

**Religious Fanaticism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic****OMORUYI, Kingsley Patrick¹ & ETINAGBEDIA, Goodluck²**

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Publication Date: 2026/06/22**Abstract**

Political instability, religious extremism, ethnic nationalism, youth unrest, and other societal issues hinder national development, with religious extremism posing the greatest challenge. Although the global impact of religious extremism on national development is widely recognized, researchers have given limited attention to its role in fostering underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study examined the effect of religious fanaticism on underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study utilized a cross-sectional research design, collecting data from 750 respondents, including Christian leaders, Muslim leaders, traditional leaders, youth leaders, and leaders of civil society organizations. Participants were chosen through a stratified random sampling method. Data analysis was conducted using correlation and regression methods with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Religious fanaticism significantly and positively influences underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In recent times, there has been an increase in ethnic chauvinism, ethnic politics, ethnic consciousness, ethnic sentiment, and religious prejudice and fanaticism that negatively impact Nigeria's national development. Religious extremism negatively affects national development in Nigeria, endangering lives, properties, and business growth in the Fourth Republic. The rising prevalence of religious terrorism has created an environment of insecurity, deterring both local and foreign investors. The study offers empirical insights into the relationship between religious fanaticism and underdevelopment in the Nigerian context. Christian and Muslim religious leaders should be encouraged to pursue comprehensive training through quality religious education. This approach will equip them with strong ethical principles, moral standards, core values, and a positive life philosophy essential for effective religious leadership, nation-building, and fostering national development.

Keywords: Religious, fanaticism, underdevelopment, national development

Introduction

Religion is a fundamental aspect of human relationships and social activities, shaping interactions and influencing social and economic activities both positively and negatively. Religious beliefs encourage individuals to align with others who share their faith, perpetuating cultural and spiritual practices. According to Yakubu et al. (2021), while the positive impacts of religion can promote political and economic development, the negative aspects often hinder progress. For example, religion can foster strong bilateral trade relations and diplomatic ties among nations with shared religious affiliations, leading to concessions such as relaxed immigration policies and the exchange of expertise for industrial development (Ogunleye, 2021; Adarigho, 2023).

However, religion has also been a source of conflict throughout history. Recent instances include Islamic extremist actions in the Middle East and the power struggles between Sunni and Shia groups, the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria (Ituma et al., 2022). Nigeria, despite its potential, continues to grapple with severe socio-economic and political challenges. Over 87% of Nigerians live in extreme poverty, and issues such as judicial inefficiency, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent trade policies, and a declining oil industry have stifled growth (Haaga & Ngbea, 2023). Additional challenges include inflation, youth unemployment, and social conflicts like the Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram extremist group, and clashes between farmers and herders, all of which have led to significant loss of life and property (Olorunda, 2023).

Religion has also played a divisive role in Nigeria, particularly due to tensions between the two dominant faiths, Islam and Christianity. This religious pluralism has fueled acrimony, division, and unhealthy competition among ethnic groups,

complicating efforts at unity. Umeanolue (2020) points out that the geographical concentration of Muslims in the northern region and Christians in the South has intensified these divisions. As Emoghene & Okolie (2020) explain, religious extremism has often been used as a tool for violence, power struggles, and socio-economic advantage, leading to widespread destruction and questioning the country's unity.

While religion is central to country's development in many societies, its misuse in Nigeria has undermined both political stability and economic progress, leaving the nation struggling with persistent conflicts and developmental challenges. This study thus examined the effect of religious fanaticism on underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Literature Review

Religious Fanaticism

The word "religion" comes from three Latin terms: religare, religio, and religere, all of which imply a binding duty that cannot be overlooked or evaded. As a key aspect of the oldest of human thought, religion is also among the most difficult concepts to define. Theologians and social scientists often disagree on the best way to understand religion, not necessarily due to personal biases but because of the inherent complexity in grasping its profound essence. Perspectives on religion vary depending on disciplinary focus. For instance, sociologists view religion primarily as a social phenomenon, anthropologists consider it a component of culture, and theologians regard it as the foundation of civilization and the driving force behind human decisions, actions, and societal structures (Okpala & Onodugo, 2023). Amadi-Nche (2020) describes religion as humanity's perception of a sacred design encompassing all beings, human or otherwise. Simply put, religion reflects a belief in a universe imbued with meaning beyond human existence. Emoghene and Okolie (2020)

emphasize that religion encompasses all dimensions of human spiritual life, representing what is ultimate, infinite, and impartial. In its broadest sense, religion is fundamentally about ultimate concerns what is and should be of the highest priority.

From an anthropological and sociological perspective, religion can also be understood as as humanity's response to existential needs, compelling individuals to connect with a greater reality that offers stability, prestige, and permanence. It is a universal phenomenon, expressed through devotion to God or higher powers via rituals, ceremonies, and deeply held beliefs. However, this devotion can sometimes prioritize outward expressions over inner spiritual transformation. As Okpala and Onodugo (2023) observe, many individuals hold religion so dear that they are willing to sacrifice their most valuable possessions, including their lives, for their faith. This fervent devotion often leads to violence and intense reactions when religious beliefs are challenged or questioned.

Fanaticism, as Omomia (2015) notes, is characterized by excessive passion. Ede (2020) defines it as an extreme zeal or excitement that surpasses reasonable boundaries, potentially leading to harmful or violent behavior. Religious fanatics are individuals who display excessive zeal in their beliefs and practices, often to the detriment of others. Oduwole and Fadeyi (2013) describe religious fanaticism as extreme, violent fervor marked by exaggeration and irrational behavior. It involves using violence to impose beliefs or doctrines, reflecting an unmoderated and unreasonable attitude toward religion.

Religious fanaticism can also be described as the naive conviction in the absolute correctness of one's beliefs, coupled with the justification of coercion to make others adopt the same perspective. This phenomenon can manifest directly or indirectly at institutional, group, or individual levels, often with negative consequences for interpersonal relationships (Amadi-Nche, 2020). Ultimately,

religious fanaticism undermines the essence of faith by promoting intolerance, violence, and division.

According to Ofusaia and Eboh (2015), fanaticism is the behavior of being excessively irrational in one's devotion or zeal for religion or belief. Religious fanaticism involves the misuse of religion for harmful or ulterior motives, often serving self-centered political goals or personal egotism. It encompasses religious practices, beliefs, actions, and behaviors that deviate significantly from the core principles and norms of religion. Essentially, it reflects extreme attitudes and actions that transform religion from a force for social cohesion and stability into a catalyst for conflict, destruction, and chaos. In the context of this study, religious fanaticism is understood as the fervent practice of one's religion, often at the expense of those who adhere to other faiths.

Underdevelopment

Underdevelopment is a condition that leads to social and political stagnation within a society, often characterized by a lack of critical and analytical thinking. One of its most damaging manifestations is imitation, where individuals fail to engage their intellectual capacities to improve their lives or contribute meaningfully to societal progress. The tendency to blindly adopt the oppressor's power or conform to established norms and practices reflects a moral failure and diminishes the uniqueness of human potential. Contributing to underdevelopment in many third-world countries are external factors like the lingering effects of colonialism and neocolonialism, alongside internal issues such as corruption, prebendalism, and ineffective leadership (Dantani, 2017).

Ingram (2018) describes underdevelopment as conditions marked by poverty and exploitation, often indicating a relative backwardness compared to established capitalist countries. It reflects disparities in

economic systems, human resource capacities, infrastructure, regional financial capabilities, and access to resources. The historical context, societal structures, erratic growth patterns, environmental control, and inadequate population planning further exacerbate underdevelopment in these nations. Otok et al. (2021) identify several characteristics of underdeveloped countries, including a labor force with a large percentage of unskilled workers, insufficient physical capital, low GDP, considerable income inequality, and significant wage disparities between skilled and unskilled labor.

Development, in contrast, is a multifaceted concept that differs depending on the observer's viewpoint. It signifies the process of societal and economic change driven by the interactions between the environment and culture. Emoghene and Okolie (2020) equate development with modernity and progress, encompassing cultural growth (customs, values, and traditions), personal growth (psychological pathways of individuals), and physical growth (technological advancements and man-made goods). According to Oladosu (2015), development involves eliminating dependency, fostering economic expansion, improving human welfare, and building capacity. For Okolie and Osayande (2021), development aims to address unemployment, inequality, and poverty reduction, with these issues serving as benchmarks for assessing progress.

A critical obstacle to regional development is the lack of stakeholder involvement in project planning and implementation. Effective development focuses on the needs and perspectives of local populations, who are best positioned to define what development means in their context. As outlined in the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, human beings should be the primary actors and beneficiaries of development efforts. In Nigeria, community involvement and social mobilization are pivotal to achieving sustainable development.

Social mobilization involves rallying diverse groups, including community members, civil society organizations, and opinion leaders, around a shared cause to drive behavioral change. In contrast, community engagement brings together people from various backgrounds within a community to work toward collective goals that may not necessarily focus on specific behaviors. Social mobilization usually arises from a collective sense of grievance or injustice and aims to offer alternative viewpoints on societal and developmental priorities. It extends beyond local engagement, incorporating nongovernmental organizations, professional networks, women's groups, youth organizations, community-based organizations, faith-based groups, and the private sector to inspire collective action for causes like climate resilience.

Through alliance-building and partnerships at international, national, and local levels, social mobilization fosters awareness and demand for specific development goals, often using media campaigns as a tool. Employing a multi-sectoral, multi-jurisdictional, and interdisciplinary participatory approach, it provides comprehensive, sustainable solutions to critical societal challenges.

Social mobilization uses an integrative approach that ensures civil society takes ownership of the agenda to drive change. By bringing together various societal and individual forces, it aims to raise awareness, build demand for specific services, support resource and service provision, and promote lasting involvement at both the individual and community levels. To engage specific groups in focused and meaningful discussions, social mobilization relies on the collaboration of institutions, community partners, and organizations. Sustainable social and behavioral change requires multiple layers of cooperation, as partnerships have a stronger impact than individual efforts. As a result, social mobilization strategies involve utilizing leaders and media to increase awareness,

establishing public forums for discussion, building alliances, and employing advocacy to gather resources.

Social mobilization involves empowering communities, individuals, organizations, and other groups to recognize their resources, needs, and strengths such as leadership capabilities for creative development. This process also encourages the formation of partnerships with funders, public and private organizations, civil society, and influential individuals. The objective is to build "Social Capital," which provides the funding and resources necessary for sustainable development planning, execution, oversight, and assessment. "Social Capital" helps motivate and fund the network of connections between individuals and organizations within a specific geographic area, ensuring the successful and efficient sustainability of the desired changes.

Religious Fanaticism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria

From the time Nigeria gained independence in 1960 till now, its national development has been hindered by various social, political, religious, and economic challenges, with religious fanaticism serving as one of the major challenges.

A country that neglects its economic development is bound to face poverty and decline. In Nigeria, the consequences of religious fundamentalism have had a particularly severe impact on development. History shows that when societies, like Nigeria, intertwine religion with political struggles for supremacy, socio-economic control, and cultural superiority, they experience developmental crises. Religious pluralism, when properly managed, can have a positive impact on society. However, in situations of religious intolerance and division, such as in Nigeria, development tends to stall. Morality is essential for national development as it promotes peace and contributes to a stable political environment.

Combatting corruption is an essential step toward ensuring moral integrity, which in turn facilitates resource management and fair allocation (Fabian & Ukomadu, 2022). Unfortunately, Nigeria's religious conflicts are often fueled by ethnic consciousness, violence, and the loss of life due to differing religious beliefs, particularly between Islam and Christianity, the two dominant religions. Religious practices that disrupt political and economic growth are prevalent, and religious terrorism, particularly from groups like Boko Haram, has severely impacted the country's stability. This group has caused widespread destruction in northeastern Nigeria, particularly in states like Yobe and Borno, crippling both social and economic life (Yakubu et al., 2021).

Religion, despite being misused at times, holds significant potential for promoting societal change, moral reformation, peace, and harmony. It provides the foundation for citizens and the government to contribute to the socio-economic and political development of the nation (Adegoke & Akaholu, 2022). A peaceful environment nurtures creativity and collaboration, helping overcome national challenges and enabling people to work together to achieve national goals (Awusaku, 2013). Religion's moral teachings promote responsible citizenship and adherence to the law, both of which are essential for successful development.

Religious fanaticism continues to impede Nigeria's progress by fostering terrorism, religious intolerance, and violent conflicts. The destruction wrought by such extremism has left countless families and organizations in devastation, creating a climate of fear and uncertainty throughout the country. As religious extremists continue to disrupt peace and security, they perpetuate underdevelopment and social instability. The belief in religious supremacy held by some adherents only exacerbates tensions, leading to violent conflicts and further undermining Nigeria's growth. These extreme religious

practices, rather than the religion itself, are the root cause of Nigeria's underdevelopment. The country cannot make substantial progress while plagued by insecurity, terrorism, and violent extremism (Awusaku, 2013).

Religious radicalism has significantly worsened Nigeria's socio-economic underdevelopment. The intertwining of ethnic politics, religious extremism, and social division has escalated the country's development challenges to alarming levels, making them difficult to address. Nigeria's religious extremism has created problems more detrimental than beneficial, leading to social fragmentation and conflict. Addressing religious extremism is vital for Nigeria's economic growth, social welfare, and modernization (Okolie & Osayande, 2021). Religious violence, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria has further undermined the political and economic stability of the country. Boko Haram has been a significant disruptor, causing severe affect to social and economic activities, investments, and the livelihoods of the population. This ongoing violence poses a direct threat to Nigeria's national development and overall prosperity, leaving the country severely underdeveloped and deeply divided.

Theoretical Framework

The deprivation theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the central issues of this study, although other theories could also be relevant for this discussion. Introduced by Ted Gurr in 1969, the deprivation theory posits that religion in Nigeria has frequently been utilized as a form of protest against problems such as exclusion, poverty, marginalization, corruption, and the lack of development. In addition, it has been employed by the ruling elites to advance their religious agendas. For instance, Nigerian Muslims view the ratification of Islamic Shariah law as an essential right for fully practicing their faith. However, Christians contend that the implementation of Sharia law

within the legal system violates their rights and argue that a secular constitution is necessary to protect their religious freedoms (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016).

Forx (2004) highlights that the government's involvement in religious matters exacerbates the situation, positioning this as contradictory to the Nigerian constitution. The state finds itself caught between the conflicting demands of secularism and religious law, fostering resentment that can escalate into violence (Cinjel & Chujor, 2017). Deprivation encompasses various aspects of poverty, such as hunger, illiteracy, poor health, insecurity, and lack of basic infrastructure. A nation's development level can be measured by the growth rate of its per capita income relative to other countries (Lucas, 1988). However, development also requires broader improvements in poverty alleviation, employment, creativity, efficiency, manufacturing, and equality. Ajaegbu (2012) defines national development as a nation's ability to enhance the social welfare of its people through access to essential services like healthcare, employment, clean water, and transportation.

Achieving meaningful development in Nigeria depends on Muslims and Christians finding common ground, beyond just polite interfaith dialogue among leaders. Without peace between these two major religions, significant development cannot be realized, as evidenced by the current situation. If these religious groups remain divided, Nigeria's development prospects will be severely hindered. This theory provides insight into how religious fanaticism affects Nigeria's national development.

Research Hypothesis

This study's goal was accomplished by testing this null hypothesis:

H₀: There is a significant relationship between religious fanaticism and underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Research Methods

The study employed a cross-sectional survey method. A total of 750 participants, including leaders from Christian, Muslim, traditional,

youth, and civil society groups, were randomly chosen from each geopolitical zone to participate in the field surveys. The findings are presented below.

Table 1: Population of the Study

Geopolitical Zone	Christian Leaders	Muslim Leaders	Traditional Leaders	Youth Leaders	Civil Society leaders	Total
South-South	Bayelsa (25)	Edo (25)	Delta (25)	Akwa-Ibom (25)	Rivers (25)	125
South-East	Enugu (25)	Anambra (25)	Ebonyi (25)	Abia (25)	Ebonyi (25)	125
South-West	Oyo (25)	Lagos (25)	Ogun (25)	Ekiti (25)	Osun (25)	125
North-West	Sokoto (25)	Zamfara (25)	Kaduna (25)	Kebbi (25)	Kano (25)	125
North-East	Bauchi (25)	Yobe (25)	Borno (25)	Adamawa (25)	Taraba (25)	125
North-Central	Plateau (25)	Kogi (25)	FCT (25)	Niger (25)	Kwara (25)	125
Total	150	150	150	150	150	750

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork (2024)

A stratified random sampling method was employed to select respondents who had relevant knowledge about the study's topic. The sample was selected from each of the six regions of the country. For data collection, the study employed a survey using a five-point Likert-type scale. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements, where a score of five

indicated strong agreement, four represented agreement, three signified neutrality, two indicated disagreement, and one reflected strong disagreement. A pilot test was carried out with thirty (30) respondents from the South-South region to assess the reliability of the instrument, its internal consistency was evaluated using the Cronbach Alpha method, as indicated below.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Study Variables

Scale	Quantity of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Religious Fanaticism	20	.779
Underdevelopment	15	.853

Researchers' Fieldwork (2024)

As a result, the coefficients of 0.779 and 0.853 for the research indicators met the commonly recommended threshold of 0.70 (Cronbach, 1951). Political science experts also deemed the questionnaire's content and face validity to be adequate. Therefore, the researchers deemed the scale's validity and

reliability to be acceptable. As a result, the two constructs under investigation demonstrated excellent reliability and internal consistency. Out of the seven hundred and fifty (750) questionnaires distributed, 537 (71.7%) were returned, cleaned, and used for

the quantitative data analysis, as demonstrated below.

Table 3: Questionnaire Distribution and Rate of Response

S/N	Regional Area	Questionnaire Dispersed	Questionnaire Collected	Proportion (%)
1	South-South	125	123	16.4
2	South-East	125	104	13.9
3	South-West	125	84	11.3
4	North-West	125	68	9.1
5	North-East	125	61	8.1
6	North-Central	125	97	12.9
	Total	750	537	71.7

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork (2024)

Pearson product-moment correlation and linear regression analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, at a 0.05 level of significance for data analysis.

Research Results

Bivariate analysis is employed to explore the causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The hypothesis is accepted if $P > 0.05$, indicating strong evidence of a relationship between the variables, and rejected if $P < 0.05$, signifying insufficient evidence of a relationship. This decision rule is applied to the bivariate test results below.

Table 4: Correlation of Religious Fanaticism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria

	Variables		Religious Fanaticism	Underdevelopment
Spearman's rho	Religious Fanaticism	Correlation Coefficient	1	.873**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	Underdevelopment	N	537	537
		Correlation Coefficient	.873**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
		N	537	537

**The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

Table 4 presents the relationship between religious fanaticism and underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, analyzed using Spearman's correlation coefficients. A strong and statistically significant correlation is observed between underdevelopment and

religious fanaticism ($\rho = 0.873$, $n = 537$, $P = 0.001$). This indicates that religious extremism contributes to the acceleration of underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. However, correlation analysis alone cannot establish causality. To further explore

the relationship, a linear regression technique was employed.

Table 5: Linear Regression Analysis of the Impact of Religious Fanaticism on Underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		P-Value	Decision
	B	Std. Error		
Constant	1.320	.308	< 0.001	
Underdevelopment	.546	.057	< 0.001	

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

Table 5 reveals that the (β) value of 0.546 suggests that 54.6% of the change in in underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic can be independently attributed to religious fanaticism. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The regression results, with a 95% confidence level, demonstrate that religious fanaticism plays a role in contributing to underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed a strong and significant positive correlation between underdevelopment and religious extremism in the country. The research further confirmed that religious fanaticism has had a major influence on the nation's underdevelopment, aligning with the views of Fabian and Ukomadu (2022), who noted the significant role of politics and religion in shaping Nigeria's national growth. The findings also support Amadi-Nche's (2020) claim that religious fanaticism continues to hinder national unity and development, as centrifugal forces, resource control disputes, ethnic politics, and religious conflicts have severely disrupted the country's development process. Additionally, Madumere et al. (2020) corroborated the findings by noting that since Nigeria's independence in 1960, religious fanaticism and terrorism have been major threats to lives, property, and economic activities. Ongoing terrorist attacks, particularly by the extremist group Boko Haram, have led to Nigeria lagging behind

other African nations in socio-economic, cultural, educational, and technological advancements. For Nigeria to achieve meaningful progress, addressing religious fanaticism and insecurity is crucial.

Adegoke and Akaholu (2022) also emphasized that religious conflicts in Africa have led to significant loss of life and destruction of resources, hindering development. The consequences of religious fanaticism are widespread, affecting political, social, economic, and religious spheres. These conflicts often lead to the loss of innocent lives, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of communities, further exacerbating underdevelopment. The damage caused by religious extremism has had a profound negative impact on Nigeria, leading to significant resource loss, especially in vital sectors like education, healthcare, and religious facilities.

Religious extremism has fostered division, violence, and a reversal of progress in multiple sectors. It has strained relationships between Islam and Christianity, making peaceful coexistence increasingly difficult. The northeastern region of Nigeria and other affected areas have experienced severe economic, social, and environmental decline due to religious extremism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings revealed that religious fanaticism significantly impedes development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, fostering ethnic

chauvinism, ethnic politics, and religious intolerance. These issues have negatively impacted the nation's growth. Religious extremism in Nigeria has led to unprecedented violence, with governments needing to take comprehensive steps to address the divide between Islam, Christianity, and African traditional religions. In the Fourth Republic, religious extremism has posed a significant danger to lives, property, and economic progress, making Nigeria an insecure environment for both local and international investors. The ongoing acts of terrorism, particularly from groups like Boko Haram, have resulted in other African nations surpassing Nigeria in socio-economic, cultural, educational, and technological development.

For Nigeria to attain national progress, it is vital to promote national unity that goes beyond ethnic, regional, and religious differences. While honoring Nigeria's multicultural and multi-religious identity, it is important for all citizens to collaborate in building a cohesive nation. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim, should receive comprehensive religious education to equip them with the ethics, moral principles, values, and life philosophies necessary for effective leadership, nation-building, and fostering national development.
2. The government should offer interest-free loans to young people to support the establishment of small businesses, including ventures like agricultural farms, poultry, fish ponds, and business centers as strategies for poverty reduction. This initiative will help reduce religious extremism and its negative effects on national development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.
3. The government, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions should regularly organize seminars

focused on religious harmony in Nigeria, encouraging peaceful coexistence, social mobilization, and active community participation among followers of different faiths.

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