



Religion, Civil Service System and Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract. Political, social and economic development is impossible without a functional and efficient civil service system. This is because the civil service system is one of the key drivers of policies and programs of government in any nation of the world. However, in recent times, there has been noticeable decline of the quality of civil service in Nigeria occasioned by the influence of some religious practices on the civil service system. The economic losses accruing from such religious practices are inestimable and portend a serious danger to the overall development of the country. Therefore, this paper examines the nexus between religious practices of civil servants and the current decline in quality of civil service system in Nigeria. In particular, the paper investigates how Christians' and Muslims' religious practices particularly prayers at the workplace can potentially inhibit socio-political and economic development in the country. Using the methodologies of desk research and critical discussion, the paper underscores the fact that a nation in which civil service system is characterized by religious practices like Nigeria definitely risks socio-political and economic development. The entire paper is hinged on the views of Max Weber's Spirit of Capitalism, secularization theory, and institutional theory while also incorporating insights from Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Sriya Iyer. Overall, the paper argues that to position Nigeria on the path of socio-political and economic development requires a balanced understanding of religious practices by civil servants at the workplace, while law makers should formulate and implement policies that can checkmate religious practices of civil servants in the civil service system.

Keywords: Religion, Civil Service System, Civil Servants, Development and Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The intractable socio-economic and political malady confronting the Nigerian state today requires decisive and holistic approach to address. One dominant approach amongst scholars in Nigeria has been the call for the federal government to diversify the economy from oil-based to technology and agricultural-based economy. Those who hold strongly to this school of thought believe that by simply diversifying the economy from oil-based to agriculture and technology-based, all socio-economic problems of the country will be addressed and the country positioned on the path of irreversible socio-economic and political growth. However, this may not be the case if the supposed diversification is understood in such a restrictive sense without inclusion of urgent reforms of some major governmental establishments like the civil service system in Nigeria. This is because the civil service system plays a vital role in the development of a nation.

Regrettably, as crucial as the civil service system is, in recent decades there has been gradual decline of the central role which the civil service plays in the socio-economic and political development of the state. Some civil service researchers like Raadschelders, Toonen, & van der Meer (2007) attribute this to a number of external and internal factors like increased citizens' education, increased awareness of the impact of decision centers on the societal and governmental level, rapid exchange of information, and effects of globalization. Moreover, other scholars like Smalskys & Urbanovic, (2017) observe that the problem confronting the civil service system is even worst in developing African countries underscoring that since after gaining independence, these countries have been bedeviled by lack of adequate administrative potential and are overwhelmed by corruption and tribalism. Notably, they enlist the challenges confronting the civil service system in Africa to include aging

population, personnel selection, moral degradation, namely: widespread nepotism, irresponsible public financial management, self-discrediting public procurement, and problem of replacement of civil servants. Similarly, Brol (2011) underscores that the major reasons for the inefficiency of the public sector in African countries are corruption, ineffective bureaucracy, diversion of public resources for private interests, tribalism, favoritism and nepotism, and lack of transparency and democratic procedures.

Suffice it to state that while these authors are in order in their respective observations, on the contrary, they fail to underscore the fact that religion, especially religious prayers of Christians and Muslims also constitute a complex problem for the civil service system. In Nigeria in particular, the indiscriminate Christians and Muslims' religious activities in the civil service particularly during working hours significantly undermine the quality of services offered by the civil service system in Nigeria. Granted that the right to profess and practice one's religion whether in public or private is a constitutional right of all citizens enshrined in Chapter IV, Sub-section 38 (1) of the 1999 Constitution as amended, the very fact that the limits of such a right is not clearly defined by the same Constitution constitutes a problem in itself. Therefore, it is arguable that such a right to profess or practice one's religion should not be allowed in whichever guise to override national or public interest. Unfortunately, in Nigeria today, some Christians and Muslims' prayer activities in the civil service sector appear to override the country's overall public or economic interest thereby adding to the list of problems confronting the civil service system. It is against this backdrop that the paper seeks to critically examine the economic cost of Christians and Muslims' prayers in the civil service system in Nigeria. The central argument in this paper is that amongst the problems confronting the civil service system in Nigeria today, religion especially Christians and Muslims' prayers constitute one of the most intractable challenges. Also, unlike the past, current reforms in the civil service system in Nigeria should include the significant role of religious prayers in eroding the quality of civil service system.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

For clarity and understanding, there is need to explain the key concepts that are central to the discussion, namely religion, civil service system, and economic development. Clarifying these concepts could help establish the conceptual boundaries within which the relationship between religion, public administration, and economic productivity in Nigeria is examined.

2.1 Religion

Religion is a complex social phenomenon that encompasses beliefs, practices, rituals, and moral values centered on the understanding of the sacred or the transcendent. Scholars have offered different definitions depending on disciplinary perspectives. Durkheim (1912/1995) defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things which unite adherents into a moral community. In a similar vein, Berger (1967) views religion as a human enterprise that establishes a sacred canopy through which individuals interpret and give meaning to social reality. Within many societies, religion functions not only as a spiritual framework but also as a moral and cultural institution that shapes social norms, human behavior and economic activities (Koko, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). In Nigeria, religion occupies a prominent position in public and private life, with Christianity and Islam being the two dominant faith traditions. These religions significantly influence individual lifestyles, communal interactions, and even institutional practices (Falola & Heaton, 2008). While religion can positively influence ethical conduct, its pervasive presence within social institutions may also create tensions between religious obligations and professional responsibilities.

Religion in public institutions refers to the presence and influence of religious beliefs, practices, or expressions within state organizations such as schools, courts, and government offices. In modern democratic societies, the relationship between religion and public institutions is often shaped by the principle of secularism, which seeks to maintain institutional neutrality toward religious beliefs while protecting individual freedom of worship (Casanova, 1994). In Nigeria, although the constitution guarantees religious freedom, the interaction between religion and public institutions is complex due to the deeply religious nature of society. Religious expressions frequently occur in public spaces, including workplaces within the civil service. While such practices reflect the religious identity of individuals, they may raise concerns when they interfere with official responsibilities and institutional productivity. In this study, therefore, the concept of religion in public institutions is examined in relation to how religious practices within the Nigerian civil service during official working hours may affect administrative efficiency and, by extension, economic development.

2.2 Civil Service System

Generally, the word "civil service" according to the United Kingdom Civil Service (2019) document is a

collective term for a sector of government composed mainly of career civil servants employed rather than appointed or elected, whose institutional tenure typically survives transitions of political leadership. Page, Chapman & Briggs (2023) note that civil service is a body of government officials who are employed in civil occupation that is neither political nor judicial. They also underscore that in most countries, the term may refer to employees selected and promoted on the basis of a merit and seniority system, which may include taking examinations. Moreover, the notion of civil service involves civil servants and their activity while implementing the assigned functions and decisions made by politicians. In this light, the civil service is a system of civil servants who perform the assigned functions of a public administration ((Smalskys & Urbanovic, 2017). Consequently, Ginsberg (2006) refers to the civil service simply as a paid non-military service in non-elective office in the executive arm of government. This means that a civil servant is a person employed in the public sector by a government department or agency to carry out specific public sector functions, particularly administrative ones (Koko & Oko, 2025). In this sense, civil service plays an important role in the state and drawing from this understanding, Ayida (1990) describes it as one vital instrument of government responsible for the provision of quality and abundant services to the people. It is also responsible for mediating the creation, delivery and sustenance of services to the public and as such plays an important role in the processes of policy formulation and execution through which services are provided to the people.

Stressing on this central role of the civil service system in the state, civil service researchers like Demmke (2010) and Smalskys & Urbanovic (2017) identify a number of reasons why efficient civil service system is indispensable for the socio-economic and political development of the state. In the first place, it is the civil service that provides the enabling environment for implementation of the assigned functions and decisions made by politicians. Hence, the effectiveness of the civil service of the state to a large extent determines the quality of implemented public policy decisions and thus the quality of life in the state. Also, the very fact that the civil service system is a key component of the system of government of the state makes it vital. Thus, it could be argued that the government of any nation may be incomplete without a competent and viable civil service system (Koko & Oko, 2025). But much more than that, the civil service is important because of the role it plays in protecting public interest as well as standing as intermediaries or negotiators between a wide range of non-profit and private stakeholders. It is against the backdrop of these

tasks and duties that the establishment of a viable and effective civil service in all countries of the world becomes imperative.

Basically, there are two dominant models of civil service system which Smalskys & Urbanovic, 2017 have identified. One is the career system which is also called the closed system. This model is dominant in continental Europe, with the prevalence of traditional-hierarchical public administration, rational bureaucracy, and formalized operational rules. The other is the position system which is also known as the open system and dominant in Anglo-Saxon countries, with the prevalence of managerial principles, pragmatic administration, and charismatic leadership. Suffice it to state that there is no completely pure model; instead, what is common in almost all countries is a mixed/hybrid of both models. It should also be said that the concept and scope of civil service in a particular country depend on the legal framework, which defines the areas of public and private sectors and their relationship. Certainly, Nigeria's civil service system aligns more with the career system but also has some elements of the position system (Koko & Oko, 2025). Thus, it could be seen as belonging to the mixed model system.

Furthermore, civil service researchers have also argued that in some countries, the boundaries between the two sectors are not distinct. In some countries, civil service includes state and local administration; other countries have only administration. However, there are countries where civil service is a broader concept and covers not only central and local government officials who perform administrative functions but also public sector employees who provide public services, such as employees of educational and health institutions, etc. (Smalskys & Urbanovic, 2017). Nevertheless, all countries are characterized by the fact that the purpose of civil service, regardless of the political situation and changes of governments, is to ensure efficient, professional, transparent, and politically neutral implementation of the objectives of the state. Given the above therefore, every state must ensure that there is high quality of performance of employees who come to work in the civil service and be sure that only qualified civil servants are accepted to the civil service through a thorough selection process, competition, or appointment (Smalskys & Urbanovic, 2017).

Page, Chapman and Briggs (2023) emphasize that the standards placed upon a civil servant's conduct are partly those to be expected of any loyal, competent, and obedient employee and partly those enjoined upon a public employee. Hence, the civil servant should be

above any suspicion of partiality and should not let personal sympathies, loyalties, or interests affect the performance of duties. For instance, a civil servant is obliged to be circumspect in private financial dealings. Moreover, as a general rule, a civil servant is not allowed to engage directly or indirectly in any trade or business and may engage in social or charitable organizations only if these have no direct bearing with his or her official duties. Although in the 19th century civil services were normally restricted to maintaining law and order and minor economic regulations such as those concerning weights and measures and factory laws. This means that there are always strict limit on a civil servant's right to engage in other socio-economic activities that may conflict with his or her official duties.

Similarly, Salisu (2009:3-4) adds that in the exercise of its powers, the civil service is expected to operate by certain guiding principles, norms and standards of professionalism, neutrality and within constitutional boundaries. Moreover, Ayeni (1990; 1994) emphasizes that as a management institution, the civil service requires effective and efficient organization and utilization of human, material and financial resources to enhance capacity and productivity of the commission. Unfortunately, in the Nigerian situation, the system of civil service has been hijacked by the political class and their cronies who see appointive positions under their jurisdiction as political prizes to be distributed among influential and faithful supporters. Scholars like Yamamoto (2003), Etuk (1992), and Balawa (1994) all see bureaucracy as one major problem confronting the civil service in Nigeria. What they ignored however, in their analyses is the fact that religion is also a major problem why the civil service in Nigeria has practically been in comatose.

Therefore, the civil service system refers to the body of permanent government officials responsible for implementing public policies and administering government programs. It represents the administrative machinery through which the state delivers services and executes governmental decisions. According to Weber (1978), the modern civil service is characterized by bureaucratic principles such as hierarchical authority, specialization of duties, adherence to formal rules, and impersonal administration. In the Nigerian context, the civil service plays a vital role in governance and national development by facilitating policy implementation, maintaining administrative continuity, and ensuring public service delivery. However, scholars have noted that the Nigerian civil service often faces challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiency, weak institutional discipline, and administrative delays (Olowu &

Adamolekun, 2015). These challenges can undermine the ability of government institutions to function effectively and contribute to economic development.

2.3 Economic Development

Economic development refers to a sustained process of improving the economic well-being and quality of life of a population. Unlike mere economic growth, which focuses primarily on increases in national income or output, economic development encompasses broader structural transformations such as improvements in productivity, institutional efficiency, employment opportunities, and living standards (Todaro & Smith, 2020; Koko, 2020c). It involves the effective functioning of institutions that facilitate economic activities and ensure the efficient allocation of resources. Strong institutions are widely recognized as fundamental drivers of economic development. North (1990) argues that institutional efficiency reduces transaction costs, enhances productivity, and promotes sustainable economic growth. Consequently, when public institutions such as the civil service operate inefficiently, they may create administrative bottlenecks that slow down economic transactions and hinder development.

3. Theoretical Framework on the Nexus between Religion, Civil Service and Economic Development

No research is carried out in a vacuum. Thus, this study is hinged on three main theories namely: Max Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic, secularization theory, and institutional theory while also incorporating insights from Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Sriya Iyer. These theoretical perspectives collectively illuminate how religious beliefs and practices shape social behavior, institutional norms, and economic outcomes.

The first theory which this current research builds upon is Max Weber's analysis of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* which remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding the relationship between religion and economic behavior. Weber (2002) argued that certain religious doctrines particularly those within Protestantism, cultivated values such as discipline, hard work, punctuality, and a sense of vocation (*Beruf*). These values contributed to the development of rational economic activity and modern capitalism. Weber further emphasized that modern bureaucratic institutions depend on rational organization, strict adherence to rules, and time discipline (Weber, 1978). Within such systems, the efficient use of working hours is essential for

administrative effectiveness. In the context of the Nigerian civil service, Weber's framework suggests that while religion can promote moral discipline and ethical conduct, the interruption of official duties for religious observances may undermine the rational and time-bound structure required for bureaucratic efficiency (Koko & Oko, 2025).

Complementing Weber's perspective is secularization theory, which examines the evolving relationship between religion and modern institutions. Early proponents such as Peter Berger (1967) argued that modernization leads to a gradual decline in the influence of religion in public institutions. However, later scholars have refined this argument. Casanova (1994), for example, contends that secularization is better understood as the differentiation of social spheres, whereby religion, politics, and economics operate as distinct yet interacting domains. In pluralistic societies like Nigeria, this differentiation implies that while religion remains influential in personal and communal life, public institutions such as the civil service are expected to operate according to secular administrative principles (Koko & Oko, 2025). From this perspective, the presence of religious practices during official working hours raises important questions about the appropriate boundary between private religious devotion and public institutional responsibility.

The functionalist perspectives of Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons further illuminate the social role of religion. Durkheim (1912/1995) viewed religion as a fundamental social institution that fosters social cohesion, collective identity, and moral regulation. Religious practices strengthen communal bonds and reinforce shared values within society. Similarly, Parsons (1951) argued that religion contributes to the maintenance of social order by providing moral guidelines that shape individual behavior and social integration. Within the workplace, these moral frameworks can encourage virtues such as honesty, diligence, and responsibility (Oko & Koko, 2024). Nevertheless, while religion can support ethical conduct among public officials, Durkheimian and Parsonian perspectives also imply that social institutions must function harmoniously within a broader social system. When religious activities disrupt organizational routines or administrative processes, they may unintentionally undermine institutional stability and efficiency.

Finally, Sriya Iyer's economic analysis of religion provides a contemporary perspective on the interaction between religion and economic development. Iyer (2016) argues that religion can

influence economic outcomes by shaping social norms, trust, and patterns of behavior within societies. Moreover, it can also shape economic development (Koko, 2020c; Koko & Oko, 2024). Religious institutions may contribute positively to development by promoting ethical values and social capital. However, the economic implications of religion depend on how religious practices interact with formal institutional structures.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the interaction between religion and the Nigerian civil service system. Weber's theory highlights the importance of work discipline and bureaucratic rationality, secularization theory emphasizes the differentiation between religious and state institutions, Durkheim and Parsons underscore the moral and integrative functions of religion, and Iyer demonstrates the broader economic implications of religious behavior. Combined, these perspectives help explain how religious practices within the civil service may simultaneously promote moral values while also creating institutional challenges that affect administrative efficiency and economic development.

4. Structures, Roles, Reforms and Problems of the Civil Service System in Nigeria

Historically, the civil service system in Nigeria roots its existence in a number of constitutional and administrative reforms which started in 1954 (Adedire, 2014). Its component organs consist of the Federal Civil Service, the 36 autonomous state civil services, and all the 774 local authorities, but excluding other federal agencies and state-owned enterprises like the military, legislative and judicial arms (Salisu, 2009). Furthermore, the federal and state civil services are organized around government ministries and extra-ministerial departments headed by ministers/commissioners who are appointed by the president/governors, respectively. These appoint-tees represent the political heads of their respective departments and are primarily responsible for policy matters. The administrative heads of the ministries are the permanent secretaries, responsible primarily for policy implementation under their respective jurisdictions. At the local government level, the political establishment is made up of the elected Chairman and councilors. The secretary and departmental heads constitute the civil service echelon at the local government (Salisu, 2009). In all, responsibility for the regulation of the three civil service systems - federal, State, and local governments rests with corresponding three commissions namely: the Federal Civil Service Commission, the State Civil

Service Commissions and the Local Government Service Commissions. These commissions are generally given the powers to appoint or dismiss any person for or from office in the services as well as exercise disciplinary control measures over persons holding positions in the services (Salisu, 2009).

Since its establishment, the civil service system as some researchers observe has gone through several reforms which can be divided into five different historical stages. Globally, issues bordering on reforms of the civil service system are not alien. For reforms of the civil service have taken place in many countries of the world. These reforms were necessary because traditionally civil service was a hierarchical, vertically integrated, and closed corporation. This conservative structure was based on loyalty to the central state institutions, service, and immediate superiors and only thereafter to the citizens as users of the administrative services. However, with the liberalization of Western societies and the beginning of globalization, this model of civil service did not meet modern requirements. Thus, it was necessary to reform and change civil service into something more effective, results-oriented, and transparent to the public (Smalskys & Urbanovic, 2017).

In Nigeria, the first historical reform is the one that started in 1954 and lasted till 1966 under the influence of colonial civil service. A significant development during this period is that with the advent of independence in 1960, the federal civil service commission was created and granted full powers to appoint, promote, dismiss, and discipline civil servants of all categories (Salisu, 2003). In addition to the federal civil service commission, there were three other civil services, one each for the Northern, Eastern and Western regions of the country (Olowu, Otobo and Okotoni, 1997).

Like the first reforms, the second major reforms took place during the military regimes which started in 1966 and lasted till 1979. Most significant thing during this period is that the higher civil service especially its corps of Permanent Secretaries in policy- and decision making gained further momentum at the federal level during this period (Salisu, 2009; Koko & Oko, 2025). Ayida (1990) adds that it was during this period that the politicization of civil service which in turn resulted to loss of its political neutrality, anonymity and impartiality took place. This development to a great extent destroyed the cherished values of stability of tenure and retirement honours associated with the civil service (Salisu, 2009). The implication is that the military regimes in Nigeria brought about gradual decline of the cherished values of the civil service

system in Nigeria. This continued till the third historical period which spanned from 1979 to 1983 when the civilian administration came to office on October 1, 1979 and made the civil service more politicized than ever before.

The fourth reforms began in 1983 and ended in May 1999. Olowu, Otobo and Okotoni (1997) record, that the period was characterized by the unified grading and salary structures covering all established posts in the civil services. States were also allowed to establish their own salary structures on the basis of their individual ability to pay. However, the most significant reforms during this period was the fact that the position of Head of Civil Service was abolished resulting into a situation in which ministers/commissioners became the chief executive and accounting officers of their respective ministries. The danger with this was that it paved way for financial recklessness and outrageous corruption to take place (Salisu, 200:7). The last historical period which started from 1999 and continues till date has also witnessed several other reforms. One significant thing worthy of mention during this period however, is the proliferation of special advisers which in a sense appears to usurp the relevance of higher civil servants in advising government on policy matters. The practice of appointing civil servants as caretakers of local government has further exacerbated the phenomenon of politicization of civil service in Nigeria (Salisu, 2009:8).

Despite these reforms, the civil service system is also characterized by serious challenges. The civil service system whether career or position, plays a central role in the governance of the state and socio-economic development of society by providing the enabling environment for implementation of policies of government as well as protecting public interest. Unfortunately, in recent times, this central role of civil servants in the political-administrative and societal systems is fast eroding as Raadschelders, Toonen, & van der Meer, (2007) rightly observe. Generally, civil service researchers attribute this gradual decline of the quality of services or supposed monopoly of civil servants worldwide to a number of internal and external factors which promote changes in the system. On a global scale, some of these internal and external factors include citizens' increase education and awareness of societal problems and possible solutions required to address them which they are now increasingly demanding a voice; increase awareness of the impact of decision centers on the societal and governmental levels; rapid information exchange; globalization and its attendant effects, transnational economic and demographic movements; and issues on

how to control cross border movement and constrain (Raadschelders, Toonen, & van der Meer, 2007; Farazmand & Pinkowski, 2006; Smalskys & Urbanovic, 2017).

In developing African countries, scholars also pinpoint that the problems confronting the civil service system are quite many and hydra-headed. Most notable of these problems however which scholars have identified include inadequate administrative potential or professionalism, corruption, tribalism, ineffective bureaucracy, favoritism and nepotism, lack of transparency, poor democratic procedures, diversion of public resources for private interests, lack of efficient information technologies, prolong absence of good governance, politicization of the civil service system, poor recruitment processes, etc. (Smalskys & Urbanovic, 2017; Brol, 2011).

The situation is not different in Nigeria where the civil service system has been particularly plagued by a number of challenges like tribalism, nepotism, endemic corruption, institutional failure, poor recruitment processes, and politicization of the civil service, amongst others (Ayeni, 1990; Etuk, 1992; and Olowu, Otobo & Okotoni, 1997). Of particular interest is that Salisu (2009) has registered five of the challenges which he considered as most daunting in the civil service in Nigeria today. These include inefficiency, that is, the inability of the civil service in Nigeria to function as a pivotal instrument for transformation; self-orientation which he defined as the tendency of civil servants to seek personal satisfaction of their own personal desires at the expense of other citizens of the country; incompetence of civil servants in setting out policy frameworks and standards as well as bring their experience, technical knowledge, and behavioural qualities to bear in the process of policy making; lack of training and retraining programs; and eroding values of integrity and trust. These are all problems confronting the civil service system in Nigeria.

Suffice it to state that while these problems persist, one area of particular reform that is urgently needed is to critically look into how religion - Christians and Muslims' prayer in the civil service constitute a problem to the smooth operations of the civil service system in Nigeria and the potential economic lost accruing from it. In the next section, this particular concern will be examined with particular reference to the Nigerian situation.

5. Religious Prayers in the Civil Service and their Implications for Economic Development in Nigeria

Religion occupies a central position in Nigerian society and significantly shapes the moral outlook, social behavior, and daily practices of its citizens (Koko, 2019). Both Christianity and Islam exert profound influence on personal and collective life, including political and administrative institutions. While religion can contribute positively to ethical conduct, discipline, and social cohesion, its manifestation within the Nigerian civil service system sometimes raises questions regarding efficiency, accountability, and economic productivity. In particular, the frequent observance of religious prayers during official working hours by both Christian and Muslim civil servants constitutes grave concerns about its potential implications for governance and economic development (Koko, 2020a).

The Nigerian civil service constitutes the administrative backbone of the state and plays a crucial role in policy implementation, service delivery, and national development. Ideally, public servants are expected to devote official working hours to performing duties that advance governmental objectives and public welfare. However, in many government offices across Nigeria, religious practices such as attending church services, participating in fellowship meetings, or leaving offices for Islamic midday prayers often occur during official working hours (Koko & Oko, 2025). While these practices are rooted in deeply held religious convictions, they sometimes disrupt administrative routines and delay the processing of public services.

From an economic perspective, time management and productivity are essential components of efficient governance. Economic development is closely linked to the capacity of institutions to function effectively and deliver services without unnecessary delays. Scholars of development economics emphasize that weak institutions and bureaucratic inefficiency often undermine economic growth by increasing transaction costs and discouraging investment (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North, 1990). When civil servants frequently suspend official duties to engage in religious activities during working hours, the cumulative effect can be significant delays in administrative procedures such as processing licenses, approving documents, or responding to citizens' requests. These delays not only inconvenience citizens but also reduce the overall efficiency of public institutions.

In Nigeria, anecdotal and observational evidence suggests that many government offices temporarily halt operations during certain periods of the day due to religious observances. Muslim civil servants often leave their offices for congregational prayers at mosques, particularly during the midday prayer (Salat al-Zuhr or Jumu'ah on Fridays), while some Christian civil servants attend prayer meetings, fellowship gatherings, or church services organized during working hours. Although these practices are not universally observed by all civil servants, their prevalence in some offices contributes to the perception that public service delivery is frequently interrupted by religious commitments. The implications of such interruptions extend beyond administrative inconvenience to broader economic consequences. Inefficiencies in the civil service can slow down economic transactions and hinder business activities. For example, delays in processing permits, tax documentation, or regulatory approvals can discourage entrepreneurial activity and reduce investor confidence. According to the World Bank (2020), bureaucratic inefficiency and administrative delays are among the institutional factors that constrain economic growth in many developing countries. When public institutions fail to operate consistently during official hours; the cost of doing business increases, thereby affecting economic productivity and national development. Furthermore, the normalization of religious activities during official work hours may reinforce a culture of laxity within the civil service. Organizational behavior scholars argue that workplace norms significantly shape employee performance and institutional effectiveness (Robbins & Judge, 2017). If the institutional environment permits frequent interruptions for non-official activities, employees may gradually develop *attitudes that prioritize personal commitments over professional responsibilities*. In such contexts, religious practices may inadvertently contribute to a broader pattern of absenteeism, lateness, and reduced accountability within the public sector. This situation also raises important questions about the relationship between religion and the secular character of the state. Nigeria is constitutionally a secular state that guarantees freedom of religion while maintaining neutrality in matters of faith. In principle, religious freedom allows individuals to practice their faith without interference. However, when religious observances interfere with official responsibilities in public institutions, tensions may arise between personal religious rights and professional obligations. Some scholars argue that maintaining a clear boundary between religious practice and public administration is essential for

ensuring institutional efficiency and fairness in pluralistic societies (Berger, 1999; Casanova, 1994).

It is important to emphasize that the argument here is not that religion itself is detrimental to economic development. On the contrary, religion has historically contributed to the formation of ethical values such as honesty, diligence, and social responsibility. Max Weber's classic analysis of the Protestant ethic, for instance, highlights how religious ideas can encourage disciplined work habits and economic productivity (Weber, 2002). In the Nigerian context, religious teachings within both Christianity and Islam often promote moral integrity and discourage corruption—values that are essential for effective governance. Nevertheless, the challenge arises when the practice of religion during official working hours conflicts with the operational demands of public institutions. In such cases, the issue becomes one of institutional management rather than religious belief itself. Public administration systems require clear rules regarding working hours, attendance, and accountability. If religious practices are allowed to disrupt these structures without appropriate regulation, the efficiency of the civil service may be compromised. A balanced approach may therefore be necessary - one that respects religious freedom while safeguarding institutional productivity. Some countries address similar issues by establishing structured break periods that accommodate personal needs without disrupting official duties. Such arrangements ensure that employees can observe religious obligations while maintaining professional discipline. In the Nigerian civil service, clearer administrative guidelines and workplace policies could help create a balance between religious expression and effective service delivery.

In all it is necessary to state that while religion remains an integral part of Nigerian social life and can positively shape moral character, its manifestation within the civil service during official working hours may have unintended consequences for institutional efficiency and economic development. Frequent interruptions for religious activities can contribute to delays in public service delivery, reinforce a culture of administrative laxity, and increase the cost of economic transactions. Addressing this issue requires thoughtful policy measures that respect religious freedom while emphasizing professionalism, accountability, and the efficient use of official working time within the civil service system. What then should be the way forward?

6. Toward a Balanced Framework: Religion, Work Ethics, and Public Accountability

The interaction between religion, work ethics, and public accountability in the Nigerian civil service calls for a balanced framework that recognizes the legitimacy of religious expression while safeguarding institutional efficiency and national development. Given the deeply religious nature of Nigerian society, attempts to exclude religion entirely from public life may be impractical. However, unregulated religious practices within official working hours can undermine the principles of professionalism, accountability, and effective service delivery. A balanced approach is therefore necessary to harmonize these competing concerns. Religion, as earlier noted, plays a significant role in shaping moral values and ethical conduct. Both Christianity and Islam emphasize virtues such as honesty, diligence, integrity, and service to others. These values align closely with the principles of public service ethics and can contribute positively to the performance of civil servants. Weber (2002) underscores the importance of disciplined work habits and a sense of vocation in fostering productivity and economic development. Similarly, Parsons (1951) highlights the role of shared moral values in maintaining social order and guiding individual behavior. When these values are properly integrated, religious ethics can reinforce a culture of responsibility and commitment within the civil service.

However, the challenge lies in ensuring that religious practices do not conflict with the operational requirements of public institutions. Public accountability demands that civil servants utilize official working hours efficiently and prioritize their responsibilities to citizens. Bovens (2007) defines public accountability as the obligation of public officials to explain and justify their actions in relation to established standards and expectations. Frequent interruptions of work for religious activities, particularly when unregulated, may weaken this accountability framework and reduce institutional effectiveness. A balanced framework therefore requires the establishment of clear institutional guidelines that regulate the expression of religion within the workplace. Such guidelines should recognize the right of individuals to practice their faith while ensuring that these practices do not disrupt official duties. For instance, structured break periods can be designated for personal activities, including prayer, without interfering with core working hours. This approach aligns with institutional theory, which emphasizes the importance of formal rules and norms

in shaping organizational behavior and maintaining efficiency (North, 1990).

In addition, strengthening work ethics within the civil service is essential for achieving this balance. Organizational culture plays a critical role in determining employee behavior, and a culture that prioritizes professionalism, punctuality, and accountability can mitigate the negative effects of workplace disruptions (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Training programs and ethical reorientation initiatives can help reinforce the importance of time management and public responsibility among civil servants. Furthermore, the principle of secularism, understood as the differentiation of institutional spheres, provides a useful framework for managing the relationship between religion and public administration. Casanova (1994) argues that modern societies function effectively when religious and state institutions operate within their respective domains while maintaining mutual respect. Applying this principle in the Nigerian context would involve ensuring that religious practices remain largely within the private sphere during official working hours, without infringing on individual rights.

In all, achieving a balance between religion, work ethics, and public accountability in the Nigerian civil service requires a pragmatic and context-sensitive approach. By integrating ethical values derived from religion with clear institutional regulations and a strong culture of professionalism, it is possible to respect religious freedom while promoting administrative efficiency and national development.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the complex relationship between religion, the civil service system, and economic development in Nigeria, with particular attention to the implications of religious practices during official working hours. While religion remains a vital force in shaping moral values, social cohesion, and individual behavior, its manifestation within public institutions presents both opportunities and challenges. The analysis has shown that although religious ethics can promote virtues such as honesty, diligence, and accountability, the unregulated observance of religious practices during working hours may undermine bureaucratic efficiency, disrupt service delivery, and weaken public trust in government institutions. The Nigerian civil service, as the administrative engine of the state, is central to national development. Its effectiveness depends on discipline, time management, and adherence to institutional rules. When these principles are

compromised, the consequences extend beyond administrative inconvenience to broader economic implications, including increased transaction costs, reduced productivity, and diminished investor confidence. In this context, the intersection of religion and public administration must be carefully managed to ensure that personal freedoms do not conflict with collective developmental goals. A key insight from this study is the need for a balanced and context-sensitive framework that accommodates religious expression while prioritizing professionalism and accountability. This requires the establishment of clear institutional guidelines that regulate workplace practices, the promotion of strong work ethics among civil servants, and a renewed commitment to the principles of secular governance. Ultimately, sustainable economic development in Nigeria depends not only on policy formulation but also on the efficiency and integrity of the institutions responsible for implementation. Ensuring that the civil service operates with discipline, neutrality, and a strong sense of public responsibility is therefore indispensable for achieving national progress.

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