vision for integrating Christian convictions into public governance.

The role of Christian politicians, therefore, must transcend nominal affiliation or religious rhetoric. They must be salt and light in a society plagued by darkness and decay (Matt. 5:13–16). Their leadership should be marked by transparency, justice, compassion, and humility. They must build policies that reflect Christ-centered values, create space for inclusive governance, and cultivate systems of accountability. Furthermore, they must engage in continuous prayer and reflection, seek mentorship and capacity development, and partner with civil society and religious institutions to advance national progress.

If Christian politicians in Nigeria genuinely embrace their spiritual mandate and apply biblical teachings to governance, they can contribute to the renewal of Nigeria's political culture. By doing so, they will not only foster good governance but also restore public trust and promote the flourishing of all citizens.

Ultimately, the challenge lies not in the absence of Christian politicians, but in the scarcity of those who are both competent and committed to enacting the radical implications of their faith in public office. As the Church continues to nurture and

hold such leaders accountable, a new era of justice, peace, and godly leadership in Nigeria is possible.

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