



RELIGIOUS BIAS AND PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Despite the fact that a lot of factors have been adduced as the bane of poor performance of public sector management in Nigeria, the surreptitious consequence of religious bias on public sector management have not been investigated. This research attempted to unravel how the underlying factors of religious bias influence the behaviours and functions of public sector managers. Hence, this study examined the relative effect of religious bias and its latent elements on public sector management in Ogun State, Nigeria. Having adopted a survey research design, the study used stratified random sampling technique to determine a sample size of 371 from a population of 5,059 employees in Ogun State public service. In addition, validated questionnaire was used to generate data for analysis. Interestingly, findings revealed that though religious bias had a significant effect on public sector management ($Adj. R^2 = 0.735$; $F(3, 367) = 342.632$, $p < 0.05$), religious sectionalism, which is one of the latent elements of religious bias had a negative effect on public sector management ($\beta_1 = -0.805$, $t = -9.376$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that religious bias influences the behaviours and functions of public sector managers in Ogun State, Nigeria. It recommended that government and public management practitioners should discourage public sector managers against the use of certain aspect of religion that makes them to be selective and biased in the execution of official responsibilities.

Keywords: Religion, religious bias, religious sectionalism, and public sector management.

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1. Introduction

The delivery of public services that promote the general good of citizens worldwide is a function of effective management of public sector organisations. Public management involves government activities in the areas of implementation of policies and allocation of resources that benefit the general public (World Bank Group, 2018). Hence, researchers and management practitioners have become challenged globally to find modern ways of public management that facilitate management outcomes as opposed to old traditional methods that impede organisational achievements (Nwokorie, 2017). Based on this, novel constructs, like new public administration and public valued management have been introduced into management literature to inform public sector managers with modern principles and mechanisms for effective management (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2018; Islam, 2015). World Bank Group (2018) observed that a well managed public sector will not only induce the accomplishment of public needs and expectations, but will equally promote socio-political and economic wellbeing of the public.

However, despite the fact that these modern approaches are meant to champion a robust and service driven sector (Shah, Larbi, & Batley, 2007), public managers in Nigeria have been observed to be influenced by varied factors that limit effective delivery and management of resources in the Sector. Scholars; Abel (2014), Itodo and Onodugo (2016), Omarli (2017) have discovered that beside corruption, ethnicity and tribalism that have rendered developments in Nigeria stunted, religion is one of the palpable phenomena that has done more harm than good.

Religion has been observed to elicit unity and cohesion in societies (Shah, Larbi, & Batley, 2007; Rapheal, 2014). Nevertheless, it has also been observed that it constitutes a useful instrument that aids the advancement of favoritism, sectionalism, nepotism and personal interest. For instance, it has been documented that public workers and politicians use it as a tool for both personal and political ambitions and covering for their misdeeds (Flavin & Ledet, 2008; Archibong, *et al*, 2009; Ajayi, 2006; Ejumudu, 2009). In addition, religion has also been recognized as a phenomenon that orchestrates violence and societal fragmentation occasioned by politicians who are driven by the sole purpose of achieving their private goals. Even though the negative dimensions of religion as it affects societies appeared to have been widely explored in the literature, its surreptitious influence on the public managers in the management of public resources has not been fully investigated.

In Nigeria, for instance, previous researches have mainly understudied the influence of religion on decision-makers and how the society is ultimately affected, without due consideration given to other elements of public sector management. These elements who are the secretaries, personal assistants, special advisers, and mentors indirectly assist the top public sector managers in the determinations of final policies and actions through their usually obscure actions and inactions in the areas of manipulation, promptness, and accuracy of information delivery.

The effect of this omission is that the outcomes of their researches become less encompassing with limitations to accuracy of their findings. This study sought to fill this research gap by defining public sector managers to include every employee in the public sector that plays one role or the other in the processing and application of information that finally determine the direction of public policy making and execution, and not merely as the top management employees that are at the apogee of public affairs control. This definition goes a long way in helping to expose the roles of the usually underground elements that influence the final policy and actions of the public sector managers. Thus, this study chose public sector managers specifically to include all those that participate in any means in the process of decision-making and policy execution to make the study relatively encompassing and to avoid the usual errors of the past. Hence, this study examined the kind of influence religious bias welds on managers in the management of public sector in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Therefore, the following specific objectives have been developed in order to:

- i. explore the underlying factors of Religious bias in the public sector management.
- ii. examine the kind of influence religious bias welds on the managers in the management of public sector in Ogun State.
- iii. investigate the relative effect of the underlying factors of religious bias on public managers in Ogun State.

On the basis of the above objectives, the following hypotheses have been framed:

H₀₁: Religious bias of managers does not affect public sector management in Ogun State.

H₀₂: Latent factors of religious bias do not have relative effect on public sector management in Ogun State.

2. Literature review

Public sector is that section of the society in which responsibilities are directly placed under the jurisdiction of the state. That is, those aspects of society that are totally controlled by the government, in accordance with national constitution or law. These areas include "...the civil service, state-owned or public enterprises, the military, the police, education, national and sub-national levels of government and non-departmental public bodies, whose personal emoluments, operational guidelines and financial resources are voted for by parliament (or its equivalent in other regime types)" (Larbi & Sandy, 2004).

Public sector management, therefore, refers to how those aspects of the society that are totally under the administration of the government are organized and governed to ensure that they perform the expected roles for the expected societal benefits (Shah, Larbi & Batley, 2007). Hence, it involves the use of people with temperament and skills to organize, motivate, and direct the actions of others in and out of government toward the creation and achievement of goals that warrant the use of public authority. Public management is a structure of government, a formal means for constraining and overseeing the exercise of state authority by public managers. This involves the lawful delegation of authority as well as external control over the exercise of delegated authority (Bertelli & Lynn, 2001). It therefore follows that public sector administration/management is usually being carried out under the influence of ethos and values which collectively shape the ethics or moral standards in public service. These rules are usually translated into characteristic ideals of everyday practice for the expected purposes. The values, which are individual principles or standards that guide judgment about what is good and proper, against what is unfair, dishonest and disadvantageous, generally influence the ethos, which form the ideals and define the overall culture in the public service. It is at this point that religion influences public sector managers' roles and their incumbent responsibilities in the development of the society.

Religious bias as a concept is an amalgam of two words (religion and bias). Hence, the definition of religion as a separate word is apposite to the understanding of religious bias. According to Bull (1969), religion is a belief system that is associated with worship and obedience to a deity that is considered to have control over human destiny and thus prescribes rules of moral behaviour and conduct. In line with this, Ejumudu (2009) perceived religion as a system of beliefs, practices, and way of life that relate man to the ultimate or Being and has the capacity to transform individuals from depravity, sinfulness and death into purity, righteousness and eternity with reward

of earthly benefits and heavenly joy.” Bello (2009) averred that religion implies devotion to some principles with strict fidelity or faithfulness, consciousness, pious affection or attachment. In a more global and encompassing posture, Haluza-Delay (2014) cited in Ives and Kidwell (2019) conceptualised religion as beliefs, worldviews, practices, and institutions that cross borders, time and scale from the level of individuals all the way to transnational and trans historical movements.

Deducting from all the foregoing, this study defines the concept of religion as an obligatory allegiance to divine entities who ultimately determine human behaviour, destiny, and ultimate reality. To this end, therefore, religion is that aspect of human psychology that determines the right actions and inactions based on innate moral convictions. It determines the way individuals interact among themselves and react to the society they live in. As rightly observed by Alanamu, Muhammed and Adeoye (2006), Egwu (2001), Ejumudu (2009), and Hynes (1996), religion has two perspectives from which it can be explained. These are the material and spiritual aspects. While the material aspect refers to religious establishments, groups and movements with the primary interests of earthly actions, reactions and rewards, the spiritual aspect refers to the ideas of transcendence, supernatural realities and the sacred; expectations beyond the spheres of this world. Although the spiritual aspect of man is usually considered to be of greater importance to the material, the combination of these two dimensions of religion influences behaviour of believers.

Therefore, religious bias refers to unfair preference to one’s religious beliefs against those of other groups. It is the set of beliefs that one holds tenaciously to, with evident and relative disregard for those of other people or group. It is the totality of one’s ardent beliefs which rules his/her behavior.

Some scholars have carried out some studies in the areas of how religion affects some political phenomena. For instance, Nwokorie (2017) carried out a study with the topic, challenges to effective management of public sector organizations in an institutionally corrupt environment in Nigeria. This study was aimed at discovering some factors that affect effective management of public sector. Having used interviews to generate data from the public sector managers, the findings revealed that religion is one of the factors that inhibit public sector organisations’ effectiveness in Nigeria.

Singh (2017) also carried out a study on the role of religion in economic development in order to establish the kind of role religion plays in economic development in Nigeria. Using data based on GDP per capita and consumption data and the world values survey data on religious

denomination, a regression analysis was used as a statistical tool for analysis. The study established that religion has a negative impact on the economic development of a country because the religious practices acts as a hindrances in promoting economic activity. This discovery is in line with Nwokorie findings because both studies identified that religion poses a kind of obstacle to development and effectiveness. However, the studies were carried out in two different domains.

Contrarily, Kimani (2017) investigated the role of religious beliefs and practices on economic development in Kenya using a qualitative approach. The study concluded that religious beliefs significantly influence economic development on Kenyan economy. Morealso, The study, religion: An instrument for enhancing national security and harmonious existence in Nigeria by Egbefo (2016) was carried out to see if religion serves as an instrument for enhancing national security and harmonious existence in Nigeria. Using qualitative approach, it found out that religion can enhance national security and harmonious existence in Nigeria. The study concluded that the welfare of the individuals should be the concern of the government, religious organizations, corporate organizations and the international community in order to achieve the expected national security.

Ajaegbu (2012) undertook a study, religion and national development in Nigeria with the aim of examining the influence of religion on the development of Nigeria. Having used philosophical theory of religion as a framework to explain a theory of terrorism and protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism, it found out that the relationship between religion and development is a complementary one since religious beliefs and practices promote moderation, rather than extremes.

Based on the above review, it is obvious that there is paucity of empirical studies to really determine the kind of effect religion wields on public phenomena. Hence, this study is carried out to fill this gap and to encourage future research, especially in the area of quantitative. Furthermore, many authors have investigated religion as a whole concept without specifically identifying the aspect of religion that affects other public variables. Interestingly, this study has specifically narrowed this religion ambiguity down to religious bias and how it influences public managers in Ogun State. Again, there is a concentration of studies in the areas of how religion affects economy, national development, conflict and politics without the exclusion of its latent effect of public managers in public sectors. This study has also been carried out to fill this often neglected gap.

Nexus between Religious Bias and Public Sector Management

Religion brings its adherents together with the power of its beliefs in a way that they begin to see themselves as one body that needs the care of one another. This makes various religious groups tend to gravitate towards parochial consciousness at the expense of collective consciousness that should generate national unity (Archibong *et al*, 2009; Hummel, 2019). Furthermore, Muhammed (2006) observes that religion is highly susceptible to manipulation by politicians. According to this author, the realization of this truism makes Moslems and Christians in Nigeria to fiercely struggle for appointments during moments of political contests. Behind this behaviour is the rationale that the amount of public space enjoyed by a particular group will be largely determined by those who control political power. Moreover, there is the virtually unavoidable tendency that whoever controls the public sector will be more favourably disposed to his/her own religious group than to others. It is for this reason that Nigeria often experiences conflicts during election and appointment periods with accusations and counter accusations following these processes from either religious groups with evidences of dissatisfaction and prejudice.

The effects of the influence of the power orientation of religion on public sector management can also be seen from the fact that in liberal democracies, public policies are often either accepted or rejected on purely religious grounds (Eberle, 2005). On the other hand, public policies have seriously become influenced by the religious biases of those in power. Studies carried out by Fernando and Jackson (2006) show that in many cases religion determine the choice of decisions and actions that affect the larger masses of any given society or group.

Moreso, Vergilius Fern, cited in Borchert (2006) observed that “to be religious is to effect in some way and in some measure a vital adjustment to whatever is reacted to or regarded implicitly or explicitly as worthy of serious and ulterior concern”. Therefore, since public sector management has to do with allocation of resources, an often regarded aspect of serious and ulterior concern by all and sundry, every religious entity finds interest in either participating in it or determining who does so and in whose interests. The truth is that every individual has beliefs based on his/her religions orientation and this orientation is what the public administrators take to the positions of public management to create room for biased political actions, no matter how little the effects may be.

Theoretical Framework

Riggs' Prismatic-Sala Model

This theory was propounded by Riggs (1962) in attempt to compare different public administrations from both the highly and lowly developing countries of the world. The influence of religion on public sector management and the entire behaviour of public workers find explanations in Riggs' prismatic-sala model. This model, which explains the administrative behaviour of public sector managers in transitional societies (like Nigeria), holds that in the lowly developed countries, public bureaucracies are not exactly what they appear to be; even though structures may look modern in appearance, they usually operate differently from those of the highly developed societies by combining traditional functions with those of administrative tasks, thereby becoming inefficient. Three major characteristics of the transient societies – heterogeneity, formalism, and overlapping – form the core of the prismatic-sala model (Naidu, 2006).

Heterogeneity means that transitional societies usually have a combination of many systems, practices and viewpoints. The resultant intermingling of traditional with modern structures and patterns is often responsible for the numerous complexities and difficulties that are usually experienced in policy formulation and implementation processes (Naidu, 2006). Formalism explained the gap between formally prescribed and actual practices documented in the constitution, laws and regulations. The quality of public administration has, therefore, often been affected by non adherence to laws, rules and regulations. So, while norms and values remain paper tigers, practical behaviour of public sector managers uphold some sort of segmented and selfish interests of some elements of the society (Naidu, 2006). In addition, the social roles of public sector managers often overlap with their official roles. As a result of this kind of overlapping, confusion and maladjustments often result leading to inefficiency and consequent underdevelopment of the society (Naidu, 2006).

3. METHODOLOGY

The design that this study employed is the social survey design that gives room to study a sample from a large population of cases. The population of the study included all the 5,059 employees of Ogun State public service in the ministries of Health, Works and Housing, Education, Agriculture, and Sports which have direct impacts on the people. Stratified random sampling technique was used to determine 371 as the sample size of the study. Validated questionnaire with reliability scores as shown on *Table 1*, designed on a Likert type scale of 1 to

5 for all the variables was used to generate data. Analysis of data was carried out using some statistical tools as shown on *Table 2* with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

S/N	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	NO. of Items
1	Religious Bias	0.901	6
2	Public Sector Management	0.973	7

Table 2: Tools for Data Analysis

Objective/Hypothesis	Statements	Statistical tool
Objective one	To explore the underlying factors of Religious bias in the public sector management.	Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)
Hypothesis one	Religious bias of managers does not affect public sector management in Ogun State.	Simple regression analysis
Hypothesis Two	Latent factors of religious bias do not have relative effect on public sector management in Ogun State.	Multiple regression analysis

4. Results

Demographic data of respondents

Academic qualification: 18.6% of the respondents had SSCE, 18.3% had OND and 8.6% of them had NCE. Also, 45.6% of respondents in this group had first degrees while 8.9% had post graduate degrees as at the time of contact with them.

Designation: In terms of their employment status 73.3% of the public sector managers were administrative employees while 26.7% were non-administrative staff.

Religious affiliation: the table indicates 69.7% Christians, 11.6% Moslems, 7.7% traditional religionists, and 11.0% affiliates of other religions.

Length of service in the ministry in Abeokuta: In this case, 49.7% of the respondents have worked for 10 to 19 years, 29.7% for 20 to 29 years, and 20.6% for 30 years and more in the ministries in Abeokuta.

Factor Analysis of Religious Bias in Relation to Public Sector Management

The identification of the latent factors of RB in relation to public management was explored using Factor Analysis (Principal Component Matrix and Varimax Rotation) as shown in *Table 3*. The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy for religious bias was 0.708 which indicated that the sample size was not only adequate, but also validated the data for the study for exploratory analysis since the value is more than 0.50.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.708
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2732.446
	Df	15
	Sig.	0.000

The null hypothesis that the item to item correlation matrix predicated on the data generated from respondents for Religious Bias in relation to public sector management which was an identity matrix was subjected to Bartlett's test of sphericity test. The Bartlett's test was calculated using chi-square test with a value 2732.446 which is significant at 0.000 level of significant. This indicated that the item to item correlation matrix is not an identity matrix. Hence the data were suitable for factor analysis as shown in *Table 4*. Interestingly, religious affinity, religious exceptionalism, and religion sectionalism emerged as the latent factors of RB after applying Factor Analysis.

Table 4: Emerged Factors

Factor Name	Eigen Value	% of Var.	Loading	Number of Item Converged
Religious sectionalism	2.133	35.538	0.924 0.909	If I have the opportunity, I will want everybody to practice my religion. In priority, I quickly assist those in the same religion with me than others.
Religious exceptionalism	0.906	11.666	0.933 0.891	My religion is better than any other religion I know in Abeokuta. Moral teachings of my religion are superior to any other set of rules.
Religious affinity	0.905	2.796	0.879 0.931	My religion helps me to be aware of what is right or wrong.

				I prefer to be guided by my religious beliefs in difficult official decision-making.
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Description of Factors

1. Religious Sectionalism: In relation to public sector management, religious sectionalism has emerged as the most significant determinant of religious bias with a total variance of 35.538. The key elements of this factor as shown in *Table 2* comprised of question 3. “If I have the opportunity, I will want everybody to practice my religion, and question 6. “In priority, I quickly assist those in the same religion with me than others”.
2. Religious Exceptionalism: With a total percentage variance of 11.666, religious exceptionalism emerged as the second determinant of religious bias in relation to public sector management. The major elements of this factor include question 2. “My religion is better than any other religion I know in Abeokuta”, and question 5. “Moral teachings of my religion are superior to any other set of rules.
3. Religious Affinity: This factor has a total variance of 2.796. The dominant elements involved in this factor are question 4. “I prefer to be guided by my religious beliefs in difficult official decision-making”, and question 1. “My religion helps me to be aware of what is right or wrong are the elements of this factor.

Table 5: Regression Analysis on the Effect of Religious Bias on Public Sector Management

Model	R	R Square	Adj. R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	0.858 ^a	0.737	0.735	5.05146		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Religious affinity, Religious exceptionalism, Religious sectionalism						
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1.	Regression	26229.064	3	8743.021	342.632	0.000 ^b
	Residual	9364.817	367	25.517		
	Total	35593.881	370			
a. Dependent Variable: Public Sector Management						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Religious affinity, Religious exceptionalism, Religious sectionalism						

Coefficient					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-0.131	1.243		-0.105	0.916
Religious sectionalism	-4.352	0.464	-0.805	-9.376	0.000
Religious exceptionalism	4.543	0.485	0.745	9.369	0.000
Religious affinity	3.388	0.199	0.888	16.981	0.000
Dependent Variable: Public Sector Management					

The summary results presented in *Table 5* showed that religious bias has a positive relationship with public sector management in Ogun State, Nigeria ($R = 0.858$). The results also revealed that religious bias significantly affect public sector management in Ogun State ($Adj. R^2 = 0.735$; $F(3, 367) = 342.632$, $p < 0.05$). The $Adj. R^2$ value was 0.735 and it is significant at P -value 0.000. This means that religious bias explained 73.5% of the variations in public sector management in Ogun State, Nigeria. The F test provided an overall test of significance of the fitted regression model. The analysis from the model had the F value of 342.632 with p -value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). Based on this, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted. Hence, these findings were sufficient to support that religious bias affect public sector management in Ogun State, Nigeria because of its statistical significance.

In line with H_{02} that aimed to determine whether latent factors of religious bias (religious sectionalism, religious exceptionalism, and religious affinity) have relative effect on public sector management was carried out through a further probe on beta coefficient as shown on *Table 5*. Hence, the result revealed that religious sectionalism, religious exceptionalism, and religious affinity have relative significant effect on public sector management. While religious exceptionalism and religious affinity had positive and significant effect on public sector management in Ogun State ($\beta_2 = 0.745$, $t = 9.369$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta_3 = 0.888$, $t = 16.981$, $p < 0.05$), religious sectionalism had a negative effect on public sector management in Ogun State ($\beta_1 = -0.805$, $t = -9.376$, $p < 0.05$).

5. Discussion of findings

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of religious bias on public sector management in Ogun State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that religious bias had a significant effect on the management of public sector in Ogun State. However, religious sectionalism which is one of the latent factors of religious bias negatively affected public sector management in Ogun State. The implication of this is that public sector managers in Ogun State are trapped with the snare of religious sentiments, prejudice and favoritism, nepotism and noncompliance with organisational ethics as they carry out their duties in the areas of implementation of policies and allocation of resources. This does not only explain the reason for uneven allocation and distribution of resources in Ogun State particularly, and in the country generally, but also reveals why some positions are given to certain personalities even when they obviously lack the capabilities, qualifications and prerequisites for such offices. This kind of religiously induced consideration given to people encourages the use of non-experts that produce poor organisational outcomes and development in any society. The findings of this study are congruously in agreement with that of Nwokorie (2017) who equally found out that religion is one of the potent factors that impede effective management of public sector organizations in an institutionally corrupt society. Although, Nwokorie (2017) did not specified the aspect of religion that is inimical to the effectiveness of public sector management, this study has revealed that religious sectionalism, which is one of the latent factors of religious bias, intrinsically motivate public sector managers to be selective and lopsided in their approach to duty.

In line with prismatic-sala theory of Riggs (1962), cited in Naidu (2006), the findings have equally revealed that public sector managers still depend on traditional methods such as religious beliefs to determine what is good or bad in management of public issues. This means that the ethical rules and regulations that are supposed to inform and regulate the behaviour of public sector managers are put in abeyance. As a result, the effective and unbiased management that the public ethical codes of conduct promote are relegated to the background and thus giving room for sectionalism and nepotism in the management of public resources.

6. Conclusion

Although, religious bias in this study do not have any negative relationship with public sector management, religious sectionalism which is one of the elements of religious bias latently motivate public sector managers to be selective, discriminatory, and biased in the management of

public sector in Ogun State. This aspect of religion inhibits the effective management of public sector in a surreptitious manner to the detriment of the citizens. Aside this negative aspect of religion, the study has equally revealed that religious exceptionalism and religious affinity are two aspects of religion that are not inimical to the management of public sector in Ogun. Hence, managers can rely on their good religious values to discharge their duties equitably without any selectivity and marginalisation. Therefore, the study recommended that government and management practitioners should discourage public sector managers against the use of religion sectionalism that makes them to be selective and biased in the execution of official responsibilities. In addition, government should also encourage individuals who work in the public sector to replicate their religious values that can propel them to be selfless, objective and accountable as they discharged their duties.

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