

Adedeji Daniel Gbadebo

ENHANCING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE
AND THE CHURCH TO FACILITATE THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF PEOPLE-ORIENTED LAWS,
GOOD GOVERNANCE, AND SERVICE DELIVERY

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the State and the Church represents a critical nexus in the pursuit of societal development, particularly in nations where religious institutions hold significant influence over public morality, communal values, and grassroots mobilization. In many African countries, including Nigeria, the Church continues to function not only as a spiritual sanctuary but also as a major stakeholder in education, healthcare, humanitarian intervention, and conflict mediation [Afolabi and Adigun 2021]. This dual capacity of the Church to shape both private virtue and public action renders it an indispensable partner in governance. The concept of “hennaing” this relationship – a metaphorical reference to the ceremonial deepening of ties – speaks to the need for a deliberate and symbolic strengthening of institutional collaboration between secular governance structures and faith-based organizations. Such a reinforced relationship can act as a foundation for the design and implementation of people-oriented laws that reflect societal aspirations, foster accountability, and enhance service delivery across critical sectors.

DR. ADEDEJI DANIEL GBADEBO – Walter Sisulu University in Mthatha; correspondence address: Private Bag X1, UNITRA, 5117, South Africa; e-mail: agbadebo@wsu.ac.za; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1929-3291>

Articles are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

People-oriented laws are those that prioritize the rights, needs, and dignity of citizens. They aim to improve social welfare through inclusive legal frameworks, equitable resource allocation, and effective justice mechanisms. However, in many developing contexts, the passage of such laws often does not translate into tangible outcomes due to weak state capacity, limited reach of formal institutions, and public skepticism regarding the government's intentions. In these settings, the Church, with its moral authority and extensive grassroots networks, is well-positioned to bridge the gap between policy and practice [Chukwuemeka, Nwosu, and Alabi 2022]. As a trusted institution, the Church can help mediate community engagement, explain the significance of new legal reforms, and advocate for marginalized voices in policy spaces. Its historical role in championing social causes, from anti-colonial resistance to contemporary human rights struggles, attests to its capacity to foster the legitimacy and cultural acceptance of people-centric legal reforms.

In recent years, governance scholarship has increasingly highlighted the necessity of collaborative governance frameworks – models in which state and non-state actors co-create policies and co-manage their implementation. This theoretical shift recognizes that state-centric approaches are insufficient to address the multifaceted challenges of modern governance, particularly in pluralistic and fragmented societies. Within such a framework, the Church emerges not as a peripheral actor but as a co-architect of governance innovations. In countries like Nigeria, where religious institutions often command greater trust than political ones, the Church can play a pivotal role in promoting ethical leadership, transparency, and civic responsibility [Olowu and Abiola 2023]. Institutionalizing mechanisms of collaboration – such as faith-state councils, joint policy reviews, and participatory governance forums – can create formal avenues through which the Church contributes to the design and monitoring of governance interventions, especially those affecting vulnerable populations.

Moreover, the resilience of democratic governance depends significantly on the strength of civic engagement and the inclusiveness of state policies. In environments marked by political instability, corruption, and economic disparity, public trust in state institutions is often low. Religious institutions, by contrast, retain a measure of legitimacy that allows them to act as mediators, educators, and service providers. The Church has consistently shown its ability to fill governance gaps by offering education, healthcare,

and relief in ways that align with both humanitarian imperatives and moral teachings [Ibrahim and Edewor 2024]. Through these services, the Church not only supplements state capacity but also builds local social capital, which is essential for sustainable development. The institutionalization of Church-State partnerships in service delivery can therefore help overcome bureaucratic inefficiencies, ensure the equitable distribution of public goods, and enhance the responsiveness of governance structures.

However, such partnerships must be carefully designed to uphold the secular principles of democratic governance while recognizing the Church's unique societal role. Unchecked religious influence in political affairs can risk the erosion of pluralism, minority rights, and institutional neutrality. Therefore, the relationship between the State and the Church must be governed by legal frameworks that clarify roles, responsibilities, and boundaries. Transparent engagement protocols, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and mutual accountability systems are crucial to maintaining a healthy balance between collaboration and autonomy [Nwachukwu and Bassey 2025]. The goal should not be to blur the lines between spiritual and civic authority but to create a principled synergy where both institutions complement one another in the promotion of justice, equity, and development.

This paper undertakes a critical examination of the potential for a cordial and strategic relationship between the State and the Church to serve as a catalyst for the implementation of people-oriented laws, the realization of good governance, and the advancement of effective public service delivery. Using a multidisciplinary approach that draws from political science, public administration, religious studies, and development theory, the study interrogates the institutional, legal, and ethical dimensions of such a partnership. Special emphasis is placed on Nigeria as a case study, given its vibrant religious landscape and ongoing challenges in governance and public trust. Ultimately, the paper advocates for a governance paradigm that recognizes the Church not merely as a moral commentator but as a co-participant in nation-building – one that can help foster inclusive, accountable, and ethically grounded systems of public administration.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE INTERACTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND GOVERNANCE

The evolving body of literature underscores that the Church holds significant potential as a co-actor in democratic governance and service delivery, particularly in states marked by institutional deficiencies and social fragmentation. Far from being merely spiritual entities, churches have demonstrated capacities for civic leadership, moral advocacy, and public service provision. However, the success and sustainability of Church-State partnerships depend on structured engagement governed by legality, inclusiveness, and mutual respect. The challenge for policymakers and scholars alike is to design institutional frameworks that leverage the strengths of religious institutions while guarding against the risks of politicization and sectarianism. This ongoing discourse forms the foundation for reimagining governance in culturally plural and democratically fluid societies such as Nigeria.

The interaction between religion and governance remains a central concern in contemporary political and development discourse, especially within societies characterized by institutional fragility, political distrust, and socioeconomic inequality. While secularist paradigms historically advocated for a strict separation between church and state – emphasizing the neutrality of governance structures [Rawls 1993] – recent scholarly trends underscore a shift towards integrative models. These frameworks propose collaborative partnerships between religious institutions and state actors as a pragmatic response to the limitations of state capacity and the growing legitimacy crisis in democratic governance [Casanova 2011]. In Nigeria, this evolution is especially pertinent as churches have become increasingly involved in not just spiritual guidance but also civic education, advocacy, and welfare provision, often serving as institutional bridges between the state and disillusioned citizenries [Olowu and Abiola 2023].

Faith-based institutions, particularly churches, have emerged as influential players in governance and development by filling voids left by underperforming public sectors. Afolabi and Adigun argue that churches are now indispensable actors in the co-production of social services in Nigeria, where infrastructural and bureaucratic deficiencies persist [Afolabi and Adigun 2021]. Their findings suggest that churches have built sustainable trust within local communities through consistent engagement in areas such as education, health, and poverty alleviation. These services are not only

materially significant but are also delivered with a moral framing that enhances their perceived legitimacy. Ibrahim and Edewor support this claim through their empirical investigation into northern Nigeria, where churches have provided essential services in underserved regions while cultivating civic consciousness and participatory attitudes among citizens [Ibrahim and Edewor 2024]. Their studies demonstrate that in contexts of weak formal governance, churches can act as informal civic institutions, enhancing both service delivery and democratic engagement.

In the legislative realm, the Church also plays a critical role in legitimizing and localizing what are known as “people-oriented laws” – legal frameworks designed to directly address the needs, rights, and aspirations of ordinary citizens. These laws, though well-intentioned, often face resistance due to cultural dissonance or political cynicism. Chukwuemeka, Nwosu, and Alabi observe that churches often act as mediating institutions that contextualize these legal reforms within prevailing moral, ethical, and communal values [Chukwuemeka, Nwosu, and Alabi 2022]. For instance, their study on public reception of social protection laws shows that acceptance increases when religious leaders support the policy publicly and embed its principles in sermons, workshops, or civic campaigns. However, the political involvement of churches must be carefully moderated to avoid dominance or sectarianism. Nwachukwu and Bassey caution that while the Church may advocate for the common good, it must do so within constitutional frameworks that prevent religious overreach and ensure pluralistic representation [Nwachukwu and Bassey 2025]. They propose a normative framework for cooperation rooted in legal clarity, equity, and institutional autonomy.

The theoretical construct of collaborative governance provides a rigorous lens through which the growing engagement between Church and State can be analyzed. Collaborative governance entails structured interaction between public authorities and non-state actors in a process characterized by deliberation, consensus, and mutual accountability. Within this framework, religious institutions are viewed not simply as cultural entities but as civic agents capable of contributing to policy formulation and implementation. In Nigeria, such partnerships have taken institutional form through interfaith councils, joint development commissions, and community liaison structures, which have proven effective in defusing interethnic tensions and aligning government projects with local priorities [Olowu and Abiola 2023]. These mechanisms embody the strengths of both actors: the Church’s moral

legitimacy and community access, and the State's legal mandate and resource capacity. However, the success of collaborative governance depends on transparent institutional design, equitable representation, and sustained trust among stakeholders.

Beyond governance mechanics, the Church continues to serve as a moral agent in society, challenging corrupt practices and promoting ethical leadership. Afolabi and Adigun highlight how Nigerian churches have increasingly embraced prophetic roles – speaking out against political malpractice and mobilizing public support for accountability mechanisms [Afolabi and Adigun 2021]. This moral voice resonates with Ter Haar and Ellis's earlier assertion that religious actors possess "soft power" capable of shaping public opinion, civic behavior, and normative expectations in governance [Ter Haar and Ellis's 2010]. Ibrahim and Edewor expand on this, showing that churches have supported peacebuilding initiatives, electoral education, and youth empowerment programs that foster inclusive citizenship [Ibrahim and Edewor 2024]. Through their embeddedness in community life, churches nurture values that underpin democratic resilience, such as honesty, solidarity, and stewardship. Yet, the same moral authority that empowers religious leaders can also pose risks if unchecked. As Nwachukwu and Bassey argue, safeguards must be in place to prevent the misuse of religious influence for partisan or exclusionary purposes [Nwachukwu and Bassey 2025].

Given the multifaceted and evolving role of churches in governance and development, there is an emerging consensus on the need to institutionalize Church-State collaboration through legal and policy instruments. Scholars increasingly advocate for codified structures that guide engagement while preserving the secular character of the State. Nwachukwu and Bassey propose a range of tools – such as memoranda of understanding, joint monitoring boards, and inclusive policy platforms – to formalize collaboration and prevent ad hoc or politicized interventions [ibid.]. Similarly, Olowu and Abiola recommend embedding interfaith representation in local government systems to enhance community voice and foster participatory development [Olowu and Abiola 2023]. These proposals aim to move beyond rhetorical inclusion toward a structured, principled partnership that recognizes the unique capacities of religious actors while reinforcing democratic norms.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is primarily grounded in Collaborative Governance Theory [Ansell and Gash 2008], which posits that governance outcomes improve when various stakeholders – specially state and non-state actors – collaborate in a structured and mutually beneficial manner. Collaborative governance emphasizes shared decision-making, co-creation of public policies, and joint problem-solving, where both government and non-governmental actors, such as religious institutions, work together to achieve common goals. This theory is particularly relevant in the context of Church-State collaboration, as it highlights how partnerships between religious institutions and the state can enhance policy legitimacy, increase the scope of public service delivery, and improve overall governance outcomes. The core idea is that when the Church and the State work together to create and implement laws, they can pool resources, gain legitimacy from different sectors of society, and mobilize support for policies that otherwise might face resistance.

Additionally, this study draws on Institutional Theory, particularly the concept of Moral Legitimacy as articulated by Suchman, which argues that the legitimacy of institutions – whether religious or governmental – is essential for their effectiveness [Suchman 1995]. In the context of Church-State relations, religious institutions often hold significant moral authority within their communities, which can lend legitimacy to state policies, particularly those aimed at social justice and community welfare. By aligning the moral authority of the Church with the objectives of governance, both institutions can gain the trust of citizens, which is critical for the successful implementation of people-oriented laws. This theory suggests that the collaboration between the Church and the State can not only enhance the legitimacy of governance but also facilitate better service delivery and social integration, particularly in societies where religion plays a central role in everyday life.

The study also incorporates aspects of Public Administration Theory, focusing on the principles of accountability, transparency, and responsiveness [Afolabi and Adigun 2021]. Public administration theory highlights the role of non-state actors in enhancing the efficiency and equity of service delivery. In the case of the Church-State relationship, churches can act as mediators between the state and citizens, ensuring that public services are accessible

and meet the needs of marginalized or underserved groups. This aligns with the concept of good governance, which is characterized by inclusive decision-making processes and the active participation of all stakeholders, including religious organizations, in policy design and service delivery.

Finally, this framework acknowledges the moderating influence of Legal and Political Theories [Nwachukwu and Bassey 2025], which emphasize the need for legal safeguards and inclusive political structures to maintain the secular nature of the state and prevent any single religious group from gaining disproportionate influence over governance. In societies like Nigeria, where religious pluralism is prominent, ensuring that the Church-State relationship respects the principles of equality, religious freedom, and democratic representation is essential for promoting social stability and fostering a governance system that is both inclusive and just.

3. WAY FORWARD

The way forward in enhancing the relationship between the Church and the State to facilitate effective governance and service delivery requires a multifaceted approach that combines legal frameworks, institutional reforms, and public engagement. First, institutionalizing Church-State collaboration is critical. This can be achieved through the creation of formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), which define the roles and responsibilities of each party in governance. These agreements would offer clear guidelines on resource allocation, collaboration scope, and accountability, reducing the potential for conflict or sectarian influence. Additionally, the establishment of interfaith councils or similar platforms for dialogue between religious institutions and government representatives can provide a formal space for joint problem-solving and policy advocacy, ensuring religious diversity is respected while enhancing policy effectiveness.

Second, while collaboration offers immense potential, it also necessitates strengthening legal safeguards to preserve the secular nature of the state and prevent the overreach of religious institutions into public policy. Legal frameworks should include anti-discrimination laws and freedom of religion clauses that protect against religious coercion while allowing for positive contributions from religious organizations. Moreover, independent oversight bodies can be created to monitor Church-State collaborations, ensuring that

these partnerships do not undermine democratic processes or sideline marginalized groups. These bodies could audit the allocation of resources and ensure that public services are distributed equitably, fostering greater public trust and ensuring that the partnership remains in the public interest.

Third, for people-oriented laws to be successfully implemented, it is essential to engage religious institutions in civic education and public discourse. Churches, as trusted community actors, can play a pivotal role in raising awareness about the benefits and implications of key social policies, such as gender equality and social protection laws. Religious leaders can use their platforms to educate citizens on their rights, the importance of democratic participation, and how to access public services. These educational efforts could significantly improve public reception and compliance with newly implemented policies. Furthermore, church leaders should continue to engage in public discourse around key governance issues, such as electoral integrity and anti-corruption, to ensure that people are informed and empowered to participate actively in democratic processes.

Additionally, the success of Church-State collaboration depends on establishing mechanisms for mutual accountability and transparency. Joint monitoring bodies composed of representatives from both religious institutions and the government would track the implementation of policies and services, ensuring transparency and reducing the potential for corruption. These bodies would provide a platform for stakeholders to hold each other accountable for commitments made and ensure that resources are allocated equitably. Both the state and the Church must operate with full transparency, sharing information on resource distribution, policy outcomes, and public feedback to maintain the public's trust in the partnership.

Moreover, advancing research and evidence-based policymaking is crucial to understanding the long-term impacts of Church-State collaboration. Empirical studies should be conducted to evaluate how religious institutions influence governance outcomes, such as reducing corruption, enhancing service delivery, and increasing citizen participation. Comparative case studies from other countries with successful Church-State partnerships can offer valuable lessons and insights, enabling Nigeria to learn from global best practices. Additionally, longitudinal studies would provide data on how these partnerships evolve over time and help policymakers refine strategies for more effective governance.

Lastly, promoting religious pluralism is essential in a diverse society like Nigeria. While strengthening the Church-State relationship is vital, it must also ensure that minority religious groups are not marginalized. Interfaith dialogue should be encouraged to foster cooperation between different religious communities and the state, creating a more inclusive governance framework. Policies must be inclusive and reflect the rights and needs of all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, to ensure social cohesion and national unity. Ensuring religious neutrality in policymaking will safeguard democratic principles and prevent the dominance of any one religious group in governance.

The strengthening the relationship between the Church and the State to enhance governance and service delivery involves a complex process of legal reform, institutional collaboration, and public engagement. By focusing on formalizing partnerships, ensuring transparency and accountability, and advancing civic education, this approach can facilitate the successful implementation of people-oriented laws. The process must also be monitored through research and comparative analysis to refine strategies and ensure long-term sustainability. As such, a structured and transparent Church-State collaboration framework can contribute to better governance outcomes, fostering a more inclusive, democratic, and socially just society.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study has explored the potential of a collaborative relationship between the Church and the State in enhancing governance, implementing people-oriented laws, and improving service delivery. The conceptual and theoretical frameworks presented herein highlight the significant role that religious institutions can play in the governance process, particularly in societies like Nigeria, where religion holds considerable moral and social influence. The findings suggest that when the Church and the State collaborate, they can improve public trust, increase policy legitimacy, and enhance the effectiveness of governance through shared advocacy and resources. This relationship can also contribute to better service delivery, especially in areas where religious institutions have an established presence, such as education, healthcare, and social welfare.

However, the study acknowledges several limitations. First, the framework and theories applied are primarily based on the context of Nigeria, and the generalizability of the findings to other countries or regions may be limited. Societies with different religious dynamics, political systems, or levels of secularism might experience varying outcomes in Church-State collaborations. Second, while the study emphasizes the importance of legal safeguards and political inclusivity, it does not delve deeply into the specific legal or institutional barriers that may exist in the Nigerian context or similar settings. The complexity of legal and political systems, along with the diverse religious and cultural groups involved, presents significant challenges in implementing and monitoring Church-State collaborations.

Future research should address these limitations by conducting comparative studies across different countries with varying degrees of Church-State interaction. These studies can help identify universal principles and best practices that may be applicable in diverse contexts. Additionally, future work could explore the legal challenges and institutional frameworks that might need to be reformed or created to facilitate effective Church-State collaboration, especially in multi-religious or multi-ethnic societies. More empirical studies are needed to evaluate the long-term effects of such collaborations on governance outcomes, particularly in areas like corruption reduction, service delivery efficiency, and public accountability.

Further research should also explore the perspectives of marginalized or minority religious groups, who may feel excluded from Church-State collaborations. Understanding their views and incorporating their concerns into the Church-State dialogue will be essential for ensuring that such partnerships do not lead to the marginalization of smaller religious communities. Finally, the role of digital platforms and social media in fostering or hindering Church-State collaborations could also be a fruitful area of investigation, particularly as these platforms have become increasingly influential in shaping public opinion and political discourse.

In sum, while the Church-State relationship offers substantial potential for enhancing governance and service delivery, careful attention must be paid to legal, political, and social factors to ensure that such collaborations are inclusive, equitable, and aligned with democratic principles.

REFERENCES

- Afolabi, Adekunle, and Oluwatobi Adigun. 2021. "The role of the Church in governance and social service provision in Nigeria." *Journal of Religion and Society in Africa* 10, no. 1:45-62.
- Ansell, Christopher, and Alison Gash. 2008. "Collaborative governance in theory and practice." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18, no. 4:543-71.
- Casanova, José. 2011. "The secular and the sacred: The two worlds of contemporary politics." *Theory and Society* 40, no. 6:761-783. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-011-9130-7>
- Chukwuemeka, Emeka, Ifeanyi Nwosu, and Oluwaseun Alabi. 2022. "The Church as a mediating institution in the implementation of people-oriented laws in Nigeria." *Journal of African Governance Studies* 8, no. 2:45-67.
- Ibrahim, Abdul, and Peter Edewor. 2024. "Church involvement in public service delivery in northern Nigeria: A case study of education and healthcare provision." *Journal of Public Administration and Development* 15, no. 1:88-107.
- Nwachukwu, Samuel, and Elizabeth Bassey. 2025. "Legal frameworks for Church-State collaboration in governance: A proposed normative approach." *African Journal of Law and Governance* 12, no. 1:23-44.
- Olowu, David, and Taiwo Abiola. 2023. "Faith-based governance: The role of religious institutions in Nigeria's political landscape." *Journal of African Political Studies* 19, no. 3:112-33.
- Rawls, John. 1993. *Political liberalism*. Columbia University Press.
- Suchman, Mark C. 1995. "Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches." *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3:571-610.
- Ter Haar, Gerrie, and Stephen Ellis. 2010. "The role of religion in governance: Soft power and political legitimacy." *Journal of African History* 51, no. 2:251-70.

Enhancing Relationship Between the State and the Church to Facilitate the Implementation of People-Oriented Laws, Good Governance, and Service Delivery

Abstract

This study explores the potential of fostering relationship between the Church and the State to facilitate the implementation of people-oriented laws, promote good governance, and enhance service delivery. In many societies, particularly in Nigeria, religious institutions play a significant role in shaping public opinion and social norms. As such, their collaboration with the state can offer unique opportunities to bridge governance gaps, particularly in marginalized communities. Through an analysis of Church-State dynamics, the study reveals that when religious leaders and government institutions work together, they can improve public trust, increase the legitimacy of laws, and ensure more equitable distribution of services. However, the study also identifies significant challenges, including the potential for overreach, legal and institutional barriers, and the need for inclusive political structures to maintain secularism and prevent the dominance of any one religious group. The study concludes with recommendations for future

research on the legal, institutional, and socio-political dimensions of Church-State relations, including comparative studies across different national contexts and a focus on marginalized religious groups.

Keywords: Church-state collaboration; good governance; people-oriented laws; service delivery; religious institutions.

**Wzmacnianie relacji między państwem a Kościołem w celu ułatwienia
wdrażania praw ukierunkowanych na człowieka, dobrego rządzenia
i świadczenia usług**

Abstrakt

Opracowanie analizuje możliwości kształtowania relacji między Kościołem a państwem w celu ułatwienia wdrażania praw ukierunkowanych na człowieka, promowania dobrego zarządzania oraz poprawy jakości usług publicznych. W wielu społeczeństwach, szczególnie w Nigerii, instytucje religijne odgrywają istotną rolę w kształtowaniu opinii publicznej i norm społecznych. Ich współpraca z państwem może więc stwarzać wyjątkowe możliwości wypełniania luk w zarządzaniu, zwłaszcza w społecznościach marginalizowanych. Analiza relacji między Kościołem a państwem pokazuje, że współpraca przywódców religijnych z instytucjami rządowymi może wzmacniać zaufanie społeczne, podnosić legitymację prawa oraz zapewniać bardziej sprawiedliwą dystrybucję usług. Jednocześnie opracowanie wskazuje istotne wyzwania, takie jak ryzyko nadmiernej ingerencji, bariery prawne i instytucjonalne oraz potrzeba tworzenia inkluzywnych struktur politycznych, które utrzymają świecki charakter państwa i zapobiegają dominacji którejkolwiek grupy religijnej. Artykuł kończy się rekomendacjami dotyczącymi przyszłych badań nad prawnymi, instytucjonalnymi i społeczno-politycznymi aspektami relacji Kościół-państwo, w tym analiz porównawczych w różnych kontekstach narodowych i badań uwzględniających marginalizowane grupy religijne.

Słowa kluczowe: współpraca państwa z Kościołem; dobre zarządzanie; prawo ukierunkowane na człowieka; świadczenie usług; instytucje religijne.

Informacje o Autorze: DR ADEDEJI DANIEL GBADEBO – Uniwersytet Walter Sisulu w Mthatha; adres do korespondencji: Private Bag X1, UNITRA, 5117, Południowa Afryka; e-mail: agbadebo@wsu.ac.za; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1929-3291>