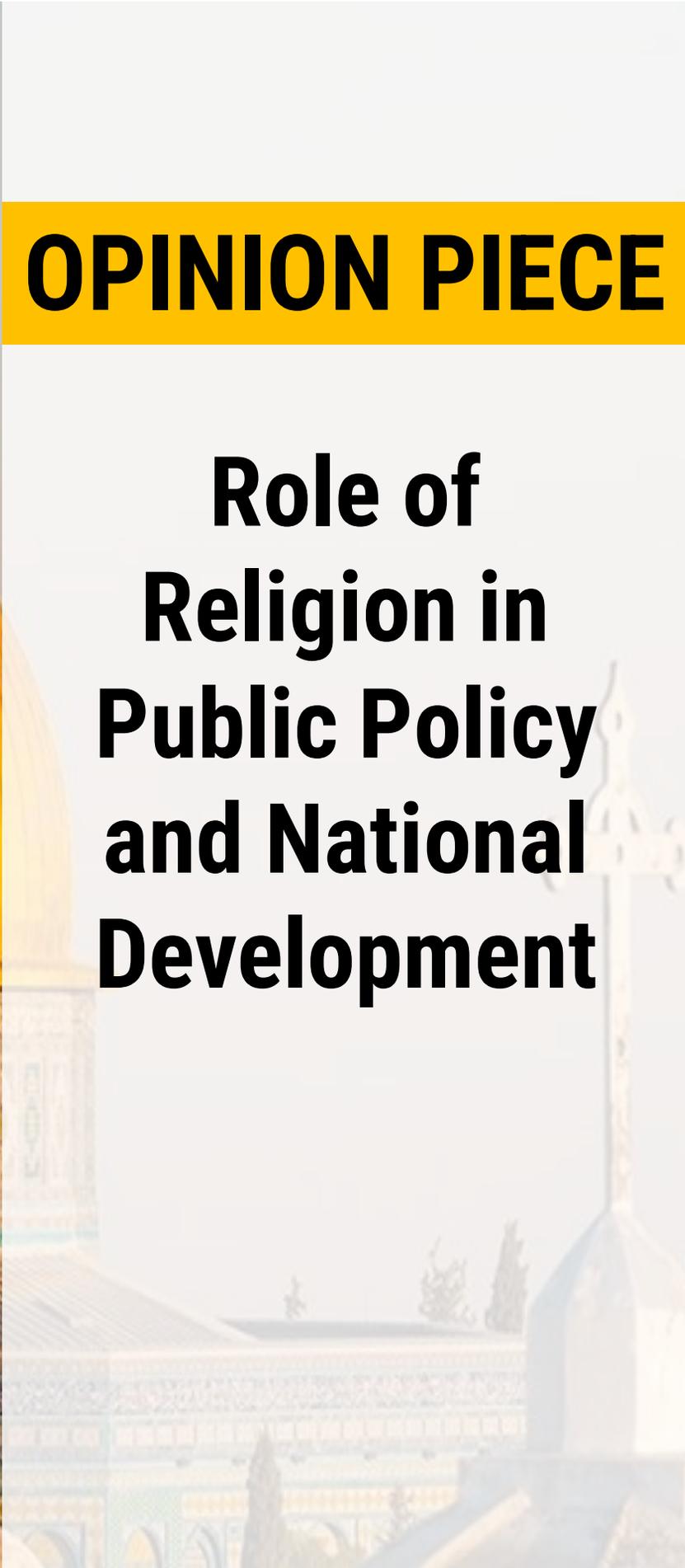




OPINION PIECE

Role of Religion in Public Policy and National Development



Over time, the relationship between religion and public policy has been an ambiguous yet salient subject of discourse. Whether positively or negatively, religion's influence on the political landscape cannot be exaggerated, especially in Nigeria, where religion has become increasingly imperative in shaping the choice of various political actors, government policies, and subsequent actions.

Scholars have attributed that the primary purpose of religion in the political sphere is to provide a cutting-edge moral framework for people and groups to articulate their demands, abide by the constitution, and positively influence governance tailored towards national development.

However, past and present experiences revealed that religion has transmuted into a critical driver of sectional rather than national development, characterized by religious competition, mistrust, rivalry, and fear of dominance. The unfortunate reality is made possible primarily by an illusion that exploits the current economic quagmire with a dishonest assertion that a particular religious divide instigates it. A situation that has often been used as a strategy to shy away from real national issues.

Interestingly, the primary concern for public policy is leadership and national interest, which does not correlate entirely to religion when it concerns public policy. However, this doesn't imply that the importance of religion to governance formulation and public policy will be unheeded.

Overall, regardless of individual perspectives, shying away from the impact of religion on public policy is dishonest. The reality is, religion

is more effectively deployed in a multi-religious society as a tool for division, distraction, and disruption - a strategy to restrain accountability of poor governance.

According to Karl Max, the renowned German philosopher, and economist, he opined "religion as the opium of the people," a state of mind whereby people's immediate sufferings are encapsulated by pleasant illusions that give them pleasure and the strength or hope to carry on. This further justifies the current societal norm of religion being the opium of the masses and the oppressor's tool.

In conclusion, the elites in all the nation's geopolitical zones should work towards strategies to bridge the country's widened ethnicity and religious gap to accommodate national development beyond religion or ethnicity. Religious leaders should prioritize religious jurisprudence and elucidation that promote tolerance and harmony amongst citizens. National interest should be the hallmark of public policies.



**ADVISORY | GOVERNMENT RELATIONS | REGULATORY AFFAIRS | INVESTMENT
FACILITATION | POLICY ADVOCACY**

ACIOE Associates is an advisory services firm providing solutions in Strategy, Government Relations, Regulatory Affairs, Economic Development, Advocacy, Investment Facilitation, and Policy Analysis.

Our team provides advisory services on critical sectors, including Health, Agriculture, Social Impact, and Government relations.

We have supported governments (Federal and Subnational), development partners, and organizations around sustainable solutions to the challenging economic, political, and development issues within the countries we operate.