



# **RELIGION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN NIGERIAN NATION: X-RAYING THE CONFLICTS AND REMEDIES**

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## **Abstract**

Religion and ethnic identity in Nigeria: X-raying the conflicts and remedies is the focus of this research. Religion is man's belief in a supernatural force for protection and reverence. Ethnic identity is an individual's self-categorizing concept in which a person identifies with an ethnic cleavage and its cultural identity, beliefs, values and origins. Religion and ethnicity have caused great harm to the Nigerian state as there is now absence of peace and crisis all over the country. There is lack of peaceful coexistence among religious groups in Nigeria as religious fanatics create tensions on daily basis. This research addressed the historical context of religion in Nigerian society, and look at ethnicity as concept, the connectivity of religion and ethnicity in Nigeria, a critique of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, exploitation of religious and ethnic identities by elites, religious conflicts and socio-political implications, religious identity and manipulation in Nigerian politics and remedies to ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria. This research utilized the analytical method with books, journals and internet sources. It recommends that every citizen of Nigeria should be allowed to practice their religion freely without infringement and discourage ethnicity because they breed discrimination and crisis.

**Keywords: Conflicts, Ethnicity, Exploitation, Identity, Religion**

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, as a result of ethnic identity and religious affiliation is more polarized and disintegrated today than it was at independence; and the situation is getting unbearable on daily basis. Adamolekun (2000) asserts that religion covers a wide variety of behavior, practices and beliefs. Hence, religion is not in any way a means of promoting conflicts, rather it is a means of encounter with the Supreme Being and interaction with the supernatural order to cope with life crises. Most religions of the world proclaim



peace, love, harmony and have served the cause of peace. Contrary to the above assertion, religion has been the causes of many wars in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Findings show that religion is sometimes one of the major causes of wars and this is borne out of the fact that some of the current international conflicts have religious undertones.

The interplay between religion and ethnicity in Nigeria is a significant factor in the country's socio-political landscape, as both are powerful identities with the ability to unify communities or create deep divides. Nigeria's ethnic diversity and religious pluralism intersect to form complex group identities that political elites have historically exploited for power and control. By leveraging these identities, elites often incite tension and conflict, deflecting from critical issues such as economic inequality, resource allocation, and corruption, (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2010). This manipulation contributes to cycles of intercommunal violence, particularly in regions where ethnic and religious identities align with access to political and economic resources.

The reality and effects of violence and insecurity in Nigeria and the world are alarming. Nigeria, since independence, has been bedeviled with one form of violence and insecurity or the other: militancy, religious crisis, political crisis, kidnapping, insurgency. This socio-Religious conflicts are part of the recurring issues in Nigeria today (Oko, 2015:287). The effects on the nation and the church cannot be overemphasized, (Olusakin & Sibani, 2023). Nigeria, as a result of ethnic identity and religious affiliation is more polarized and disintegrated today than it was at independence; and the situation is getting unbearable on daily basis. This was re-echoed by Atanang, Ekanem and Oko (2022:201) when they said "due to differences in tribes and religious beliefs, there are numerous incidences of hostilities, resulting in destruction of lives and properties" .Ambrose (2022) says, if the inter-religious dialogue



between Christians and Muslims is in nature, it will pave way for a peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. For example, one can quickly observe that, in our schools, neighbourhood, and even extended families, Muslims and Christians are living together. The questions begging for answers are: is ethnicity the main cause of religious violence? Are religious conflicts in Nigeria political? If Nigeria completely becomes a secular state, will crisis cease? This research will see to the solutions of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

### **Historical Context of Religion in Nigerian Society**

Nigeria's religious landscape is one of the most diverse and complex in Africa, deeply shaped by its history, colonial legacy, and varied ethnic composition. The country is home to three major religious traditions: Islam, Christianity, and indigenous African religions. Each of these belief systems has left a profound imprint on Nigeria's social, economic, and political structures, contributing to both its unity and its divisions.

Islam is the oldest of the three major religious traditions in Nigeria. It was introduced to the northern part of the country in the 11th century through trade and contact with the broader Islamic world, especially with North Africa and the Arab world. The Kanem-Bornu Empire and later the Sokoto Caliphate helped establish Islam as the dominant religion across the northern regions, where it remains the majority faith today. The Sokoto Caliphate, founded by Usman dan Fodio in the early 19th century, also contributed to the spread of Islam and shaped the political structure in the north. Islamic leaders in the north exercised both religious and political authority, creating a legacy of theocratic governance that continues to influence the region's culture and political systems (Falola, 2001).



Christianity was introduced later, primarily during the 19th century with the arrival of European missionaries, who initially established schools and medical facilities as a means to evangelize local communities, (Ter-Haar, 2009). Christianity spread most rapidly in southern Nigeria, where British colonial administrators also had a greater presence. Unlike Islam, which became embedded in local governance structures, Christianity spread through a decentralized network of missionary institutions. The faith gained considerable influence among the Yoruba in the southwest and the Igbo in the southeast, contributing to a new social hierarchy and changing traditional practices, (Larrain, 1983). Christian missions often prioritized Western education, which in turn opened up opportunities for employment in the colonial administration, thereby reshaping social structures in the south (Peel, 2000).

Indigenous African religions, though often less visible in contemporary Nigeria, represent the oldest spiritual traditions in the region. These belief systems are typically polytheistic and emphasize a close connection between the spiritual and natural worlds. Indigenous religions vary widely across Nigeria's different ethnic groups, but common features include ancestor worship, belief in multiple deities or spirits, and a strong link between religious practices and local customs. Although Christianity and Islam now dominate religious life in Nigeria, indigenous beliefs continue to influence cultural practices and worldviews, especially in rural areas. Many Nigerians even today incorporate elements of traditional religions into their Christian or Islamic practices, creating unique syncretic forms of worship (Falola, 2001).



## **A Look at Ethnicity as Concept**

Ethnicity is generally considered the most basic and political salient identity in Nigeria. Nigerians define themselves in clear terms of their ethnic affinities than any other identity both in competitive and non-competitive spaces. Ethnicity is one of the key markers in Nigeria's pluralistic society. The primordialists see ethnicity as historically rooted and embedded in people's way of life and culture, and enforced by social institutions, collective myths and memories developed from early socialization, and hence have continued over time to heighten the polity of the nation, (Nwaoha, Ogboji & Ugwolebo, 2022).

Ethnic nationalism holds that nations are defined by common ancestry, language, and beliefs (Muller, 2008). According to Erikson's (1968), description of identity as interrelating the group and individual identity; identity can be generally defined as any group attribute that gives recognition, definition, reference, affinity, coherence and meaning for individual members of the group, acting individually and collectively. Ethnic identity connects people with common ancestral bond, languages, cultural affinity. Two major approaches or school of thoughts can classify the nature of Nigeria's identity formation. The first is primordial ties which are basically ascriptive and dependent on the 'givens' of life or natural (tribe, kinship, and ethnicity among others), and civil ties, which is based on industrial-society, such as political party affiliation, interest group membership, class and 'elite' construct.

Uchegbu, Belo & Ojo (2025) holds that identities are intricately linked and mutually reinforcing, because identities co-exist. The most salient identities are main basis for violent conflicts in Nigeria which cut across ethnic, regional, religious and sub-ethnic. The phrases: ethno-religious, ethno-regional and religio-political are ways of expressing the connectivity of identities in a plural state, like



Nigeria. In recent times, other ‘primordial’ identities which have gained wide and strong conceptual relevance in Nigeria are those of ‘indigenes’, ‘non-indigenes’, ‘migrants’ and ‘settlers. All these have ethnic, communal, religious and regional affinity, and have emerged from an entrenched system of exclusion and marginalization in which non-indigenes, migrants and settlers are deprived of equal access to resources, rights and privileges in the same nation as citizens. The newest emerged, constructed identity in Nigeria is the ‘political-class’ identity which has deepened the socio-economic marginalization and promoted the classification of other citizens of the country as the ‘poor masses. This exclusionary system has continually promoted social inequality, injustice, and deprivation which has remain the bane of violent conflicts all over Nigeria, and is deep-rooted in the “national question”. Of course, these marginalization and ethnic socio-political inequalities were both entrenched by the colonial lords and post-independence administrations.

Nwaoha, et.al (2022) defines ethnic nationalism as the allegiance of individual members of ethnic group to such group, having shared origins, tradition and having developed high level of consciousness on the factors that binds them together in a given area. There is always a fundamental consciousness of the ethnic group to think and belief that they are distinctive from others, and this ethnic consciousness and allegiance determine the level of co-operation and existence of these ethnic cleavages in a given period.

Ethic nationalism identifies a people of ethnic group of common descent bonded with common culture and distinctive ideology. Ethnic nationalism believes that nations are defined by common ancestry, language and beliefs. It is based on the idea that ethnic groups have the right to self-determination, and this right can lead to a variety of different outcomes from a sovereign state to the establishment of self-



governing bodies within the existing state. Ethno-nationalism is a type of nationalism which basic understanding is tied up to ethnic ties and ethnicity as core component of nations. Ethnic nationalism as a concept refers to distinct ethnic groups and identities that are living in a common territorial space or polity, who failed to develop attributes or social capital or integration to accommodate each other, whose deep-rooted boundaries define their distinct cleavages.

Colonial legacies, modernization, forced assimilation; social fragmentation, uneven development and histories of authoritarianism are factors that construct ethnic nationalism. Ethnicity plays a major role in the political development in Nigeria, and has emerged ethnic politics-a detriment to Nigeria's nascent democracy and national development.

### **The Connectivity of Religion and Ethnicity in Nigeria**

The Hausa-Fulani are predominantly Muslim, the Yoruba are religiously diverse with a mix of Islam, Christianity, and indigenous religions, and the Igbo are primarily Christian. These religious and ethnic identities are not merely cultural markers but have become politicized in ways that shape access to power and resources. As a result, religion and ethnicity often overlap, influencing regional politics, economic policies, and social organization. Considering religious affiliation trend in Nigeria, all is not well as religious crises have almost put the entire country apart as religion is used as a political weapon by selfish politicians. According to (Oluwatoyin & Emmanuel, 2020) Nigeria has three hundred and fifty ethnic groups with diverse religion, history, culture, dialects and languages. The major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani) compose only fifty-seven percent of Nigeria's population. The remaining forty-three percent are the minority groups. Minority groups according to (Dada, 2016) do not have political voice, nor do they have access to resources or the technology required to develop



economically. As a result of this, they often consider themselves being marginalized, neglected, relegated and oppressed in all ramifications. These among other factors usually fuel religious crises in Nigeria as each ethnic groups and religious fundamentalists will usually want to have their ways at all cost.

The political relevance of religion and ethnicity has been especially pronounced since colonial times when the British colonial administration applied “indirect rule.” This policy relied on local leaders and aligned with ethnic and religious divisions, especially by empowering northern Muslim leaders and reinforcing a political divide between the north and the south. This divide laid a foundation for later ethnic and religious competition as Nigeria transitioned to independence, with groups vying for influence in the emerging nation-state (Kukah, 1993). Over the years, these divisions have become deeply entrenched in the political framework, influencing voting patterns, party alliances, and government appointments. Consequently, religion and ethnicity serve as a means of rallying communities, but they also perpetuate the marginalization of certain groups and fuel tensions across regional and religious lines.

### **A Critique of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

The persistent exploitation of religious and ethnic identities for political gain has profound implications for Nigeria’s social and political stability. This manipulation not only fuels division but also hinders development by diverting attention and resources away from crucial issues like poverty reduction, healthcare, and education, (Smith, 2007). The cycles of violence that emerge from such divisions have a devastating effect on communities, leading to economic disruption, displacement, and long-term trauma, (Ibrahim, 2011). Intercommunal violence often results in the destruction of infrastructure and



disruption of essential services, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, where access to social services is already limited, (Omeje, 2012).

On a national scale, ethno-religious conflict weakens Nigeria's cohesion and challenges the viability of its federal structure. As local leaders and politicians continue to draw on these identities to build support, the sense of a united Nigerian identity becomes harder to sustain. This fragmentation impedes the formation of effective, inclusive policies, as politicians prioritize the interests of their immediate ethnic or religious constituencies over national unity. Moreover, when communities become polarized along religious and ethnic lines, they are less likely to collaborate in addressing shared challenges, such as poor governance and economic inequality, making it easier for elites to escape accountability (Kukah, 1993).

The intersection of religion and ethnicity in Nigeria has become a critical factor in the country's political and social dynamics, (Lewis, 2007). Political elites exploit these identities to maintain control, reinforcing divisions that lead to recurring violence and societal fragmentation. By examining case studies such as the Jos crisis and the Boko Haram insurgency, it is evident that many of Nigeria's ethno-religious conflicts are not merely cultural clashes but products of deliberate manipulation. Scholars such as Albert (2002) and Kukah (1993) highlight the importance of addressing these root causes by fostering inclusivity, accountability, and unity across Nigeria's diverse communities. Addressing the manipulation of religion and ethnicity in politics is crucial for fostering peace, development, and national cohesion in Nigeria.



### **Exploitation of Religious and Ethnic Identities by Elites**

Several instances of intercommunal violence in Nigeria demonstrate the impact of elite-driven manipulation of religious and ethnic identities. These clashes have led to the loss of thousands of lives and the displacement of many more, illustrating the tragic consequences of politicizing religious and ethnic identities (Albert, 2002). Boko Haram capitalized on religious grievances and perceptions of government neglect, attracting followers who felt marginalized by the state. The group's attacks on Christian communities and government installations have further intensified Nigeria's religious divide. Politicians in the northeastern Nigeria have been accused of leveraging the insurgency to gain control over rival communities or to undermine federal power. The Boko Haram conflict is thus both a symptom of religious and ethnic manipulation and a tool used by some elites to maintain local power, even at the cost of regional stability, (Anderson & Beckerleg, 2007).

Political elites in Nigeria often manipulate religious and ethnic identities to secure loyalty, consolidate power, and marginalize opposition. This exploitation operates on several levels, ranging from subtle messaging to outright incitement of violence. During elections, for example, candidates frequently appeal to ethnic and religious loyalties, presenting themselves as defenders of their community's interests, (Nnoli, 2008). This approach is especially effective in Nigeria's "first-past-the-post" electoral system, where the winner takes all, making ethnic and religious bloc voting a critical strategy for political survival.

In many cases, elites stoke fear and distrust between religious and ethnic groups to maintain political stability that benefits their own interests. For instance, politicians might emphasize historic grievances or frame social and economic problems as threats posed by another religious or ethnic group, even



when the issues stem from broader structural inequalities or governance failures. This tactic allows elites to deflect attention from systemic issues, such as poverty and corruption, by fostering divisions that keep different groups in opposition to one another rather than united in demanding accountability (Albert, 2002). The outcome is often a heightened sense of “us versus them” among communities, which can quickly escalate into conflict.

The selfishness of leaders in government, fraud, and the wide gap between the political class and the masses force the suffering society and the youth to carry arms, Rev. Christian Eze (Personal communication, 12th Feb., 2023). Socio-economic factors in this contest include unemployment, corruption, uneven distribution of wealth and resources, poverty, and environmental crisis. Unemployment breeds poverty. Extreme poverty logically leads to criminality that begets insecurity. A society where more than 90% of the workforce who are youths are unemployed, necessarily will yield more than 90% of insecurity. Nigeria has been called the extreme poverty capital of the world and yet there is no reasonable programme either immediate or remote on ground to lift her out of this messy situation. This situation creates an avenue for the youth to employ themselves in criminal activities that lead to insecurity, (Nwagboso, 2012).

### **Religious Conflicts and Socio-Political Implications**

Religious diversity in Nigeria has been a double-edged sword, providing a source of cultural richness but also contributing to tensions and conflict. Inter-religious conflicts, such as those between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Belt region, have often been fueled by political and economic grievances rather than solely by religious differences. Competition over resources, political representation, and access to land are often reframed along religious lines, intensifying these conflicts (Albert, 2002).



Political elites have sometimes exploited these religious divisions to secure their own power, aligning with religious leaders to gain the support of their communities while marginalizing opposition groups.

In recent years, religious identities have become further politicized, with religious organizations becoming more influential in advocating for social and political change, (Meyer, 2004). For instance, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) frequently engage in public debates over national policies, particularly in areas related to religious freedom and governance. These organizations have become major players in Nigeria's political discourse, sometimes challenging government policies and sometimes aligning with them, depending on the interests of their constituencies, (Salamone, 2014).

Nigeria's religious history is deeply intertwined with its socio-political and economic landscape. The introduction of Islam and Christianity, the persistence of indigenous religions, and the colonial legacy have collectively shaped Nigeria's diverse religious environment. Religious identities in Nigeria intersect with regional and ethnic distinctions, creating a complex and sometimes divisive socio-political landscape. This historical context helps explain the ways in which religion continues to influence Nigerian society, not only as a matter of personal belief but also as a significant factor in social, economic, and political power dynamics, (Nolte, Danjibo & Oladeji, 2009). Understanding this context is essential for analyzing the role of religion in contemporary Nigeria and for exploring how religious identities may be used by political elites to maintain their dominance, a phenomenon that aligns closely with the Marxist perspective on religion as a tool of social control.



## **Religious Identity and Manipulation in Nigerian Politics**

**1. Elections and Religious Allegiances:** Nigerian elections have often been marked by candidates openly aligning with religious identities to secure votes. For instance, in presidential elections, candidates strategically emphasize their religious affiliations to appeal to either the Christian or Muslim majority. This tactic serves to polarize voters along religious lines, reinforcing divisions that distract from critical issues such as corruption or policy failures. Religious leaders are frequently enlisted to endorse candidates, turning places of worship into platforms for political propaganda. (Van-Stiphout, 2014).

**2. Sharia Law and Northern Identity:** In the early 2000s, several northern Nigerian states implemented Sharia law, a move supported by Muslim elites who portrayed it as a return to religious and cultural authenticity. This development created significant tensions with Christian populations in the north and with the broader Nigerian Christian community, (Alao, 2010). While Sharia's introduction was presented as a reflection of regional autonomy, it also functioned as a political tool for northern elites to consolidate power, foster regional solidarity, and marginalize Christian minorities, often leading to violent confrontations.

**3. State Support for Religious Institutions along Ethnic Lines:** Nigerian governments at both State and Federal levels frequently fund religious activities and events, such as sponsoring pilgrimages to Mecca and Jerusalem for citizens. While ostensibly promoting religious freedom, these state-sponsored initiatives also serve to curry favor with religious groups and strengthen the political influence of religious leaders. For example, governors in northern states often use public funds to subsidize the Hajj



pilgrimage, building goodwill among Muslim constituents and reinforcing the elites' legitimacy through religious patronage.

These case studies illustrate how religion is used to foster political loyalties, create a sense of shared identity, and legitimize power, ultimately supporting the elite's control over Nigeria's political landscape. By manipulating religious affiliations and exacerbating sectarian divides, political leaders gain short-term political capital at the expense of long-term social cohesion, perpetuating a system that serves elite interests while marginalizing the broader population, (Mohammed, 2004).

### **Remedies to Ethno-religious Crisis in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, intolerance of the other's ethnic origin and religious belief has been considered as one of the main causes of insecurity. According to Ozoigbo (2019), ethnic bigotry and religious fanaticism have facilitated insecurity in Nigeria to the extent that it is gradually becoming the identity of the Nigerian State. Manguwat (2016) holds that major religious crises in Nigeria have erupted between Christians and Muslims; but also, between Muslims and Muslims. There has not been any intra-religious conflict among Christians that would require the intervention of government and security agents. Therefore, it requires religious tolerance to suppress ethno-religious violence in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a secular state but the identification of Christianity and Islam to the exclusion of other religion further deepens conflicts in Nigeria. The State of origin should be removed and replaced with State of resident in all our national document as this will reduce ethnic identity which is in opposition to nationalism.



As Nigerians witness the harrowing effects of violence and insecurity, various countries, civil society organizations, traditional rulers and religious bodies, lend their voices to call on the federal government to find lasting solution to the issues stemming violence and insecurity in the nation. (Olusakin & Sibani, 2023). There should be a serious security check on religious groups fueling violence in their organization via sermons, teaching, hostility. Religious and traditional leaders should preach unity and peaceful coexistence, discouraging violence. Nigerian citizens and religious groups are supposed to unify people of diverse culture together and not as one who divides members of multi-national state. According to Chidi (2022), religious extremism, poor leadership and marginalization have been identified as the major causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Nigeria religious adherents and leaders, especially the Muslims and Christians have demonstrated intolerance attitude towards each other resulting in religious fanaticism, confrontations and conflict of interest between members of this various religious group.

The economic implications of ethno-religious crises, like the social implications, are multi-dimensional. The disruption of economic life due to ethnic and religious conflicts negatively impacts on the national economy. Individuals, corporate organizations and governments have business interests in various parts of the country and the outbreak of such conflicts usually necessitates the closure of business activities, (Chidi, 2022). It is imperative for Nigerians to raise local securities that will protect economic activities in any part of Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

There are two primary religions in Nigeria- Islam and Christianity, competing with each other for centuries, causing intolerance and socio-political crises. Conflict is a great predicament in any human society. History indicates that conflict is an on-going process in human relations and may occur within



and among groups and communities at any time. The management of ethno-religious crises is essential for the protection of Nigeria's national security and unity. The prevalence of crises in Nigeria is eroding the unity upon which any meaningful development could take place. It has also left adverse effects on the socio-economic polity of the people. Since the effects of ethno-religious crises borders on national security, it is imperative that governments evolve such measures that would protect lives and property of the Nigerian people.

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## **The Role of Religious Ethical Values in Stemming the Tides of Cybercrime among Youths in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Cybercrime has become a household phenomenon in Nigeria, particularly among young people who are mostly actively involved in the crime. Cyber shenanigans are perpetuated in different forms, such as credit card or bank account hacking and unsolicited emails and text messages to unsuspecting persons by fraudsters through the aid of the internet accessible with computers or mobile phones. Cybercrime is ethically and morally wrong because they cause pain to victims or destroy the lives of those involved, which is completely against moral codes in a humane society. The study aimed to investigate the reality of cyber fraud among youths in Nigeria and highlight the role of religious ethical values in stemming this evil tide, with the understanding that humans, including cybercriminals, are religiously conscious beings living among people. The study adopts a historical research methodology to systematically recapture the complex nature of cybercrime and youth participation in Nigeria through a critical review of relevant literature. The study revealed that the quest for wealth and fame among youth in Nigeria and the rush to measure up with their peers in the society could be attributed to the reason why many youths engage in the illicit venture of cybercrime, even though it is against their faith and falls short of religious, moral, or ethical values. The study therefore, argued that if properly engaged, religious moral values could serve as transformative tools towards right values among young people. The study concludes and recommends that the fight against criminality, especially cybercrime, is the sole responsibility of every member of society, but that the religious community must play a vital role in teaching adherents that going against or breaking existing laws is both punishable by God and society.

**Keywords:** Cybercrime, Youth, Unemployment, Religion, Ethical Values, Nigeria.



## **Introduction**

The tendency to use religion for positive or negative gains, whether relating to character or virtue, has been an age-long argument among scholars of religions globally. This debate is even more complicated, particularly in Africa, where religion has assumed a dangerous ‘weapon’ in society, because it now serves as a means of political recognition to the detriment of the electorates or to improve economic and charismatic relevance among clergies, instead of using it in the services of God and humanity. Although, we cannot equivocally conclude that religion remains the major reason while the African continent as a whole cannot measure up in areas of technological advancement as compared to Europe and America. Although African country like South Africa have tried to break the shackle of religious bigotry to some extents and in their effort to embraced secularism. Whereas Nigeria has been labelled consistently with derogatory nomenclatures like ‘notorious’ and ‘overtly religious’ people by Western scholars. According to African countries are rich in culture and values that continue to shape the African cosmology and philosophy due to its accommodating nature (Marloes 647). There are over 250 ethnic nationalities in Africa that has served as a guiding light for countless generations, molding the moral and ethical foundation of societies across the continent (Falola par. 2). These are some of the reasons why it was literally easy for Europeans missionaries and the Arabian merchants to penetrate in the southern and northern protectorates of Nigeria where they spread Christianity and Islamic message to the people without any form of hindrances.

It is interesting to note that the immoral act of cybercrime did not originate from the African continent, rather it first surfaced in the European state of France in 1834, where the first cyber-attack took place and cybercriminals stole financial market information by gaining access into the French telegraph system (Wolf par.1). Since then, cybercrime has become the compound name for rule-breaking behaviours, such as cyber-fraud, cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and cyber espionage in the cyber spaces (Hutchings and Chua 169; Lazarus, 65). As Africans began to be aware of the illicit trade



of cybercrime, it is unfortunate that Nigerian youths have taken the centre stage with the bulk of cybercriminals emanating from our space, where they represent ninety percent of the active population (Adeniran 20; Ojedokun & Eraye 1002). Cybercrime involves defrauding victims of monetary values, and many young people in Nigeria most especially job seekers and university undergraduates, have taken the trade as a means of employment with the hope that through it they will become rich one day (Lazarus 67). Osuntuyi, Ireymi and Aluko express their worries about the increasing number of youths joining cybercrime in Nigeria when they opine that:

Many people, especially the youth, are getting involved day by day. They are participating actively in one form of Internet fraud or the other, majorly known in cyberspace as cybercrime, but known in the Nigerian parlance as *Yahoo Yahoo*..., cybercrime is a fast-growing expanse of crime, and this crime has continued unabated with the day-to-day involvement of many youths who are infused with the get-rich-quick syndrome (51).

The quest for quick wealth and the corrupt lifestyle often displayed by politicians has unequivocally forced many young people into illegal means of making money at all costs, including cybercrime and other forms of shenanigans that readily come to mind. This challenge of rich quick tendency is dramatised in our music industries today and on social media, including music stars who occasionally flaunt expensive jewellery, displacing and talking about the necessity of making wealth at any cost, in their songs, has paved the way for more crimes in society. This kind of lifestyle has become part of us because we have gradually built societies that no longer give credence to hard work, rather one that celebrates criminality instead of virtue, even among Christians and Muslims. For instance, social media was flooded in 2023 with the untimely demise of a Nigerian popular musician and Afrobeats star Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba, popularly known as ‘Mohbad’, who we alleged to have “died why trying to get rich” in the music industry because today new generational record labels are co-founded by Yahoo-boys (Lazarus, 69).

The cybercrime phenomenon remains one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century and has escalated to what Osuntuyi, Ireymi and Aluko et al described as *Yahoo Plus*, that is, the blending of spiritual elements with internet surfing (51). Many have identified the influence and roles of religious leaders as promoters of cybercrime activity in Nigeria as negative. According to Osuntuyi, Ireymi and Aluko, Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion glamorised cybercrimes because “*Yahoo boys and girls* make use of spiritual ingredients that can help them



successfully scam their victims by hypnotising them, even though their victims might be aware of the prevalence of cybercrime in the scheme (62-63).

This paper explores the role of religious ethical values in moderating negative criminal behaviours and other forms of youthful delinquency, and promoting positive values and conduct in the society can transform society. Therefore, the first section conceptualises and theorises cybercrime and youth, providing relevant examples. The next section deals with Nigerian youth and the cybercrime phenomenon, next is the role of religious ethical values in mitigating the menace of cybercrime and then conclusions and recommendations.

### **Conceptualisation and Theoretical Clarification of Concepts:**

#### **Religious Ethical Values**

Religious ethical values are the product of sacred religious texts, which usually resonate with major world religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and African Traditional Religion, etc. In the context of this study, however, the sacred religious text of Christianity is the focus, although with a comparative analysis of other sacred scriptures that are believed to have a significant place in the life of adherents due to the valid cultural and moral teachings of its founders. Although the purpose of this study is not to compare the moral values of both religious experiences, rather to stress the rich morals inherent in both religions and how they can engender sound ethical principles, particularly among the youth, so as to build trust and a meaningful, humane society.

Furthermore, religious ethical values can be understood within the framework of religious beliefs and practices, texts, sacred spaces, symbols, piety, and the life and influence of a particular founder, that became a stander for followers as they get acquainted with certain values, due to the positive roles they play in shaping such religious cultures and traditions in the society (Bobyreva et al 2). The development of religious ethical values is usually a complex process, because religion itself signifies the ‘most good’ which can be expected or hoped for from this world. Hence, religious values are the “stable belief that a certain model of human behaviour or the ultimate goal of a person’s existence is the only preferable one from a social and personal point of view, rather than a different manner of behaviour or some other ultimate goal of existence” (Bobyreva et al, 2-3). For the purpose of clarity religious ethical values are decorated with terms such as norms, morals, traits, and attitudes, which are different from one religious consciousness to another. In the Christian worldview, for



instance, its own system of values lays the basic foundation of faith, expecting adherents to follow accordingly for the promotion of its religious norms and for societal acceptance. Although, virtually every religion in the world upholds a high standard of morality, either as a written code, or as a moral disposition, that admonishes followers to lead acceptable lives as they engage in human society, keeping to the ideas that immoral and unethical ways of life are absurd and cause pain to humanity and further devalue such faith in the eyes of the public. Therefore, no world religion, be it Asianic, Jewish or African, will outrightly defend the immoral and unrighteous acts of criminality in any form and in whatsoever society because the attempt to swindle a gullible person, through any form of fraudulent means, is evil, and has the capability of causing moral and psychological pains (Ihuah and Ojoma 1379).

### **Youth and the challenges of unemployment in Nigeria**

There are different descriptions and definitions of youth by different states, organisations and scholars alike. This is because it is a difficult task to categorically assert the meaning of the word 'youth' to a certain age or group, as the case may be. However, there is a consensus among scholars, which says that youths are future leaders; an understanding that has propelled countries across the world to pay unresolved attention to young people through development and skill acquisition initiatives in order to keep them out of crime (Obomese 246; Mbachu and Alake par. 1-2; Gonyok par. 3). Furthermore, Kalagbor and Deinibiteim in an attempt to define the term youth, quoted the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and assert that the term "is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood - independence and the awareness of our interdependence as member of a community (4)." Therefore, the youthful age can also be conceptualised as the transition period from dependence to independence, which is from childhood to adulthood in the life journey of a human being.

The United Nations Organisation (UNO par.1), for statistical consistency across regions, defined 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and this view is without prejudice to other definitions by member states. Akande corroborated the United Nations Organisation when he opined that 'youth' or young adult is any person between the ages of 18 and 24 years (2). Furthermore,



Kalagbor and Deinibiteim expatriated by employing some characteristics to define the term youth, thus:

Persons who normally would have completed secondary education, and would either be in tertiary institutions such as the university, striving to secure employment, or already employed. This group of persons would need post-secondary education, employment and reproductive health information and services (2-3).

Interestingly, as the youth population grows, so does the unemployment rate increase beyond proportion in Nigeria. The youth unemployment rate in Nigeria in 2022, for instance, was estimated at 13.44 percent according to source data available with the International Labour Organisation (Statista par.1). However, the African Youth Charter (AYC) differs completely in their definition of a youth. According to AYC, the “youth is any person between the ages of 15 and 35 years old” (20). In the same vein, the second National Youth Policy Document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2009 describes youths as “persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years of age. Kalagbor and Deinibiteim, adopting what they called the ‘transition from dependence to independence Schema’, outline certain distinct features that are characterised by the youth as follows:

- (a) Leaving the parental home and establishing a new living arrangement for themselves;
- (b) Completing full-time education in most cases, tertiary;
- (c) Forming close, stable personal relationships outside of the family, often resulting in marriage and procreation, and finally;
- (d) Testing the labour market, finding work and possibly settling into a career, and achieving a more or less sustainable livelihood (3).

The above indicates that the youthful period is the age when an individual is most active in life, seeking education, functional skills and employment opportunities, etc. Indeed, at that age, young people are very energetic and are in search of where they would deploy such energy into and when they are not guided towards gainfully using it, is usually expended into crimes and all forms of shenanigans that are common with the youths. The youth, at times, are usually full of anxiety of not having the knowledge of what the future holds for them; hence, they are agitated and ask questions such as What does the future hold? What roles and positions can I fit into in society? These are the daily thoughts of most Nigerian youth, especially when they have completely lost hope in the government of the day.



## **Theorizing Cybercrime**

Several scholarly literatures deal with the concept and theories of cybercrime. A significant amount of this literature has emanated from the social sciences disciplines, while very little has emanated from the humanities as a social phenomenon. Although researchers from the arts and humanities across the world and in the global south have made resounding attempts towards bridging this gap by opening the field through extensive research in digital humanities and other areas of interest. Consequently, the distending threat of cybercrime became influential in interdisciplinary research aimed at discovering correlates and predictors of online crime and victimisation, pioneering researchers in the field theorising and conceptualising cybercrime, especially from the social sciences fields of enquiry, such as sociology and psychology, but with very few scholars in religious studies and moral philosophers lately. Meanwhile, pioneering scholars in the field of cybercrime include Russell Smith, Michael L. Pittaro, Cathering D. Marcum, Kasun Jayawardena, Roderick Broadhurst and Jaishankar Karuppanan, just to mention a few that have made significant contributions to the study of cybercrime globally. However, over time, researchers have emerged who explore various studies in cybercrime and the *Yahoo Yahoo* phenomenon from other disciplines, which have brought about the thousands of literatures that exist today in the study.

Nevertheless, one thing that has taken precedence lately is the fact that since the new millennium, there has been a continuous attempt to apply traditional criminological theories to the study of cybercrime, which has been decolonised by scholars from other fields of study, especially from Africa. Hitherto, most articles or studies investigating the cybercrime phenomenon were marginalised by top-tier academic journals, which focus on more traditional topics; as a result, cybercrime researchers still represent a very small minority in the overall criminologist community today (Holt and Bossler 20). The implication, therefore, is that most cybercrime theories evolved from a criminological background, which is not healthy enough for global scholarship because it prevents a broader spectrum of wider academic debates that would have impacted other fields of study that attempt to proffer solutions to the challenges of cyber-criminality, which poses a great threat to human society at large.



According to Holt and Bossler three cybercrime theories have been successfully and extensively tested, and they have produced mixed results over time about the phenomenon. These theories include “self-control theory, social learning theory, and lifestyles-routine activities theory” (Holt and Bossler 21). The self-control theory and social learning theories have both discovered some empirical support explaining the underlying motivations of some types of cybercrimes. Although most criminologists focus on the aspect of criminal behaviours explained by self-control theory, which includes acts such as deviant, sinful, and reckless. The term ‘self-control’ is defined as the propensity to refrain from acts whose long-term costs outweigh their immediate advantages (Holt and Bossler 21). It postulates that individuals who lack self-control will pursue acts that immediately gratify their impulses, such as substance abuse from smoking, gambling, speeding in automobiles, and imprudent sexual conduct (Valasik 1). Furthermore, Burruss, & Bossler (38), and Choi (40) all advocated for the self-control theory (SCT), emphasizing that it is the most appropriate theory to be applied in the study of cybercrime, because it addresses essential and important known delinquencies that are youth related such as smoking, gambling, immoral sexual conducts and other social vices often perpetuated in the society. However, SCT was first proposed by Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi in their book “A General Theory of Crime” in 1990. Since then, the theory has been a subject of discussion and serves as several empirical studies which test the theory and compare it with other criminological theories (Karl-Dieter, 45).

### **Nigerian Youth and the Cybercrime Phenomenon**

A newspaper report published online by Daily Post on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, 2023, according to the rider “Cybercrime: Police nab six, shutdown Abuja ‘Yahoo Academy’” describe how the Nigerian police uncovered a recruitment centre for young people between the ages of 19 to 27 who showed interest in acquiring skills in cyber-fraud (Ochogwu par. 2). In the report, some of the youth confessed to teaching skills ranging from identity theft, hacking, and trading hacked Facebook accounts, romance scams, and other computer fraud and forgery. This immoral situation is almost getting out of hand, and many have attributed the cause to the high rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics report published online by Macrotrent.net (2024) indicate that unemployment rates has escalate from year to year, for example in 2018 and 2022 the number of



unemployed persons constituted a 0.43% in 2018; in 12.59% in 2019; 1.76% in 2019; 14.35% in 2020; a decline from 07% in 2020; 13.65% in 2021; with a further decline 0.21% in 2021; 13.44% in 2022.

In the case of age group, the report shows that as at March 2009, persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, representing 41.6% were unemployed, and those between the ages of 25 and 44 years old, (17%) were under-employed. This alarming rate of unemployment has led to an increase in cyber and other crimes in Nigeria, perpetuated by young people. Therefore, one of the ways by which this can be prevented is for the government to create jobs for youths involved in the so-called Yahoo Yahoo business (Osuntuyi, Ireiyomi & Aluko 51). Every year, several people are victims of cyber-attack in Nigeria, and it is in the public that young adult male Nigerians (youths), mainly university students/graduates, constitute the bulk of cyber-fraudsters in the country (Tade & Aliyu, 861).

Unemployment has been attributed as the major factor responsible for cybercrime and other forms of crime among the youth in Nigeria. Greater number of Nigerian graduates is unemployed (Oko, 2020:194). Many secondary school leavers and university graduates, frustrated due to the inability to secure a job or maybe a good pay job, often, believe that it is better to plough their talents into crimes and other vices since it is another way of making money without necessarily having to sweat under the sun, rather what it required is just a computer or smart mobile phone and the skill to operate them.

Cybercrime is usually perpetrated through electronic communication networks, particularly through the internet connected to either a laptop or smartphones. The menace is rampant among youths who are graduates or undergraduates and has done incalculable damage to the image of Nigeria globally. Cybercrime is in types which include internet calls, sending of scam emails containing "get rich quick" proposals to entice unsuspecting victims in a bid to defraud them, cyber bullying and etc. In the case of email, sometimes it comes in the form of marriage proposals, purported unclaimed fund, donation, lottery, help, bonanza, bank transaction notification/credit alert and other kinds of scheming. Some of the youths send as many as 10,000 of such scam emails every day, while others send more to increase their chances of getting victims that will fall to their prey (Onadipe, 10).

The economic motive that links across the types of cybercrimes, as already alluded to above, is the connection between unemployment and cybercrime in Nigeria. Suffice it to say here that it is not only the unemployed that engage in cybercrime; however, it is generally believed as argued by Ademola & Olajubutu, that "a critical cause of social vices in the society is unemployment and it



manifests itself in the form of kidnapping, armed robbery, political mercenaries, destitution and cybercrime” (82). Similarly, Anderson submitted that “the failure of the state's macro-economy will lead to youths' recklessness given that the majority who are unemployed are the most affected, and if not contained, will degenerate into social vices such as cybercrime in the society” (85). The actions of the youths will be hinged on the fact that the governmental institutions have failed them and the best way to get back at the state is to seize and engage in nefarious acts to survive. Little wonder, in Nigeria, the youths who are educated but unable to secure decent employment are the ones at the forefront of crimes in the country, not to mention cyber-crimes, which is becoming more or less a haven for them. (Obaro 36). This situation is made worse by the fact that the social-cultural norms in Nigeria despise poverty but magnify material wealth, giving little or no room for hard work. Hence, many Nigerian youths just want to appear successful no matter how they made it, and society celebrates success regardless of how it is attained.

### **The Role of Religious Ethical Values in Mitigating the Menace of Cybercrime**

Since cybercrime is a shameful deviant criminal activity capable of destroying not just the image of the perpetrators but that of their nation, it became imperative to suggest some means it can be mitigated. Therefore, religious values have played a significant role in shaping ethical and moral values in society, and cybercrimes are a societal phenomenon. The fundamental beliefs and teachings of religious ethical values have been used as a foundation for moral principles and codes in many societies throughout history to determine behaviours and moral formation from time to time.

Therefore, religious ethical values are essential moral principles that guide one's behaviour and decision making and are inherent in religious traditions, texts and beliefs, which involve the teaching of values, norms, morals and practices that can influence the lives of people in everyday experience (Obomese and Mande 123). Elsayed, Lestari and Brougham argued that elements of religious ethical values, such as morality, codes of practice, codes of conduct, and other punitive measures, are some of the rules that have been used to control numerous kinds of social traits in society over time (16). The aforementioned can be adjudged to be correct because religious spiritual values have a positive influence on one's perception, choices, actions, and relationships with others, and spiritually conscious



people act in godly ways, displaying spirituality as a control measure for unethical behaviour. This can be explored in relation to the unethical practices of cybercrime among youths in Nigeria.

Consequently, religion has often been seen as a unifying factor that is able to help in situations like the case of cybercrime and all its other shades among young people. Therefore, since religion plays important roles in human society at large, it can thus be said that religious ethical values may act as a controlling or bonding force to prevent crimes. It is interesting to note that one of the functions of religion is to influence people's inner feelings, causes a kind of self-control and social function, religion favours systems and organisations that are exposed to changes and also provides social solidarity through people's participation in religious ceremonies and respect for sacred things (Nevisi and Sharafi 2). Religious ethical values try to prevent the roots of crime, its motivation and the formation of criminal thoughts, and as a result stop their occurrence or the means by which crimes are perpetuated. Generally, religion can be said to play a major role in controlling people in dangerous and crime-causing situations, and although it uses all its efforts for prevention, it is also used to reform the criminal and prevent repeated crimes from happening (Nevisi and Sharafi 3).

Religious crime and sin have always existed together since mankind stepped into the material world and the realm of existence, as pictured in the creation account in the book of Genesis. Therefore, since then, mankind has always tasted deviations, deviance from the proper standard, destructions and crimes with their bitter taste. A critical look at religious teachings reveals that what is referred to today as crime prevention was a combination of heavenly messages and the guidance of prophets and divine saints. In other words, the mission of religion is to liberate man from corruption and misguidance; hence, religious leaders did not spare any efforts to realize it and before fighting the disability, they fought the cause and background of sin and crime, and on this basis, prevention of deviation and crookedness is one of the duties of religious leaders who are expected to through their messages transform sinners into saints (Nevisi and Sharafi 3).

Unfortunately, several government efforts towards enforcing and reinforcing punitive laws to dissuade citizens, especially the young people, from committing or engaging in cybercrime and other social delinquencies in society have proved abortive, and this crime persists with no end in sight. Instead, they kept discovering different and innovative ways of committing it. Therefore, the failure of



all these human solutions, obviously proves the fact that absolutely relying on the wisdom and intellect, with no use of religious teachings, human beings are not able to pursue their felicity and struggle misguide and deviation because religious teachings has the power to lower the paths towards and drastically reduce crime rates in the society (Vaezi and Kashkolli 508).

The fast erosion in morality or the absence of religious moral values has been identified as one of the greatest reasons why many young promising youths get involved in crimes without evaluating the social and moral consequences of their actions (Anderson 88; Ademola & Olajubutu 80; Obomese & Mande 125). In the past, religious values have contributed to good moral behaviour among young people in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, but today the case is completely different. For instance, the teachings in Christianity were regarded as the tools for conveying the message of peace and holy living among the people in society. This is because it exposes evil and outlines punishments meant for those engaging in the various evils; therefore, moral values were transmitted through the accumulation of the knowledge of good moral conduct in the society (Ogueche et al, 2021). Although there is a widely held notion and perception among religious psychologists that those who believe in the Devil and the hereafter (death) are as likely to commit delinquency as people who do not believe in a supernatural world (Adamczyk et al, 2017). This speculation aligns with most of the studies that have been conducted by researchers in religion and criminology, even though much work has not been done on the relationship between religion and crime, because religion can be employed to manage criminal tendencies such as cybercrime and other related shenanigans prevalent among young people in society. According to Adamczyk, Freilich, & Chunrye, citing Johnson et al, and Baier & Write, observed that “adhering to religious association and tenets produces less crime in society” (10). To substantiate this fact, a meta-analysis of 60 studies published between 1969 and 1998 found that religious beliefs and behaviour exert a moderate negative effect on individuals’ criminal behaviour in society” (3).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

I have argued in this work that the tendency to use religion for positive or negative purposes abounds in society abound even though the overall aim of religion is to produce in adherents some sense of virtues and acceptable characters. However, the reverse has been the case, and this is even



more complicated, particularly in Africa, where religion is severely used as a weapon of manipulation and marginalisation.

Furthermore, religious ethical values are the product of sacred religious texts and spirituality, which mainly resonate with major world religions such Christianity, Islam and Judaism, to name just a few. In the context of this study, however, I focused on the sacred religious text of Christianity, although with a comparative analysis of other sacred scriptures that are significant, like Islam, due to its validity and existential value for its cultural and moral teachings on ethical principles and standards in society.

Furthermore, in this study, I conceptualized religious ethical values from the frameworks of religious beliefs and practices, texts, codes, sacred spaces, symbols, piety, and the influence of religious leaders and founders for shaping life and how it will help in curbing deviant and other forms of anti-social practices, such as cybercrime, particularly among the youth in Nigeria. I here recommend that the fight against criminality, especially cybercrime, is the responsibility of all, but the religious community has the following roles to play:

1. To teach members of their congregation that breaking extent law is punishable by God and
2. Take the teaching of morality seriously and inculcate values in their member, especially the youth who form the majority of their population.
3. Teach the value of hard work and respect for authority and senior citizens, who are sometimes mostly the victims of cybercrime in society
4. Government and stakeholders should engage the youth and the positive use of their talents instead of trying to kill them
5. Introduce a youth empowerment program that will drive policy change and bring back the confidence of the youth in government and society.

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## THE ROLE OF MOUNT ZION MISSION INCORPORATED IN RECLAIMING DRUG USERS AND REDUCING STIGMA IN ORO NATION, AKWA IBOM STATE

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### ABSTRACT