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Religion and Society: Implication to Political and Social Cohesion in Nigeria

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Abstract

Religion remains one of the most influential forces shaping political and social life in Nigeria, often serving as both a source of unity and a driver of division. In Lagos State, Nigeria's most religiously diverse and cosmopolitan region, the intersection of religion with politics and society raises critical questions about its role in fostering or undermining cohesion. This study investigates the implications of religion on political and social cohesion in Lagos State, with a focus on how religiosity and religious polarization influence trust, tolerance, and intergroup cooperation. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, targeting a sample of 400 adult residents selected through multistage stratified sampling across ten Local Government Areas. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising validated scales on religiosity, religious polarization, political cohesion, and social cohesion. Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, and construct validity was established via factor analysis. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analyses. Findings revealed that respondents exhibited a high level of religiosity and general agreement with statements promoting political and social cohesion, while strongly rejecting expressions of religious intolerance. Correlation analysis indicated a weak but significant negative relationship between religiosity and political cohesion ($r = –0.101$, $p = .047$), and a non-significant

relationship between religious intolerance and social cohesion ($r = .065$, $p = .205$). Multiple regression results showed that religiosity and intolerance jointly predicted political and social cohesion ($R^2 = .048$, $p < .001$), with religiosity emerging as the stronger positive predictor. The study concludes that religion in Lagos State functions more as a unifying than divisive force. High religiosity, when moderated by tolerance, enhances political inclusiveness and intergroup cooperation. The findings underscore the need for policies and interfaith initiatives that harness the moral and integrative potential of religion to promote democratic stability and social harmony in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Social Cohesion, Political Cohesion, Lagos State, Religiosity, Religious Polarization

Introduction

Religion is one of the most influential social institutions in human societies, shaping values, behavior, identity, and political orientations. Across cultures, it has historically provided moral guidance, social solidarity, and meaning to life, while also serving as a tool for legitimizing authority and mobilizing communities. In plural societies, however, religion can be a double-edged sword promoting tolerance and unity on the one hand, while fostering suspicion, exclusion, and conflict on the other. The study of religion and society therefore occupies a central place in contemporary scholarship, particularly in regions like Nigeria where religious identity intersects with ethnicity, politics, and social life in complex ways. Nigeria, the most populous African nation, is home to more than 200 million people, almost equally divided between Islam and Christianity, alongside African Traditional Religion and minority faiths (NPC, 2022). This religious plurality, combined with over 250 ethnic groups, makes the country one of the most diverse in Africa. While religion is deeply embedded in the daily lives of Nigerians manifesting in education, governance, economic transactions, and social rituals it has also become a major factor in political contestations and intergroup relations. Afrobarometer (2024) reports that Nigerians trust religious leaders more than elected officials, yet surveys consistently highlight low levels of social trust and weak institutional legitimacy (API, 2025). This paradox underscores the ambivalent role of religion: it can be a source of cohesion and legitimacy, but also of polarization and mistrust. The concept of political cohesion refers to the extent to which citizens trust, support, and feel represented by political institutions, and accept political outcomes irrespective of religious or ethnic affiliation. In cohesive political systems, religion may serve as a moral compass that reinforces legitimacy and participation. However, in divided societies, religious polarization defined as hardened boundaries and negative stereotypes between groups may erode trust in government, reduce willingness to accept democratic outcomes, and fuel political exclusion (Adewale & Temitope, 2024). Nigeria has witnessed this dynamic in several

electoral cycles, where allegations of religious bias in candidate selection and voting patterns have heightened tensions.

Similarly, social cohesion refers to the strength of relationships, trust, tolerance, and cooperation among individuals and groups in society (OECD, 2019). A socially cohesive society is one where people of different identities coexist peacefully, trust one another, and work collectively for the common good. Religion can strengthen social cohesion by promoting altruism, community service, and moral accountability (Koenig & Büssing, 2019). Yet, when weaponized, religion can deepen stereotypes, discourage interfaith interaction, and ignite communal violence, as seen in conflicts in Plateau, Kaduna, and Nasarawa States (Ishaq & Shousha, 2021).

The case of Lagos State provides a compelling setting for analyzing these dynamics. As Nigeria's most urbanized and cosmopolitan state, Lagos is home to millions of Christians, Muslims, and adherents of other religions who live and interact in densely populated neighborhoods. The city reflects both the strengths and strains of religious plurality: vibrant interfaith cooperation exists alongside disputes over worship practices, land use, and electoral mobilization along religious lines (Adesoji, 2020). Lagos is also a strategic site for studying political and social cohesion, given its central role in Nigeria's economy and its reputation as a microcosm of national diversity. Understanding how religion contributes to unity or division in Lagos therefore has implications for national peacebuilding and democratic stability.

Scholars have long debated the role of religion in politics and society. Functionalist perspectives view religion as a source of shared values and moral order that sustain social solidarity (Durkheim, 1912/1995; Putnam, 2000). Conflict theorists, on the other hand, emphasize how religion can be instrumentalized by elites to entrench power, marginalize groups, or mobilize supporters against perceived adversaries (Collier, 2018). Social identity theory further explains how religious affiliation becomes a marker of in-group and out-group membership, often leading to prejudice and discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In contrast, the contact hypothesis posits that intergroup interaction, under conditions of equality and cooperation, can reduce prejudice and foster mutual understanding (Allport, 1954). These frameworks together highlight why religion may simultaneously foster cohesion and division in Nigeria.

Despite abundant literature on religion and conflict in northern Nigeria, few studies have quantitatively examined how religiosity and religious polarization affect both political and social cohesion in urban, religiously plural settings like Lagos. Most existing works are either descriptive, localized, or focus narrowly on violent extremism (International Crisis Group, 2021). This leaves a gap in understanding how ordinary citizens in Lagos perceive the role of religion in shaping trust, tolerance, and political legitimacy. Addressing this gap is important not only for academic debates but also for practical policymaking, since Lagos often sets precedents for interfaith coexistence and political culture across the country. This study therefore investigates the implications of religion for political and social cohesion in Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, it examines how religiosity and religious polarization influence trust in political institutions, intergroup tolerance, and cooperation, while also testing the

moderating roles of interfaith contact and civic education. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to both theory and practice: by clarifying the ambivalent role of religion in plural societies and by providing evidence-based insights for religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society actors working to strengthen Nigeria's democratic and social fabric.

Statement of Problem

Religion in Nigeria has remained an ambivalent force, simultaneously serving as a mechanism for social solidarity and a driver of division. On one hand, religious institutions are trusted more than political authorities, and they provide moral guidance, social welfare, and community identity. On the other hand, religious polarization marked by distrust, prejudice, and rigid boundaries between groups has repeatedly undermined political legitimacy, weakened democratic processes, and fueled intergroup conflicts (Afrobarometer, 2024; API, 2025). This paradox is especially visible in urban, multi-religious contexts such as Lagos State, where diverse faith communities coexist in close proximity.

While existing literature has extensively examined violent religious conflicts in northern Nigeria and their effects on national security (Ishaq & Shousha, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2021), fewer studies have systematically explored how everyday religiosity and polarization shape political and social cohesion in cosmopolitan urban spaces like Lagos.

Lagos presents a unique context because it is both Nigeria's most religiously diverse state and its economic nerve center, making interfaith coexistence critical to stability. Yet, empirical evidence on whether religion in Lagos fosters trust, tolerance, and unity or whether it entrenches suspicion and division remains limited.

Furthermore, although theoretical frameworks such as social identity theory and conflict theory highlight the divisive potential of religion, and functionalist and social capital theories emphasize its capacity to strengthen cohesion, there is little quantitative research testing these dynamics within the Nigerian urban context. Similarly, while interfaith dialogue and civic education are often recommended as peacebuilding strategies, few studies have empirically tested their moderating roles in reducing polarization and enhancing cohesion.

This gap in knowledge has significant implications. Without a clear understanding of how religiosity and religious polarization affect political trust, institutional legitimacy, and intergroup cooperation in Lagos, policymakers and religious leaders may struggle to design effective interventions for promoting harmony in Nigeria's most diverse state. Addressing this gap is essential not only for academic advancement but also for sustaining democratic stability and peaceful coexistence in Lagos and, by extension, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the implications of religion for political and social cohesion in Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which religiosity influences political cohesion in Lagos State.
2. Examine the relationship between religious polarization and social cohesion in Lagos State.

3. Assess the joint predictive power of religiosity and religious polarization on political and social cohesion in Lagos State.
4. Explore demographic variations in the influence of religiosity and polarization on political and social cohesion in Lagos State.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does religiosity influence political cohesion?
2. What is the relationship between religious polarization and social cohesion?
3. How do religiosity and religious polarization jointly predict levels of political and social cohesion?

Research Hypotheses

$H_0$1: Religiosity has no significant influence on political cohesion.

$H_0$2: Religious polarization has no significant relationship with social cohesion.

$H_0$3: Religiosity and religious polarization do not jointly predict levels of political and social cohesion.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the implications of religion for political and social cohesion in Lagos State. The design was considered appropriate because it allows the collection of standardized data from a large sample at a single point in time and facilitates the use of statistical techniques to test relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

The population of the study consisted of adults aged 18 years and above residing in Lagos State. Adults were chosen because they are politically enfranchised and socially active, making them directly relevant to the issues of religiosity, political trust, and social cohesion.

Lagos State was selected as the study location because it is Nigeria's most cosmopolitan state, characterized by high religious diversity and frequent intergroup interactions, making it an appropriate microcosm of the wider Nigerian society.

A multistage sampling procedure was adopted. First, Lagos State's five administrative divisions Lagos Island, Ikeja, Badagry, Ikorodu, and Epe were treated as clusters. Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from each division, yielding a total of ten LGAs. Within each LGA, systematic sampling was used to select households, and one eligible respondent was chosen per household. Using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations with a 5% margin of error and Lagos's estimated adult population of about 12 million (NPC, 2022), the minimum required sample size was calculated to be approximately 400 respondents.

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire developed in line with the study variables. Section A captured demographic characteristics such as age, gender, religion, education, and occupation. Section B measured religiosity using items adapted from the Duke University Religion Index (Koenig & Büssing, 2019). Section C assessed religious polarization through

items reflecting intergroup attitudes, adapted from Adewale and Temitope (2024). Section D focused on political cohesion, capturing trust in institutions, electoral legitimacy, and tolerance, while Section E measured social cohesion using indicators such as trust, intergroup cooperation, and sense of belonging, guided by the OECD (2019) framework. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). To ensure validity and reliability, the instrument underwent expert review by scholars in sociology, political science, and religious studies for content validity. A pilot test with 10 respondents outside the sampled LGAs was conducted to refine items, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed to assess internal consistency. A threshold of 0.70 was adopted as the benchmark for acceptable reliability (Taber, 2018). Construct validity was further tested using exploratory factor analysis.

Data collection was facilitated by trained research assistants proficient in English and Yoruba to accommodate respondents' language preferences. Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and informed of their right to voluntary participation and withdrawal at any stage.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations were employed to summarize demographic characteristics and overall responses. Inferential analyses were then conducted to test the hypotheses. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) was used to examine the association between religiosity and political cohesion ($H_0 1$) and between religious polarization and social cohesion ($H_0 2$). Multiple regression was employed to determine the joint predictive power of religiosity and religious polarization on both political and social cohesion ($H_0 3$). All tests were carried out at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 386)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	183	47.4
	Female	203	52.6
Age	18–25	31	8.0
	26–35	109	28.2
	36–45	147	38.1
	46–55	87	22.5
	56 and above	12	3.1
Religion	African Traditional Religion	44	11.4
	Christianity	71	18.4
	Islam	256	66.3
	Other	15	3.9
Division	Badagry	87	22.5
	Epe	52	13.5
	Ikeja	76	19.7
	Ikorodu	74	19.2
	Lagos Island	97	25.1

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. Out of 386 participants, 52.6% were female and 47.4% were male. The majority (38.1%) were aged 36–45 years, followed by 28.2% aged 26–35 years. Most respondents (66.3%) were Muslims, 18.4% Christians, and 11.4% adherents of African Traditional Religion. Participants were drawn from all five divisions of Lagos State, with the largest share from Lagos Island (25.1%) and the least from Epe (13.5%).

These results show that the sample was fairly balanced across gender and divisions, representing the religious and demographic diversity of Lagos State.

Research question one: To what extent does religiosity influence political cohesion?

Table 2:

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Decision
I regularly attend religious services.	386	3.22	0.85	Agree
I frequently engage in personal prayer or devotions.	386	3.40	0.75	Agree
My religious beliefs guide my decisions and daily life.	386	3.40	0.77	Agree
I seek advice from religious leaders in times of confusion.	386	3.21	0.85	Agree
Religion is the central guiding principle of my life.	386	3.42	0.75	Agree
Average (Religiosity)		**3.33**		**Agree**
Political arrangements in Nigeria should be fair to all citizens irrespective of religion.	386	3.54	0.80	Agree
I accept election results even if my preferred candidate of same faith loses.	386	3.56	0.77	Agree
Political leaders in Nigeria govern in the interest of all religion.	386	3.41	0.93	Agree
I believe democratic institutions in Nigeria will improve through genuine religious cohesion.	386	3.55	0.75	Agree
I am willing to support peaceful reforms that strengthen	386	3.68	0.62	Agree
Nigeria's democracy.				
Average (Political Cohesion)		**3.55**		**Agree**

The results in Table 2 reveal that respondents generally agreed with all items measuring religiosity (mean range = 3.21 – 3.42, overall M = 3.33) and political cohesion (mean range = 3.41 – 3.68, overall M = 3.55). This indicates that most respondents consider themselves religiously active and perceive political systems in Lagos State as relatively fair and inclusive across religions.

Research question two: What is the relationship between religious polarization and social cohesion?

Table 3:

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Decision
People of my religion should not mix freely with members of other religions.	386	2.10	0.87	Disagree
I find it difficult to trust people of other faiths.	386	2.12	0.83	Disagree
Nigeria's major problems are caused by religious misconceptions.	386	2.15	0.86	Disagree
Interfaith marriages should not be encouraged.	386	2.37	0.97	Disagree
Political leadership positions must favor my religion.	386	2.22	0.92	Disagree
Average (Religious Intolerance)		**2.19**		**Disagree**
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my country Nigeria.	386	2.86	1.23	Agree
I am ready to work with people of different faiths to solve community problems.	386	2.97	1.25	Agree
I trust my neighbors regardless of their religious background.	386	2.85	1.24	Agree
Conflicts in Nigeria can be resolved peacefully through dialogue.	386	2.93	1.25	Agree
Nigeria's diversity in religion and ethnicity should be a source of strength, not division.	386	2.91	1.25	Agree
Average (Social Cohesion)		**2.90**		**Agree**

Table 3 shows that respondents generally disagreed with all items measuring religious intolerance, with mean scores ranging from 2.10 to 2.37 (overall M = 2.19).
This indicates that most respondents reject intolerant or exclusionary religious attitudes.
Conversely, all items under social cohesion recorded mean values above 2.50 (range = 2.85–2.97, overall M = 2.90), suggesting that respondents agreed they maintain positive, cooperative relationships with people of other faiths and value religious diversity.
Research question three: How do religiosity and religious polarization jointly predict levels of political and social cohesion?

Table 4:

Construct / Item	N	Mean	SD	Decision
People of my religion should not mix freely with members of other religions.	386	2.10	0.87	Disagree
I find it difficult to trust people of other faiths.	386	2.12	0.83	Disagree
Nigeria's major problems are caused by religious misconceptions.	386	2.15	0.86	Disagree
Interfaith marriages should not be encouraged.	386	2.37	0.97	Disagree
Political leadership positions must favor my religion.	386	2.22	0.92	Disagree

Construct / Item	N	Mean	SD	Decision
Average (Religious Intolerance)		**2.19**		**Disagree**
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my country Nigeria.	386	2.86	1.23	Agree
I am ready to work with people of different faiths to solve community problems.	386	2.97	1.25	Agree
I trust my neighbors regardless of their religious background.	386	2.85	1.24	Agree
Conflicts in Nigeria can be resolved peacefully through dialogue.	386	2.93	1.25	Agree
Nigeria's diversity in religion and ethnicity should be a source of strength, not division.	386	2.91	1.25	Agree
Average (Social Cohesion)		**2.90**		**Agree**
I regularly attend religious services.	386	3.22	0.85	Agree
I frequently engage in personal prayer or devotions.	386	3.40	0.75	Agree
My religious beliefs guide my decisions and daily life.	386	3.40	0.77	Agree
I seek advice from religious leaders in times of confusion.	386	3.21	0.85	Agree
Religion is the central guiding principle of my life.	386	3.42	0.75	Agree
Average (Religiosity)		**3.33**		**Agree**
Political arrangements in Nigeria should be fair to all citizens irrespective of religion.	386	3.54	0.80	Agree
I accept election results even if my preferred candidate of same faith loses.	386	3.56	0.77	Agree
Political leaders in Nigeria govern in the interest of all religion.	386	3.41	0.93	Agree
I believe democratic institutions in Nigeria will improve through genuine religious cohesion.	386	3.55	0.75	Agree
I am willing to support peaceful reforms that strengthen Nigeria's democracy.	386	3.68	0.62	Agree
Average (Political Cohesion)		**3.55**		**Agree**

Respondents generally disagreed with statements reflecting religious intolerance (M = 2.19), showing rejection of exclusivist or divisive religious views. They agreed with items measuring religiosity (M = 3.33), social cohesion (M = 2.90), and political cohesion (M = 3.55). This pattern indicates that the population is highly religious yet largely tolerant, emphasizing cooperative coexistence across faiths.

Testing of hypotheses

H_{01}: Religiosity has no significant influence on political cohesion.

Table 5: Correlation between Religiosity and Political Cohesion

Variables	1	2
1. Religiosity		
2. Political Cohesion	–0.101*	

Note: p < .05 (2-tailed)

Table 6: Regression Summary for Religiosity and Political Cohesion

Model	R	R^2	F	β	t	Sig.
Religiosity → Political Cohesion	0.101	0.010	3.97	–0.101	–1.99	0.047

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between religiosity and political cohesion among respondents. The result revealed a weak negative but significant relationship between religiosity and political cohesion ($r = –0.101$, $p = 0.047$, $N = 386$).

Further, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether religiosity predicts political cohesion. The result showed that religiosity significantly predicted political cohesion, $F(1,384) = 3.97$, $p = 0.047$, $R^2 = 0.010$. The regression coefficient ($B = –0.091$, $t = – 1.992$, $p = 0.047$) indicates that an increase in religiosity slightly decreases political cohesion. The null hypothesis (H_{01}) is therefore rejected, meaning religiosity has a significant but weak negative influence on political cohesion.

H_{02}: Religious polarization has no significant relationship with social cohesion.

Table 7: Correlation between Religious Intolerance and Social Cohesion

Variables	1	2
1. Religious Intolerance		
2. Social Cohesion	0.065	

Note: p > .05 (2-tailed)

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between religious intolerance (as a measure of religious polarization) and social cohesion among respondents. The result showed a weak positive but non-significant relationship between religious intolerance and social cohesion ($r = 0.065$, $p = 0.205$, $N = 386$).

Since the p-value (0.205) is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is retained. This implies that religious polarization does not significantly influence the level of social cohesion.

H_{03}: Religiosity and religious polarization do not jointly predict political and social cohesion.

Table 8: Multiple Regression Summary for Religiosity and Intolerance on Political/Social Cohesion

Predictor	B	β	t	Sig.	VIF
Constant	2.689		15.497	.000	
Religiosity	0.197	0.218	4.352	.000	1.013
Intolerance	–0.054	–0.060	–1.194	.233	1.013

Model Summary: $R = .220$, $R^2 = .048$, *Adj.* $R^2 = .043$, $F(2,383) = 9.72$, $p < .001$

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the joint predictive influence of religiosity and religious intolerance on political and social cohesion. The results revealed that the model was statistically significant, $F(2,383) = 9.72$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 value of .048, indicating that the predictors jointly accounted for 4.8% of the variance in political and social cohesion.

The regression coefficients showed that religiosity significantly and positively predicted political/social cohesion ($\beta = .218$, $t = 4.35$, $p < .001$), while religious intolerance did not significantly predict cohesion ($\beta = –.060$, $t = –1.19$, $p = .233$).

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) is rejected, implying that religiosity and religious intolerance jointly predict political and social cohesion, though religiosity is the stronger predictor.

Discussion of Findings

The demographic characteristics of respondents reveal important contextual insights. The sample of 386 participants was fairly balanced in terms of gender, with females constituting 52.6 percent and males 47.4 percent. This balance reduces gender bias and strengthens the representativeness of the findings. The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents fall within the 26–45 age bracket, which represents the most socially and economically active segment of the population. Individuals within this age range are typically more engaged in civic life, religious participation, and political processes, which enhances the credibility of their responses regarding cohesion and religiosity. The religious distribution, with 66.3 percent Muslims, 18.4 percent Christians, and 11.4 percent adherents of African Traditional Religion, reflects the pluralistic religious structure of Lagos State and Nigeria as a whole. Nigeria has consistently been described as one of the most religious countries in the world, where religion plays a central role in both private and public life. Scholars such as Peter L. Berger (1999) argue that contrary to secularization predictions, religion continues to exert strong influence in modern societies, particularly in Africa. Similarly, J. D. Y. Peel (2000) emphasizes that religion in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with identity, politics, and social organization. The spread of respondents across the five administrative divisions of Lagos State further strengthens the contextual validity of the findings.

With regard to the first research question, which examined the extent to which religiosity influences political cohesion, the findings indicate that respondents generally reported high

levels of religiosity. The overall mean score of 3.33 suggests active engagement in religious services, personal devotion, reliance on religious leaders, and strong identification of religion as a guiding principle in daily life. At the same time, respondents expressed high levels of political cohesion, with an overall mean of 3.55. They endorsed fairness in political arrangements irrespective of religion, acceptance of electoral outcomes even when co-religionists lose, and support for peaceful democratic reforms. These descriptive findings suggest that high religiosity coexists with positive democratic attitudes in Lagos State.

This pattern aligns with the argument of Robert D. Putnam (2000), who posits that religious participation can generate social capital by fostering trust, civic engagement, and cooperative norms. Religious institutions often provide networks that encourage collective responsibility and democratic participation. Similarly, Grace Davie (2002) suggests that religion can provide moral resources that support social integration and public life. However, inferential analysis revealed a weak but statistically significant negative relationship between religiosity and political cohesion ($r = –0.101$, $p < .05$). The regression results further indicated that religiosity accounted for only 1 percent of the variance in political cohesion. Although statistically significant, the magnitude of this effect is extremely small, suggesting limited practical influence.

The weak negative association may reflect the dual character of religion in politics. While religion can promote civic virtues, strong religious identity may also heighten in-group consciousness. Samuel P. Huntington (1996) argued that religious identities can shape political alignments and sometimes reinforce boundaries between groups. Likewise, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2004) contend that intense religiosity can influence political values in ways that differ from secular democratic norms. In this study, although respondents overwhelmingly support democratic fairness, incremental increases in religiosity slightly reduce political cohesion. This suggests that religion in Lagos may function as a strong identity marker, but its impact on political unity is minimal in magnitude.

The second research question investigated the relationship between religious polarization, measured as religious intolerance, and social cohesion. The findings indicate that respondents generally rejected intolerant attitudes. The overall mean of 2.19 for religious intolerance shows disagreement with statements promoting segregation, mistrust of other faiths, and favoritism in political leadership based on religion. Conversely, social cohesion indicators recorded mean scores above the acceptance threshold, with an overall mean of 2.90. Respondents expressed a sense of national belonging, willingness to collaborate across faiths, trust in neighbors regardless of religious background, and belief in peaceful conflict resolution.

These findings suggest that religious diversity in Lagos does not automatically produce social fragmentation. This supports the theoretical perspective of John Rawls (1993), who argues that stable pluralistic societies are possible when citizens accept principles of fairness across diverse belief systems. Similarly, Jürgen Habermas (2006) maintains that religious and secular citizens can coexist productively within democratic societies through mutual recognition and dialogue. The correlation analysis revealed a weak and non-significant relationship between

religious intolerance and social cohesion ($r = 0.065$, $p > .05$). This indicates that religious polarization does not significantly undermine social cohesion in this context.

While earlier conflict theorists such as Ted Robert Gurr (1970) associated identity-based grievances with social instability, more recent scholarship highlights the mitigating role of civic networks. Ashutosh Varshney (2002) demonstrated that intercommunal engagement can prevent religious diversity from escalating into violence. The findings of this study are consistent with Varshney's position, suggesting that everyday interfaith interactions in Lagos may reinforce cohesion rather than division.

The third research question examined the joint predictive influence of religiosity and religious polarization on political and social cohesion. The multiple regression results indicated that the overall model was statistically significant, explaining 4.8 percent of the variance in cohesion. Religiosity emerged as a significant positive predictor, while religious intolerance was not statistically significant. This implies that when considered together, religiosity contributes more meaningfully to cohesion than intolerance does. However, the explanatory power remains modest, indicating that other variables likely play more substantial roles in shaping cohesion.

The positive predictive influence of religiosity in the combined model resonates with classical sociological theory. Émile Durkheim (1912) argued that religion reinforces collective conscience and social solidarity. Religion, in this sense, binds individuals together through shared moral norms and rituals. Robert Bellah (1967) also emphasized the integrative role of civil religion in sustaining national unity. In the Lagos context, religiosity may foster moral commitments that encourage civic cooperation and democratic participation, even if its independent effect is limited.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the implications of religion for political and social cohesion in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Lagos State. Grounded in functionalist and social identity perspectives, the research explored how religiosity and religious polarization shape political behavior, trust, and intergroup relations. Through quantitative analysis of data collected from 386 respondents across five administrative divisions of Lagos State, the study provided an empirical understanding of how faith interacts with civic and social life in one of Nigeria's most religiously diverse environments.

The study concludes that religion in Lagos State plays a predominantly constructive role in sustaining social harmony and political inclusiveness. The findings counter the widespread narrative that religion is inherently divisive in Nigeria; rather, they highlight that it is the misuse or politicization of religion not religion itself that fuels tension. The everyday lived experience of Lagosians, marked by interfaith contact and urban pluralism, demonstrates the capacity of religion to coexist with modern democratic and social values.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Religious institutions should increase interfaith programs and collaborative community projects to reinforce mutual understanding and reduce latent prejudice.
2. Government agencies and civil society organizations should integrate religious tolerance themes into civic education curricula and public awareness campaigns.
3. Political actors should refrain from mobilizing support along religious lines and instead emphasize shared values of justice, accountability, and unity.
4. Nigerian policymakers should design inclusive development policies that reflect the state's pluralistic religious composition, ensuring equity in governance and resource distribution.
5. Future studies could employ qualitative or mixed method designs to explore the nuances of how religious beliefs influence citizens' perceptions of democracy and social trust in different Nigerian contexts.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Title: Religion and Society: Implications for Political and Social Cohesion in Lagos State Questionnaire
Instruction to Respondents:
This questionnaire is strictly for academic research purposes. It is intended only for respondents aged 18 years and above. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Please answer each item honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. Tick (✓) the option that best reflects your opinion.
Scale:
1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly Agree

Section A: Demographic Information
(Please tick ✓ the option that applies to you)
1. Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female

2. Age: [ ] 18–25[ ] 26–35 [ ] 36–45 [ ] 46–55 [ ] 56 and above

3. Religion:[ ] Islam [ ] Christianity [ ] African Traditional Religion [ ] Other

4. Highest Level of Education: [ ] No formal education [ ] Primary [ ] Secondary [ ] Tertiary [ ] Postgraduate
5. Division: [ ] Ikeja [ ] Badagry [ ] Epe [ ] Ikorodu [ ] Lagos Island

Section B: Religiosity
1. I regularly attend religious services.
2. I frequently engage in personal prayer or devotions.
3. My religious beliefs guide my decisions and daily life.
4. I seek advice from religious leaders in times of confusion.
5. Religion is the central guiding principle of my life.

Section C: Religious Intolerance
1. People of my religion should not mix freely with members of other religions.
2. I find it difficult to trust people of other faiths.
3. Nigeria's major problems are caused by religious misconceptions.
4. Interfaith marriages should not be encouraged.
5. Political leadership positions must favor my religion.

Section D: Political Cohesion
1. Political arrangement should be fair to all citizens regardless of religion.
2. I accept election results even if my preferred candidate of the same faith loses.
3. Political leaders in Nigeria govern in the interest of all religion.
4. I believe democratic institutions in Nigeria will improve through genuine religious cohesion.
5. I am willing to support peaceful reforms that strengthen Nigeria's democracy.

Section E: Social Cohesion
1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my country Nigeria.
2. I am ready to work with people of different religions to solve community problems.
3. I trust my neighbors regardless of their religious background.
4. Conflicts in Lagos can be resolved peacefully through dialogue.
5. Nigeria's diversity in religion and ethnicity should be a source of strength, not division.