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POLITICS AMONG RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES-A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT: The relationship between religious scholarship and political participation has remained an important subject of intellectual and practical debate in Muslim societies. Throughout Islamic history, Muslim scholars have participated in governance, public administration, political consultation, social reform and the articulation of public morality. In contemporary Nigeria, the involvement of Islamic scholars in political activities and government institutions has generated considerable discussion concerning the compatibility of religious scholarship with political engagement. While some regard such participation as an important avenue for promoting justice, accountability, moral values and good governance, others express concerns about political compromise, loss of scholarly independence, partisan divisions and the possible erosion of public confidence in religious leadership.

This paper examines the prospects and challenges of political participation among Islamic scholars, using Nigeria as its principal case study. It adopts a qualitative research methodology based on historical analysis, documentary research and selected case studies. Six Nigerian Islamic scholars are considered: Professor Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami, Professor Ishaq Oloyede, Professor Salisu Shehu, Professor Bashir Aliyu Umar, Professor Isa Muhammad Maishanu and Dr. Jabir Sani Maihula. Their different experiences of public

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administration, institutional leadership, religious advocacy and academic engagement provide an opportunity to examine the diverse ways in which Islamic scholars interact with political and governmental institutions. Drawing upon the Qur'an, Sunnah, classical Islamic political thought and contemporary Nigerian realities, the paper argues that political participation by Islamic scholars should be assessed through the principles of justice, public interest, accountability, competence, integrity and independence. It maintains that neither unconditional political participation nor absolute political withdrawal provides an adequate framework for evaluating the responsibilities of religious scholars in modern society. Rather, their engagement should be guided by Islamic ethical principles and the objectives of Shariah, particularly the preservation of religion, life, intellect, property and human dignity.

Keywords: *Religious scholars, politics, Nigeria, Islamic scholars, governance, public administration*

1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and politics has historically constituted one of the most significant areas of discussion in Islamic intellectual and political thought. Unlike approaches that consider religion and political administration as entirely separate spheres, Islamic political philosophy recognizes the importance of moral and religious principles in the administration of public affairs. Consequently, Muslim scholars have historically played different roles in society, including religious instruction, judicial administration, political consultation, public advocacy, conflict resolution and, in some circumstances, direct participation in government.

The involvement of religious scholars in political affairs, however, has never been free from controversy. While some scholars have considered political engagement necessary for the promotion of justice and the protection of public interests, others have expressed reservations about the dangers of political association, particularly where political authority conflicts with religious principles. The tension between maintaining scholarly independence and participating in political administration therefore remains an important question in Islamic political discourse.

In Nigeria, this relationship has acquired particular significance because of the country's religious diversity, political complexity and the historical influence of Islamic scholarship,

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especially in Northern Nigeria. Islamic scholars have traditionally exercised considerable influence through religious institutions, Islamic educational establishments, preaching, community leadership and public mobilisation. Their engagement with political authorities has taken different forms, ranging from advising political leaders and participating in public administration to holding governmental appointments and contributing to national policy discussions.

The contemporary Nigerian experience demonstrates that Islamic scholars do not necessarily engage with politics in the same manner. Some have occupied formal government positions, others have served in public institutions, while some have maintained their principal activities within religious, academic and intellectual institutions. These differences make it necessary to distinguish between partisan political participation, political appointments, public administration, religious advocacy and intellectual engagement with public policy.

This distinction is particularly important when examining the experiences of Professor Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami, Professor Ishaq Oloyede, Professor Salisu Shehu, Professor Bashir Aliyu Umar, Professor Isa Muhammad Maishanu and Dr. Jabir Sani Maihula. Their professional and institutional experiences provide different perspectives on the relationship between Islamic scholarship and the Nigerian political environment.

The central concern of this research is not merely whether Islamic scholars should participate in politics, but how such participation can be undertaken without compromising their religious responsibilities, intellectual independence and commitment to public welfare.

The paper therefore examines the religious foundations of political participation, the historical relationship between Islamic scholarship and political authority, the experiences of selected Nigerian scholars, and the opportunities and challenges associated with their involvement in public affairs.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

2.1 Politics

Politics generally refers to the processes through which authority is acquired, exercised, distributed and regulated within a society. It includes decision-making, public

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administration, policy formulation, political competition, representation and the management of collective interests.

From an Islamic perspective, politics may be examined through the concept of al-Siyasah, which concerns the administration of public affairs in accordance with justice, public welfare and the principles of Islamic law.

Ibn Taymiyyah's discussion in Al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyyah fi Islah al-Ra'i wa al-Ra'iyyah emphasises the importance of responsible authority, trustworthiness and the proper management of public responsibilities.

Politics, therefore, should not be understood exclusively as partisan competition for governmental power. It also encompasses the broader responsibility of managing public affairs and protecting societal interests.

2.2 Religious Scholars (Ulama)

The term Ulama refers to individuals who possess recognised knowledge of Islamic religious sciences, including the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, theology and related disciplines.

In Muslim societies, scholars traditionally serve as teachers, interpreters of religious texts, spiritual guides, advisers and contributors to public moral discourse.

However, religious scholarship does not automatically confer political authority or administrative competence. The qualifications required for religious leadership and those required for particular governmental responsibilities may overlap, but they are not necessarily identical.

This distinction is important when evaluating the appointment of scholars to public offices.

2.3 Political Participation

Political participation refers to the various ways individuals and groups become involved in political and governmental processes.

For Islamic scholars, this may include:

- Holding elected political positions.
- Accepting ministerial and other government appointments.

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- Serving as advisers to political authorities.
- Participating in public policy formulation.
- Engaging in political consultation and advocacy.
- Promoting accountability and good governance.
- Providing religious and ethical guidance on public affairs.

These activities should not be treated as identical. A scholar who serves as a government minister has a different institutional responsibility from one who advises government officials or participates in public religious discourse.

2.4 Prospects and Challenges

Prospects refer to the potential opportunities and positive contributions that may result from the participation of Islamic scholars in political and governmental affairs.

These include the promotion of justice, ethical leadership, social welfare, educational development, institutional accountability and the protection of religious interests.

Challenges refer to the difficulties and potential negative consequences associated with such participation. These may include political manipulation, partisan divisions, compromised independence, conflicts of interest, public criticism and the possibility of losing the confidence of religious followers.

3. Islamic Foundations of Political Participation

3.1 Political Responsibility and the Principle of Trust

Islam considers public authority a responsibility and a trust rather than merely a privilege or an avenue for personal advancement.

Allah says: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice" (Qur'an 4:58).

This verse establishes two fundamental principles of public administration: the proper allocation of responsibilities and the maintenance of justice.

For Islamic scholars participating in government, these principles impose a responsibility to ensure that religious knowledge is accompanied by honesty, competence and accountability. A scholar who accepts public office must understand that his responsibility

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extends beyond personal religious reputation. He is accountable for the proper discharge of the duties entrusted to him.

3.2 Justice as the Foundation of Governance

The Qur'an makes justice a fundamental obligation, even when it conflicts with personal interests or group loyalties.

Allah states: "O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice, as witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives" (Qur'an 4:135).

This principle is particularly relevant to the political involvement of religious scholars. A scholar's commitment to justice should not depend on whether the political authority concerned belongs to his preferred party, religious association or social group. Political loyalty cannot legitimately replace moral and religious responsibility.

3.3 Cooperation in Righteousness

Islam encourages cooperation in activities that promote righteousness and social welfare.

Allah says: "Cooperate with one another in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression" (Qur'an 5:2).

This verse provides an important foundation for understanding the relationship between Islamic scholars and political authorities. Cooperation with government is not inherently objectionable. Its legitimacy depends substantially on the purpose, nature and consequences of the cooperation.

Where political engagement contributes to education, healthcare, security, justice and public welfare, it may serve legitimate Islamic objectives. Conversely, cooperation in corruption, oppression, injustice or the violation of people's rights cannot be justified merely by the scholar's political access or appointment.

3.4 Consultation and Collective Decision-Making

Consultation (Shura) is another important principle of Islamic governance.

Allah describes the believers as those: "Whose affairs are conducted by mutual consultation" (Qur'an 42:38).

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The principle of consultation establishes that public affairs should not be managed exclusively through arbitrary personal decisions. Islamic scholars can contribute to consultation by providing religious guidance, ethical perspectives and informed analysis of public policies. Nevertheless, their contribution should be part of a broader consultative process involving relevant professionals, community representatives and other stakeholders.

3.5 Prophetic Guidance on Public Responsibility

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock" (Sahih al-Bukhari_ and Sahih Muslim_).

This Hadith establishes the principle of responsibility in leadership. It is relevant to scholars who occupy public positions because governmental responsibility is not separated from moral accountability.

Similarly, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Religion is sincere counsel" (Sahih Muslim 55).

The principle of sincere counsel provides a foundation for the responsibility of scholars to advise political authorities truthfully, promote justice and oppose wrongdoing through appropriate means.

4. Historical Relationship between Islamic Scholars and Political Authority

The participation of Islamic scholars in political affairs is not a new phenomenon. It has historical roots in the formative period of Islam and subsequent Muslim political institutions.

During the Prophetic period, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) combined religious leadership with political and administrative responsibilities in Madinah. His leadership involved establishing social agreements, managing public affairs, resolving disputes and maintaining relations with other communities.

Following his death, the rightly guided Caliphs continued the administration of the Muslim community, relying on consultation with knowledgeable Companions and other members of society.

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During subsequent Islamic periods, scholars participated in judicial appointments, legal interpretation, political consultation, educational administration and public advocacy.

Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi's _Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah_ provides an important classical discussion of Islamic political institutions, public authority, judicial responsibilities and the qualifications of public officials.

Nevertheless, the historical relationship between scholars and rulers was not always harmonious. Some scholars accepted official responsibilities, while others maintained their independence and resisted political pressure.

The experiences of scholars such as Imam Abu Hanifah, who is traditionally associated with refusing certain official judicial appointments, illustrate the historical concern about preserving scholarly independence.

It is therefore inappropriate to present Islamic history as though all scholars supported political participation or that all scholars opposed it. Their positions differed according to their understanding of religious responsibility, political circumstances and the potential consequences of engagement.

This historical diversity provides an important foundation for examining contemporary Nigeria.

5. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on historical analysis, documentary research and selected case studies. Data were drawn from secondary sources: official government profiles, reputable newspaper reports, and public records of appointments and reforms. The six cases were purposively selected to represent federal ministerial, federal agency, and state executive levels. Thematic analysis was used to identify prospects and challenges across the cases.

6. Islamic Scholars and Political Participation in Nigeria: Selected Case Studies

6.1 Professor Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami

Professor Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami provides an important contemporary example of an Islamic scholar who occupied a prominent position within the Nigerian federal government.

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He served as Director-General of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) before his appointment as Minister of Communications and Digital Economy. His professional background combines Islamic scholarship with formal education in computer science and technology. His experience provides an opportunity to examine the participation of religious scholars in a technically specialised government ministry.

The case raises several important research questions:

1. How can religious and ethical values inform the administration of a modern technological sector?
2. To what extent can a scholar's intellectual and religious background contribute to public policy?
3. What challenges arise when a religious scholar becomes a politically accountable public official?
4. How can such an individual maintain a distinction between personal religious convictions and official governmental responsibilities?

Pantami's experience demonstrates that the participation of Islamic scholars in government is not necessarily limited to ministries dealing directly with religious affairs. His ministerial experience also illustrates the importance of examining professional competence alongside religious scholarship. For an adequate assessment, the study must distinguish his documented official responsibilities and policy decisions from public controversies and competing interpretations of his political and religious activities.

6.2 Professor Ishaq Oloyede

Professor Ishaq Olanrewaju Oloyede is another significant case study because of his combination of Islamic academic scholarship and national institutional administration. He is a professor of Islamic jurisprudence and previously served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin. He subsequently served as Registrar of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

His experience is particularly relevant to the relationship between Islamic scholarship, educational administration and national institutional governance. Unlike a conventional

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partisan political appointment, his leadership of JAMB involved the administration of a national educational institution with responsibilities affecting millions of Nigerian candidates and educational stakeholders. His case provides an opportunity to examine the contribution of scholars to public institutions through professional administration rather than direct party politics.

Relevant questions include:

1. How can Islamic ethical principles inform the administration of public educational institutions?
2. What role can religious scholars play in promoting institutional transparency and accountability?
3. Does participation in public administration influence the public perception of Islamic scholarship?
4. What safeguards are necessary to maintain institutional independence?

The case should also examine the distinction between institutional administration and partisan political activity.

6.3 Professor Salisu Shehu - Political Engagement as Executive Secretary, NERDC

Professor Salisu Shehu represents a distinct model of political engagement: not electoral politics, but national policy-making through a federal curriculum agency. Appointed Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) on 23 December 2024, Shehu assumed office at a moment of major curriculum reform under the Federal Ministry of Education and the Renewed Hope Agenda.

His political engagement is visible in four concrete areas. First, curriculum leadership: under his leadership NERDC completed the revision of the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC), approved by the National Council on Education (NCE), and developed a Teachers' Guide for its implementation, with rollout from the 2025/2026 academic session. The review of the Senior Secondary Education Curriculum (SSEC) began in March 2025, covering core subjects including Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Islamic Studies, Christian Religious Studies, Economics, and Financial Accounting, alongside

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Geography, Government, Arabic, Health Education, and vocational subjects. The new curriculum adopts a competency and outcome-based approach, reduces subject overload - Primary 1-3: 9-10 subjects; Primary 4-6: 11-13 subjects; JSS: 12-14 subjects; SSS: 5 compulsory subjects plus electives - and introduces Digital Technologies, Citizenship and Heritage Studies, and one trade subject at senior secondary level.

Second, inter-agency coordination and teacher capacity building: Shehu led NERDC's engagement with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in February 2025 to strengthen partnership on curriculum implementation, adaptation of the curriculum for learners with visual impairments, and massive state-based teacher capacity building focused specifically on the new curriculum. He consistently argued that curriculum reform would fail without retraining teachers for a competency-based system.

Third, textbook governance and quality assurance: in 2026 Shehu introduced the National Textbook Ranking System - Phase 1 covering Primary 1, Primary 4, JSS 1 and SSS 1 - requiring all textbooks, including previously approved titles, to be resubmitted for fresh assessment and ranking under new quality benchmarks. He also directed the digitalisation of book review processes and, in July 2026, reduced textbook assessment fees from N2,000 to N1,500 per page and ranking fees from N1 million to N750,000 per title, with refunds for publishers who had paid the higher rate, to ease the burden on publishers while raising standards.

Fourth, public communication and management of controversy: in September 2025 Shehu signed and published the only authentic list of approved subjects, publicly warning stakeholders to disregard fake lists circulating on social media. This act illustrates a key dimension of scholar-politicians: they must use public authority to defend institutional truth against misinformation. At the same time, his appointment attracted criticism from some quarters who questioned whether his Islamic affiliations would affect a national curriculum for a plural society. This shows how a scholar in a national, multi-religious office must constantly demonstrate constitutional neutrality, protect the place of both Islamic Studies and Christian Religious Studies, and ensure inclusivity for learners with special needs through subjects such as Braille Reading and Writing and Independent Living Skills.

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Shehu's case therefore illustrates political engagement through education policy: the scholar does not contest elections, but shapes what millions of Nigerian children learn, what values are taught, and what textbooks are permitted. His success depends on technical competence in curriculum design, interfaith sensitivity, and transparent administration — not on religious popularity alone.

6.4 Professor Bashir Aliyu Umar

Professor Bashir Aliyu Umar provides a particularly relevant example of the relationship between Islamic scholarship, public policy and specialised financial administration. He is an Islamic scholar specialising in Hadith and Islamic Studies, with an academic and professional background that also includes Islamic finance.

He served as Permanent Commissioner in the Kano State Shariah Commission and later as Special Adviser to the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria on Non-Interest Banking between 2010 and 2014. His work in Islamic finance provides an important example of how Islamic scholarship can contribute to the development of public financial policy and the institutional regulation of non-interest financial services. His experience raises important questions concerning the relationship between religious knowledge and technical expertise in public administration.

In particular, the case illustrates that the contribution of Islamic scholars to governance may extend beyond political advocacy to the development of specialised institutional frameworks. His subsequent leadership of the Supreme Council for Shariah in Nigeria also provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between religious institutional leadership and engagement with national policy issues. The study should examine the opportunities and limitations of this model of participation, particularly the need for collaboration between religious scholars, economists, financial regulators and legal experts.

6.5 Professor Isa Muhammad Maishanu - Political Engagement as Commissioner for Higher Education, Sokoto State

Professor Isa Muhammad Maishanu provides a state-level model of scholar-politician: a university professor and imam who moved into executive government. His academic

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specialisation is Comparative Religion and Qur'anic Studies, with publications on comparative religion, Islamic da'wah, Islam in pluralistic societies, and the Madinan Constitution as a panacea for ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria. He was former Dean, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, and pioneer Dean, Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies, at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS), and an imam at the University Central Mosque.

As Commissioner for Higher Education under Governor Ahmad Aliyu Sokoto (from May 2023), Maishanu's political engagement is documented in concrete administrative actions. First, scholarship and student welfare: between May 2023 and September 2026, his ministry spent N6,791,891,890 on scholarships and related support - N945 million in 2023, N3.08 billion in 2024, N2.08 billion in 2025, N605 million in 2026, and N67.2 million in individual assistance - covering tuition, registration, feeding, and accommodation. He cleared inherited liabilities, including N555 million for outstanding registration fees for the 2021/2022 session at UDUS, and verified and settled liabilities owed to ten universities in Sudan, Wisconsin University in Ghana, and Integral University in India.

Second, crisis management for students abroad: Maishanu facilitated the resettlement of 72 students evacuated from war-torn Sudan, enabled 24 students to graduate through a Memorandum of Understanding between Sudan International University and UDUS, relocated nine final-year students to the Islamic University in Uganda, and resolved challenges for Sokoto students transferred from Ukraine to Baze University, Abuja. He also sponsored 22 students to science and technology programmes at Integral University in India and the University of Central Punjab in Pakistan.

Third, access and infrastructure: he announced free UTME and Direct Entry registration for indigent students for 2025/2026, with distribution of PINs through the 23 local government secretariats. He inspected and supervised capital projects, including the proposed ultra-modern sports complex at Sokoto State University, the completed Faculty of Education building at Shehu Shagari University of Education, Sokoto (SSUES), and, through the State Executive Council in 2026, the establishment of an out-of-school children centre in Gandu (N532.6 million), renovation of Turaki Basic Secondary School, renovation of the Vice-Chancellor's residence and lecturers' quarters at Sokoto State University, and upgrading of a college clinic to a Primary Health Care Centre. He also

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announced the Federal Government's takeover of SSUES as Shehu Shagari University of Education, Science and Entrepreneurship, describing it as a victory for education in Sokoto.

Maishanu's case shows that political engagement for a scholar-commissioner is primarily administrative and welfarist: using executive power to expand access, clear debts, protect vulnerable students, and improve institutions. It also shows its limits: as a commissioner, he serves at the pleasure of the governor and must implement the governor's nine-point SMART Agenda and party programmes, which may constrain independent scholarly judgment. His intellectual background in comparative religion and pluralism, however, gives him a resource to frame higher education as a tool for peaceful coexistence, not merely for patronage.

6.6 Dr. Jabir Sani Maihula - Political Engagement as Commissioner for Religious Affairs, Sokoto State

Dr. Jabir Sani Maihula provides the clearest example of a scholar whose portfolio is religion itself. His education includes a BA in Hadith and Islamic Studies from the Islamic University of Madinah, an LLM in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies from the University of East London, and a PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Nottingham, with postgraduate interest in Islamic law and politics. Before appointment, he was Head of Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Dean, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, at Sokoto State University.

As Commissioner for Religious Affairs, Maihula has transformed what was a dormant ministry into, in his words, a deliberate, evidence-based instrument of social policy and public welfare. His political engagement is organised around five strategic pillars: infrastructure, welfare, morality, conflict resolution, and public enlightenment.

First, infrastructure: under his leadership, the Sokoto State Government rehabilitated or constructed 65 Jumu'ah mosques, many fitted with boreholes and solar power to improve hygiene and accessibility, commissioned 15 new Jumu'ah mosques, and in the last 30 months completed and inaugurated 30 Jumu'ah mosques. Major mosques receive N500,000 monthly allowances for cleanliness, electricity, and water. The ministry also fenced cemeteries, employed security guards, and maintained facilities across local

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governments. For the first time, a comprehensive database of all Jumu'ah mosques, their Imams, deputies, and mu'adhins with qualifications and contact details - was compiled.

Second, welfare and independence of Imams: the ministry introduced regular stipends and welfare packages for Imams, to dignify them, prevent exploitation by politicians, and restore integrity to Friday sermons. This is a direct political intervention: by paying Imams from the state, Maihula seeks to reduce the politicisation of sermons and the dependence of clerics on wealthy patrons.

Third, productive zakat and social welfare: he strengthened the Zakat and Waqf Agency's Productive Zakat Model, investing zakat funds in farms and real estate to create sustainable incomes for orphans and vulnerable families, rather than one-off handouts.

Fourth, moral reorientation and public health: through town halls, radio and TV programmes, and mosque sermons, the ministry campaigned against dishonest trade practices, indecent dressing, and poor hygiene. Ramadan campaigns promoted fair measurement by traders, and butchers and market operators were trained in ethical and hygienic practices.

Fifth, security, Hisbah reform, and interfaith harmony: Maihula relaunched the Hisbah Corps as an unarmed, community-oriented body focused on moral guidance, education, and reconciliation, supervised by a multi-agency committee comprising the Ministry of Justice, Nigeria Police, Sultanate Council, and other security agencies. Recruitment prioritised educated, service-oriented personnel about 230 in the first intake trained in human rights, due process, and community engagement. He reports that since relaunch, no human rights litigation has been recorded against the Corps. He also promoted interfaith harmony by creating the Office of Special Adviser on Resident Communities for Christians and other non-Muslim groups, and by collaborating with religious leaders, traditional rulers, and security agencies to prevent religious crises. He also led capacity building for 2,300 clerics on combating misinformation and media literacy, including verification of images, videos, and AI-generated deepfakes.

Maihula's case therefore shows the most direct form of scholar-politics: the scholar governs religion. The prospect is that religious institutions can be used for public welfare, health, and peace. The challenge is that the ministry can be accused of favouring the

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Muslim majority, using state funds for sectarian purposes, or using Hisbah for moral policing. His emphasis on multi-agency oversight, human rights training, and inclusion of resident communities is an attempt to answer that challenge.

6.7 Dr. Bashir Abdullahi Ismail – Associate Professor, University of Abuja

Dr. Bashir Abdullahi Ismail represents an important example of the relationship between Islamic scholarship, academic engagement and public religious leadership in Nigeria. He is an Associate Professor at the University of Abuja, where he is associated with the academic study of Islam and Islamic religious thought. His activities demonstrate how Islamic scholars can contribute to public affairs not only through formal government appointments but also through academic research, religious instruction, public enlightenment and engagement with contemporary social and political issues.

His intellectual contribution to discussions on politics and governance is reflected in his scholarly publication, *The Islamic Ruling on Protests, Demonstrations, and Labour Strikes*, published in the Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Religions. This work addresses the Islamic perspective on public demonstrations, protests and labour disputes, subjects that are directly connected to political participation, citizens' rights, public order and the responsibilities of government. His engagement with these issues illustrates the relevance of Islamic jurisprudence to contemporary questions of governance and the relationship between citizens and political authorities.

Beyond his academic responsibilities, Dr. Ismail has also contributed to religious leadership and public enlightenment. He has served as Chief Imam of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) National Headquarters Mosque in Utako, Abuja. Through religious lectures and public engagements, he has addressed issues concerning Islamic education, moral development, social responsibility and the challenges confronting Muslim communities. His public lectures have included discussions on the Islamic approach to the education and upbringing of children, particularly the challenges associated with the Almajiri system in Northern Nigeria. He has also engaged in teaching classical Islamic political thought, including the works of Al-Mawardi on Islamic political administration and governance.

Dr. Ismail's experience provides an opportunity to examine a model of political engagement in which Islamic scholars influence public affairs primarily through

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intellectual contributions, religious leadership and public advocacy rather than necessarily occupying elected or executive political positions. His work demonstrates that political participation should not be restricted to holding government offices or belonging to political parties. Scholars can also contribute to political development by examining government policies through Islamic ethical principles, educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities, advising political authorities and promoting peaceful approaches to resolving public disagreements.

His case raises several important research questions:

1. How can Islamic scholarship contribute to contemporary discussions on political participation, demonstrations and citizens' rights?
2. What role can religious scholars play in promoting peaceful engagement between government institutions and the general public?
3. How can academic research and religious leadership contribute to political awareness and responsible citizenship?
4. What challenges do scholars encounter when addressing politically sensitive issues while maintaining their intellectual and religious independence?

The experience of Dr. Bashir Abdullahi Ismail demonstrates that the relationship between Islamic scholarship and politics extends beyond direct participation in government. His academic contributions, religious leadership and public engagement illustrate the potential of Islamic scholars to influence political consciousness, encourage responsible citizenship and promote the application of Islamic ethical principles to contemporary governance challenges. His case also highlights the importance of maintaining scholarly independence, intellectual integrity and impartiality when addressing politically sensitive matters.

7. Prospects of Politics Among Religious Scholars

From the seven cases examined, several prospects emerge concerning the participation of Islamic scholars in political and governmental affairs. These prospects demonstrate that religious scholars can contribute to national development through direct political appointments, institutional administration, academic engagement, religious leadership and public advocacy.

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7.1 Moral Capital and Public Trust

Islamic scholars often enter public institutions with established reputations for *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *sidq* (truthfulness). These qualities can contribute to public confidence in governance and institutional administration. The experience of Professor Ishaq Oloyede at JAMB demonstrates how scholarly experience and ethical leadership can contribute to institutional reforms, transparency and accountability. However, such moral credibility must be sustained through consistent conduct and responsible administration.

7.2 Bridging Religion and Modern Governance

The participation of Islamic scholars provides opportunities to integrate religious ethical principles with contemporary governance and professional administration. Professor Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami demonstrates the possibility of combining Islamic scholarship with digital technology policy, while Professor Bashir Aliyu Umar illustrates the application of Islamic knowledge to non-interest banking and financial administration. These examples demonstrate that Islamic scholarship and modern professional expertise can complement one another in addressing contemporary societal challenges.

7.3 Access to Grassroots Networks and Community Development

Islamic scholars maintain significant connections with mosques, Islamic schools, religious organisations and community institutions. These networks provide opportunities for public enlightenment, social mobilisation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Such relationships can be particularly valuable in Northern Nigeria, where religious institutions play important roles in community development and social relations. Through these networks, scholars can encourage responsible citizenship, promote peaceful coexistence and strengthen cooperation between government institutions and local communities.

7.4 Policy Influence and Institutional Development

Religious scholars can influence public policies and institutional reforms through direct government appointments and professional engagements. Professor Salisu Shehu's experience at NERDC demonstrates the influence of scholars in educational curriculum development, while Professor Isa Muhammad Maishanu's activities illustrate their potential contributions to higher education and student welfare. Similarly, Dr. Jabir Sani

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Maihula's experience as Commissioner for Religious Affairs demonstrates how religious institutions can be incorporated into public welfare, moral reorientation and conflict-resolution programmes.

Dr. Bashir Abdullahi Ismail further illustrates this prospect through academic research, religious leadership and public enlightenment. His engagement with contemporary questions concerning protests, demonstrations and labour strikes demonstrates how Islamic scholarship can contribute to public discussions on citizens' responsibilities, political participation and the relationship between government and society. This shows that scholars can influence policy discussions not only from within government institutions but also through intellectual contributions and public discourse.

7.5 Promotion of Religious and Social Harmony

Islamic scholars can contribute to peaceful coexistence by providing religious guidance, encouraging tolerance and addressing misconceptions that may lead to social and religious conflicts. Their influence within religious communities gives them opportunities to promote dialogue, discourage extremism and encourage respect for the rights of others. The experiences of Dr. Jabir Sani Maihula, particularly his engagement with interfaith relations in Sokoto State, demonstrate the importance of religious leadership in promoting social harmony.

7.6 Intellectual Independence and Public Accountability

Academic and religious engagement provides scholars with opportunities to examine government policies, identify social challenges and offer constructive recommendations without necessarily becoming members of political parties or occupying government offices. Dr. Bashir Abdullahi Ismail's academic and religious engagements illustrate this form of contribution. Through research, teaching, public lectures and religious guidance, scholars can influence political consciousness and encourage accountability. Such independence can strengthen their ability to advise political authorities and society while maintaining their scholarly responsibilities.

7.7 Providing a Model for Younger Generations

The participation of Islamic scholars in public affairs provides younger generations with examples of individuals who combine religious knowledge with professional competence

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and social responsibility. The experiences of the scholars examined demonstrate that religious commitment does not necessarily require withdrawal from contemporary societal affairs. Rather, Islamic knowledge can be applied to education, technology, finance, public administration, social development and intellectual discourse. This can encourage young Muslims to pursue religious knowledge alongside professional and academic development.

8. Challenges of Politics Among Religious Scholars

Despite the opportunities associated with the participation of Islamic scholars in political and governmental affairs, several challenges may undermine their effectiveness, credibility and independence. The seven cases examined reveal that these challenges affect scholars differently depending on their institutional positions, responsibilities and forms of political engagement.

8.1 Politicisation and Loss of Moral Authority

One of the major challenges facing Islamic scholars who participate in politics is the possibility of losing their moral and religious credibility. When scholars accept political appointments or openly associate themselves with particular political parties, their religious statements, sermons and public opinions may be interpreted as expressions of political loyalty rather than independent scholarly judgment. This can weaken public confidence in their religious authority and create divisions within the Muslim community.

8.2 Conflict Between Religious Responsibilities and Constitutional Duties

Nigeria is a multi-religious country with diverse ethnic, cultural and religious communities. Islamic scholars who occupy public offices must therefore balance their religious convictions with their constitutional responsibilities to serve all citizens without discrimination. Failure to maintain this balance may generate concerns about religious favouritism, exclusion and the misuse of public authority. This challenge is particularly important for scholars occupying national positions or managing public institutions that serve citizens from different religious backgrounds.

8.3 Political Patronage and Godfatherism

The Nigerian political environment is often characterised by political patronage, personal loyalty and expectations associated with government appointments. Scholars who accept

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political positions may experience pressure to support the interests of political authorities, even when such interests conflict with their scholarly judgment or religious principles. Such circumstances can limit their independence and discourage them from openly criticising policies or decisions that are inconsistent with justice and public welfare.

8.4 Public Scrutiny and Double Standards

Religious scholars are often expected to demonstrate exceptionally high standards of moral conduct. Consequently, their involvement in political administration exposes them to intense public scrutiny. Administrative mistakes, controversial decisions or perceived inconsistencies between their religious teachings and political actions may attract criticism and accusations of hypocrisy. This challenge can become particularly serious when scholars occupy influential government positions.

8.5 Sectarian Rivalry and Religious Divisions

Differences in Islamic jurisprudential orientations, religious organisations and scholarly affiliations may create tensions among scholars participating in political affairs. Some scholars may be perceived as representing particular religious groups rather than the wider Muslim community. Political appointments may consequently intensify existing religious disagreements and create divisions within the Muslim Ummah. Such rivalry can undermine collective efforts towards educational development, social reform and responsible political participation.

8.6 Security Risks and Political Vulnerability

Insecurity remains a major challenge in Nigeria, particularly in areas affected by terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and farmer-herder conflicts. Islamic scholars who cooperate with government institutions or publicly condemn extremist activities may become targets of threats, intimidation or attacks. Their political engagement may also expose them to accusations of supporting particular political interests or security policies. These risks can discourage scholars from participating actively in public affairs.

8.7 Loss of Scholarly Independence and Intellectual Freedom

Scholars who become closely associated with political authorities may find it difficult to maintain their intellectual independence. Government appointments, institutional

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expectations and political pressures may influence their ability to express independent opinions on controversial public issues. Even scholars who remain outside government may face criticism or pressure when their academic research and religious opinions challenge prevailing political interests. The experience of scholars such as Dr. Bashir Abdullahi Ismail highlights the importance of protecting academic freedom and the independence of religious scholarship in public discourse.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the participation of Islamic scholars in Nigerian political and governmental affairs:

1. **Professional and Administrative Training:** Islamic scholars intending to occupy public offices should receive appropriate training in public administration, constitutional law, leadership, public policy and interfaith relations. Religious knowledge should be complemented by the professional competencies required for their respective responsibilities.
2. **Preservation of Scholarly Independence:** Clear distinctions should be maintained between religious responsibilities, academic positions and political appointments. Scholars should retain the freedom to express independent opinions and offer constructive criticism without undue political interference.
3. **Development of Ethical Guidelines:** Islamic organisations and recognised religious institutions should establish appropriate codes of conduct to guide scholars participating in political activities. Such guidelines should emphasise integrity, accountability, impartiality and the avoidance of political manipulation.
4. **Appointment Based on Competence and Integrity:** Governments should appoint religious scholars to public positions based on relevant qualifications, professional competence, administrative experience and demonstrated integrity rather than religious popularity or political loyalty alone.
5. **Promotion of Political Neutrality and Constitutional Responsibility:** Scholars occupying public offices should respect the constitutional rights of all citizens and

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ensure that public resources and institutional responsibilities are not used to promote religious discrimination or partisan interests.

6. **Strengthening Academic Research and Public Enlightenment:** Universities and Islamic institutions should encourage research, publications, public lectures and intellectual discussions on Islamic political thought, governance, accountability and contemporary societal challenges. This will enable scholars to contribute to public policy discussions beyond direct political appointments.

7. **Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding:** Islamic scholars should work with Christian religious leaders, traditional institutions, civil society organisations and relevant government agencies to promote peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding and conflict resolution.

8. **Protection of Religious and Academic Freedom:** Governments and relevant institutions should provide an environment in which scholars can express religious and academic opinions without intimidation, political victimisation or unnecessary interference.

9. **Encouragement of Youth Participation and Mentorship:** Islamic scholars should encourage younger generations to combine religious education with professional, technological and leadership development. Mentorship programmes should prepare young Muslims to contribute positively to national development.

10. Conclusion

The participation of Islamic scholars in Nigerian politics and public affairs is an important dimension of the relationship between religious scholarship and contemporary governance. The seven cases examined in this study demonstrate that Islamic scholars engage with political and governmental institutions through different approaches, including ministerial appointments, public administration, educational policy, financial regulation, state executive responsibilities, religious leadership, academic research and public advocacy.

The experiences of Professor Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami, Professor Ishaq Oloyede, Professor Salisu Shehu, Professor Bashir Aliyu Umar, Professor Isa Muhammad Maishanu, Dr. Jabir Sani Maihula and Dr. Bashir Abdullahi Ismail illustrate the diverse opportunities available to Islamic scholars seeking to contribute to public development. While some have

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participated directly in government institutions, others have influenced public affairs through academic contributions, religious leadership and intellectual engagement.

The study establishes that the participation of Islamic scholars in politics offers significant prospects for promoting justice, accountability, ethical leadership, educational development, social welfare and peaceful coexistence. Their religious knowledge, intellectual contributions and connections with grassroots communities can provide valuable resources for addressing contemporary governance challenges. However, such participation also presents serious challenges, including political manipulation, loss of moral authority, sectarian divisions, conflicts between religious responsibilities and constitutional duties, and the possible erosion of scholarly independence.

Consequently, the legitimacy and effectiveness of political participation among Islamic scholars should not be determined merely by whether they accept government appointments or remain outside political institutions. Rather, their contributions should be assessed according to the principles of justice (*al-Adl*), trustworthiness (*Amanah*), public interest (*Maslahah*), accountability and professional competence.

Ultimately, Islamic scholars have an important responsibility to contribute to the moral, intellectual and institutional development of Nigerian society. Whether through direct political participation or independent academic and religious engagement, their involvement should remain guided by Islamic ethical principles, respect for constitutional responsibilities and an unwavering commitment to public welfare. The future of politics among religious scholars therefore depends not simply on their willingness to participate in governance, but on their ability to preserve religious integrity, intellectual independence and accountability while contributing meaningfully to national development.

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