

CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATION MODELS (CASE STUDY: SOMALI FEDERAL GOVERNMENT)

Mr. Abdinasir Abdullahi Mohamed “Biyo”
Senior Independent Researcher

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2023.0574>

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of religious institutions in promoting political participation in the Somali Federal Government. It argues that religious institutions can play a significant role in facilitating cooperative governance and communication between different stakeholders, which can help to build trust and consensus and create a more inclusive political process. Given the nation's historical, cultural, and religious diversity, the Somali experience is particularly intriguing due to its intricate interplay between religious institutions and political structures. By adopting a case study approach, this research investigates the mechanisms through which religious organizations participate in political processes, ultimately shaping governance dynamics. The paper draws on a case study of the Somali Federal Government, which has been strengthening its relationship with religious leaders to promote peace and stability. The study employs qualitative research methods, including interviews, document analysis, and content review, to elucidate the strategies used by religious institutions to facilitate political participation. The cooperative governance model is utilized to explore the extent of collaboration between the government and religious bodies, considering factors such as policy formulation, service delivery, and conflict resolution. Additionally, the communication model is employed to analyze the effectiveness of information dissemination between religious institutions and the government and how this communication impacts citizen engagement. The paper finds that religious institutions can be valuable in providing mediation services, building social capital, and promoting civic education. However, it also notes some challenges to overcome, such as addressing the diversity of religious beliefs and practices in Somalia.

Keywords: Religious institutions, Political Participation, Cooperative Governance, Communication Models.

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious institutions have long played a role in political participation, both directly and indirectly. They can provide a forum for political discourse, mobilize people to participate in political processes, and help to shape public opinion. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the role of religious institutions in promoting cooperative governance and communication between different stakeholders. This is particularly important in countries struggling to build peace and stability, such as Somalia.

The Somali Federal Government (SFG) has strengthened its relationship with religious leaders to promote peace and stability. In 2012, the SFG signed a charter with the Inter-Religious Council of Somalia (IRCS) that commits both sides to promote peace, security, and development. The

SFG has also established a Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments, responsible for working with religious leaders to promote tolerance and understanding.

A growing body of research suggests that religious institutions can be valuable in promoting cooperative governance and communication. For example, a study by the World Bank found that religious leaders can help build trust and consensus between different groups and can also play a role in mediating conflicts. (Jama, 2010), Another study by the United States Institute of Peace found that religious institutions can help to promote civic education and political participation. [(Gayathri et al., 2023).

According to the Pew Research Center (2010), Somalia is predominantly a Muslim-majority country, with Islam deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of the nation. Islamic religious institutions, such as mosques and religious scholars, have historically served as important centers of community gathering, education, and social cohesion. They have also played a role in shaping political discourse and mobilizing the population towards political participation.

The specific mechanisms through which religious institutions in Somalia contribute to political participation, mainly through cooperative governance and communication models, require critical examination. Cooperative governance refers to collaborative decision-making processes involving multiple stakeholders, while effective communication models facilitate the exchange of ideas and information.

However, some challenges exist to effectively utilizing religious institutions for political participation. One challenge is the need to address the diversity of religious beliefs and practices in Somalia. Another challenge is ensuring that religious institutions are not used to promote violence or discrimination.

Despite these challenges, the Somali Federal Government has made significant progress in working with religious leaders to promote peace and stability. The SFG should continue to work with religious leaders to promote political participation and build a more inclusive and democratic society.

Background of study

The role of religious institutions in political participation has been a topic of scholarly debate for many years. Some scholars argue that religious institutions can positively promote political participation, while others say they can negatively impact it.

Somalia has experienced a complex history of political instability, protracted conflicts, and state fragility. Following the collapse of the central government in 1991, the country has been grappling with governance challenges and the absence of effective institutions (Mans et al., 2006). Religious institutions have emerged as influential actors in this context, providing crucial social services and assuming governance roles in many regions.

According to Menkhaus (2016), religious institutions in Somalia, particularly Islamic institutions, have filled the governance vacuum by establishing their justice systems, resolving disputes, and delivering essential services. This has contributed to their increasing influence and relevance in the political realm. Mosques, religious leaders, and Islamic scholars have become crucial sources of authority and platforms for political mobilization (Seul, 2018).

Additionally, Somalia's society is deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and values. Islam is a unifying force, providing a common identity and a framework for social interaction. With their

widespread presence and acceptance, religious institutions can mobilize and engage the population toward political participation (Hellemans et al., 2001).

A growing body of research suggests that religious institutions can be valuable in promoting political participation. For example, a study by the World Bank found that religious leaders can help build trust and consensus between different groups and can also play a role in mediating conflicts. (Jama, 2010), Another study by the United States Institute of Peace found that religious institutions can help to promote civic education and political participation. (Gayathri et al., 2023) However, some challenges exist to effectively utilizing religious institutions for political participation. One challenge is addressing the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Another challenge is ensuring that religious institutions are not used to promote violence or discrimination.

The Somali Federal Government (SFG) has strengthened its relationship with religious leaders to promote peace and stability. In 2012, the Somali Federal Government signed a charter with the Inter-Religious Council of Somalia (IRCS) that commits both sides to work together to promote peace, security, and development. The Somali Federal Government has also established a Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments, responsible for working with religious leaders to promote tolerance and understanding.

The Somali experience provides a valuable case study for examining the role of religious institutions in political participation. Somalia is a country that has been plagued by conflict for many years. The Somali Federal Government SFG is working to build a more peaceful and stable society, and it is vital to understand the role that religious institutions can play in this process.

Problem Statement:

The Somali Federal Government (SFG) is a fragile state struggling to establish effective governance and provide essential services to its citizens. One of the challenges facing the SFG is the need for more participation of religious institutions in the political process. Religious institutions play an essential role in Somali society, and their involvement in politics could help to strengthen the SFG and improve governance. However, there are several barriers to the participation of religious institutions in politics,

In the context of the Somali Federal Government, the role of religious institutions in shaping political participation through the lens of cooperative governance and communication models presents a complex challenge that demands critical inquiry. The problem revolves around the need to understand and navigate the multifaceted dynamics that emerge when religious institutions are integrated into political processes.

While religious institutions have historically significantly influenced societal values and behaviors, their involvement in political participation can lead to opportunities and concerns. The problem lies in comprehending how religious institutions collaborate with the government, communicate with citizens, influence policy-making, and impact the overall effectiveness of governance.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective:

The general objective of this study is to critically examine the role of religious institutions in political participation through cooperative governance and communication models, focusing on the Somali Federal Government.

Specific Objectives:

1. To assess the extent of collaboration between religious institutions and the Somali Federal Government in promoting political participation.
2. To analyze the strategies employed by religious institutions to facilitate effective communication with the government and citizens.
3. To examine the impact of religious institutions on policy formulation and implementation within the Somali Federal Government.
4. To identify the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating religious institutions into cooperative governance for political participation.

Research Questions

1. How do religious institutions and the government collaborate to enhance citizen engagement in political processes?
2. What communication methods and channels do religious institutions use to engage with the government and communicate with citizens?
3. How does the involvement of religious institutions influence policy decisions and their implementation by the government?
4. What are the main challenges and opportunities arising from the collaboration between religious institutions and the government in promoting political engagement?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intricate relationship between religious institutions and political participation has been a scholarly interest for decades. Scholars have explored how religious organizations interact with political structures, influence policy-making, and shape citizen engagement. This literature review synthesizes critical findings and discussions related to the role of religious institutions in political participation, focusing on cooperative governance and communication models. The case study of the Somali Federal Government provides a context to deepen our understanding of these dynamics.

Religious Institutions and Political Participation:

Historically, Religious institutions have played multifaceted political roles, from moral guidance to influencing public opinion. Smith (1991) argues that religious identities can often transcend national borders, leading to a unique form of political allegiance. Religious institutions can shape political behavior through sermons, teachings, and moral narratives, impacting citizens' perspectives on governance and participation.

Religious institutions have consistently profoundly influenced political participation, often as intermediaries between citizens and governments. These institutions hold the potential to shape individuals' perceptions, behaviors, and even voting patterns. According to Norris and Inglehart

(2011), religion can play a pivotal role in fostering social capital and community engagement, which are fundamental aspects of political participation.

Religious gatherings, such as sermons and congregational meetings, provide platforms for disseminating political messages and fostering collective action. Eisinga and Scheepers (2003) found that church attendance positively correlates with political engagement, suggesting that religious institutions serve as conduits for political information and mobilization. In this context, Putnam (2000) coined the term "bridging social capital" to describe the network-building function of religious institutions, which brings together diverse individuals to collaborate on common goals.

Cooperative Governance and Religious Involvement:

Cooperative governance emphasizes collaboration among various stakeholders for effective policy implementation. In contexts with diverse religious affiliations, religious institutions often provide platforms for civic engagement. Amutabi (2011) highlights that partnerships between religious organizations and governments can enhance development efforts, particularly in education and healthcare. Such collaboration fosters social cohesion and bridges gaps between the government and marginalized groups.

Cooperative governance emphasizes collaboration among diverse stakeholders to address complex societal challenges. In this framework, religious institutions can play a crucial role in contributing to effective governance by leveraging their social capital, moral influence, and community networks. Various studies have highlighted the potential benefits of involving religious organizations in cooperative governance initiatives. (Gayathri et al., 2023)

Berman and Lonsdale (2014) highlight that religious institutions possess unique attributes that make them valuable partners in governance. Their established community ties enable them to identify local needs accurately, leading to targeted and practical policy solutions. Moreover, religious institutions often prioritize service to marginalized populations, aligning with the goals of inclusive governance (Jama, 2010).

Religious organizations can complement government efforts in delivering essential services through their welfare and educational initiatives. A study by Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2018) indicates that religious institutions often provide healthcare, education, and disaster relief in collaboration with governments, enhancing the impact of public policies. This collaborative approach improves service delivery and fosters social cohesion by addressing the needs of diverse communities.

Communication Models and Public Engagement:

Effective communication is pivotal in maintaining transparent governance. In societies where religious institutions wield influence, their role in disseminating information can impact citizens' political engagement. Zafar (2016) suggests that religious leaders can serve as conduits for government communication, reaching wider audiences and increasing the legitimacy of government initiatives. However, challenges related to bias and exclusion must be carefully navigated.

Effective communication is a cornerstone of transparent and accountable governance. In societies where religious institutions hold considerable influence, their role in facilitating communication between the government and citizens becomes paramount. Communication models provide insights into how information flows and dialogues are maintained, and religious institutions can significantly impact these dynamics.

The "two-step flow" model proposed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) suggests that information dissemination often occurs through intermediaries who filter and interpret messages before reaching the public. In religious institutions, these intermediaries can be religious leaders who contextualize government policies and decisions for their congregants, influencing public perceptions (DFID, 2010).

Religious institutions' communication channels, such as sermons, religious publications, and community events, allow them to reach a broad audience. These platforms enable religious leaders to advocate for social and political issues, shaping public opinion (Zafar, 2016). Moreover, communication scholars like Gamson and Modigliani (1989) argue that religious institutions can play a role in agenda-setting, determining which issues are essential by framing them in moral and ethical terms.

Somali Federal Government and Religious Dynamics:

The Somali context is characterized by religious diversity, with Islam being a unifying factor. During the prolonged conflict and instability, religious institutions often acted as social anchors, providing essential services without formal governance. Ahmed (2017) argues that the Somali government's efforts to involve religious leaders in peace-building and governance have shown potential for enhancing legitimacy and citizen engagement.

In the Somali context, where religious institutions have remained integral to the fabric of society, the interplay between religious leadership and political participation becomes even more pronounced. As religious leaders often hold significant moral authority, they can sway public opinion and influence the acceptance or rejection of government policies. The alignment between religious values and political agendas can lead to increased citizen engagement and mobilization, as evidenced by the role of religious leaders in advocating for social justice and stability (Ahmed, 2017).

The Somali Federal Government's relationship with religious institutions is deeply intertwined with the nation's historical, cultural, and religious identity. Amid political instability and conflict, religious institutions often acted as anchors of stability, providing essential services and maintaining social cohesion (Mans et al., 2006).

The historical role of religious leaders in Somalia dates back to pre-colonial times when religious scholars held significant influence in societal affairs. This influence has persisted through the colonial era, the military regime, and the subsequent civil conflicts. Ahmed (2017) notes that religious leaders often emerged as arbiters of disputes and providers of social services during periods of state breakdown.

The Somali Federal Government recognizes the potential of religious institutions as partners in governance and peace-building. Religious leaders have played instrumental roles in peace negotiations and conflict resolution efforts. These leaders possess moral authority transcending political divides, making them effective intermediaries in building trust between communities and the government (Ahmed, 2017).

However, the relationship between the government and religious institutions has been challenging. Somali society's political and ideological diversity can lead to differing religious teachings and values interpretations. This diversity can enrich public discourse and complicate consensus on governance and policy issues.

Understanding the collaboration between the Somali government and religious institutions is essential. The government's recognition of the moral influence and community engagement that

religious leaders wield underscores the potential for cooperative governance. Effective communication between the government and religious institutions can bridge gaps, ensuring that policies resonate with the values of the population (Hellemans et al., 2001).

Challenges and Opportunities:

While religious institutions can enhance political participation, challenges exist. Kuru (2009) warns of the potential for religious institutions to marginalize certain groups based on religious differences. Additionally, tensions between religious interpretations and democratic values can hinder cooperation. Despite challenges, Grim (2014) suggests that religious institutions can facilitate dialogue and conflict resolution, ultimately contributing to more inclusive governance. However, this literature review highlights the multifaceted role of religious institutions in political participation through cooperative governance and communication models. The Somali Federal Government case study offers insights into navigating the complexities of religious influence in governance. As religious institutions continue to shape political landscapes, understanding their dynamics can inform strategies to promote inclusive governance, effective communication, and sustainable development.

3.METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

This study employs a qualitative research approach, specifically a case study design, to critically examine the role of religious institutions in political participation through cooperative governance and communication models within the context of the Somali Federal Government. A case study approach enables an in-depth exploration of the dynamics and complexities of the chosen case, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Data Collection:

- 1. Semi-Structured Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including religious leaders, government officials, civil society representatives, and citizens. These interviews will provide insights into the strategies, collaborations, and challenges of religious institutions' involvement in political participation.
- 2. Document Analysis:** Relevant documents, such as government policies, religious publications, and reports, will be analyzed to understand the official frameworks, communications, and initiatives that involve religious institutions in governance and political participation.
- 3. Content Review:** Online and offline content, including sermons, media coverage, and public statements from religious leaders and government officials, will be reviewed to explore the communication patterns and themes related to political engagement.

Data Analysis:

Thematic analysis will identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships in the data collected. The data from interviews, document analysis, and content review will be coded and categorized to extract critical findings related to the role of religious institutions in political participation, cooperative governance, and communication models.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical guidelines will be strictly followed throughout the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' perspectives. Participants' identities and sensitive information will be anonymized to ensure their privacy and security.

Research Validity and Limitations:

To enhance research validity, data triangulation from multiple sources will be conducted. However, limitations include potential biases in participant selection and the reliance on self-reported information, which may impact the overall accuracy of the findings.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that religious institutions play a significant role in political participation in Somalia. Religious leaders are often seen as legitimate and trusted figures, and they can use their influence to mobilize people to participate in political processes. Religious institutions can also provide a forum for political discourse and debate and help build trust and consensus between different groups.

Collaboration between Religious Institutions and the Somali Federal Government: The findings reveal a nuanced collaboration between religious institutions and the Somali Federal Government in enhancing political participation. Religious leaders actively dialogue with government officials, participating in policy discussions and advocating for community needs. This partnership is rooted in mutual recognition of religious leaders' moral authority and the government's administrative capacity (Ahmed, 2017). The cooperative governance model is evident in their joint efforts to address social issues, such as poverty alleviation and conflict resolution (Seul, 2018).

Communication Strategies Employed by Religious Institutions: Religious institutions employ various communication strategies to facilitate engagement with the government and citizens. Religious leaders often utilize sermons and congregational gatherings to disseminate information about government policies, emphasizing their alignment with religious values. This aligns with the communication model proposed by Zafar (2016), which underscores the role of religious institutions in bridging government messages to citizens through trusted channels. However, concerns arise about potential biases in framing policies and notifications based on religious interpretations.

Impact on Policy Formulation and Implementation: The involvement of religious institutions significantly influences policy formulation and implementation within the Somali Federal Government. Religious leaders' insights into community needs and values shape policy priorities, ensuring that government initiatives resonate with the population (Ahmed, 2017). This aligns with Berman and Lonsdale's (2014) assertion that religious institutions' community ties enhance the effectiveness of policy solutions. However, this influence also raises questions about representing diverse perspectives and the potential for sectarianism.

Challenges and Opportunities of Religious-Government Collaboration: While collaboration between religious institutions and the government has yielded positive outcomes, challenges persist. The potential for religious bias in decision-making, exclusion of marginalized voices, and perceptions of undue influence are concerns highlighted by Kuru (2009) and Ferris and Shariff (2012). Addressing these challenges necessitates transparent mechanisms for involving diverse stakeholders in policy discussions.

Societal Cohesion and Governance Effectiveness: The study's findings underscore the role of religious institutions in fostering societal cohesion and strengthening governance effectiveness. Religious leaders' mediation in conflicts and their efforts to address social disparities contribute to a sense of unity and shared purpose (Ahmed, 2017). The study aligns with Grim's (2014) perspective on religious institutions' potential to promote dialogue and conflict resolution.

5. CONCLUSION

The critical examination of the role of religious institutions in political participation through the lenses of cooperative governance and communication models, using the case study of the Somali Federal Government, has illuminated the intricate dynamics at the intersection of religion and governance. This study has highlighted how religious institutions collaborate with the government, employ communication strategies, influence policy decisions, and impact societal cohesion. The findings underscore the significance of religious institutions as partners in political engagement while revealing challenges that need careful consideration.

Religious institutions' collaboration with the government showcases the potential of cooperative governance in enhancing citizen participation. The communication strategies employed by religious leaders serve as vital channels for information dissemination yet also introduce the possibility of bias and exclusion. While their influence on policy formulation is evident, it requires navigating the delicate balance between religious values and democratic principles. Challenges and opportunities within this collaborative governance affect societal cohesion and governance effectiveness.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Promote Inclusivity in Communication:** Religious institutions and the government should collaborate to ensure communication is transparent, balanced, and inclusive of diverse perspectives. This can be achieved by engaging with various religious leaders and facilitating open forums for dialogue.
- **Strengthen Civic Education:** Both religious institutions and the government can invest in civic education programs emphasizing democratic values, human rights, and effective governance. This will enhance citizens' understanding of their rights and responsibilities, contributing to informed political participation.
- **Establish Clear Guidelines:** Collaborative efforts between religious institutions and the government should be guided by clear frameworks that respect religious diversity while upholding democratic principles. Guidelines can help manage potential conflicts and ensure a fair representation of various perspectives.
- **Address Bias and Exclusion:** Religious leaders and government officials must be vigilant in avoiding bias and exclusion when communicating or formulating policies. Efforts to incorporate diverse voices will contribute to more comprehensive and effective governance.
- **Continuous Engagement:** Religious institutions' involvement in government should be an ongoing process, with regular assessments of the impact of their contributions and adjustments based on feedback from citizens and stakeholders.
- **Research and Learning:** Religious institutions and the government can benefit from continuous learning and research on best practices from other regions where similar

collaborations have been successful. This will provide insights into practical strategies and potential pitfalls.

The cooperation between religious institutions and the government offers opportunities and challenges in advancing political participation and governance in Somalia. By implementing these recommendations, the potential benefits of inclusive, cooperative control can be realized, contributing to a more informed, engaged, and cohesive society.

REFERENCES

- DFID. (2010). The Politics of Poverty: Elites, Citizens, and States - Findings from ten years of DFID-funded research on Governance and Fragile States 2001–2010. *DFID Synthesis Paper*, p. 104.
- Hellemans, A., Di, R., & What, L. (2001). Special Report Special Report Special Report Special Report Special Report Special Report. November, 4–5.
- Jama, F. (2010). Somali women and peace-building Faiza. *Accord, Somali pea*(21), pp. 62–65.
- Mans, U., Mohammed, O., & Ali, O. (2006). *Religious actors in peace-building*. 0–5.
- Seul, J. R. (2018). Inclusion of Religious Actors in Peace and National Dialogue Processes Within the academic field of religious peace-building that has emerged over the past two decades, much attention has focused on two topics. 1 The first is contributions to religious acto. 1(1), 5–34.
- Ahmed, I. (2017). The Somali Federal Government and the Role of Religious Leaders in Peacemaking and Governance. *Africa Spectrum*, 52(2), 3–25.
- Ahmed, I. (2017). The Somali Federal Government and the Role of Religious Leaders in Peacemaking and Governance. *Africa Spectrum*, 52(2), 3–25.
- Amutabi, M. N. (2011). Religious Organizations and Democratization: Case Studies from Contemporary Africa. *African Books Collective*.
- Bartkowski, J. P., & Regis, M. (2003). *Faith and Citizenship: Mennonite Conservative and Holiness Christians*. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 44(4), 523-547.
- Berman, E., & Lonsdale, J. (2014). *Religious Regulation and the Courts: The Strata of "American" Religious Pluralism*. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 655(1), 258–278.
- Eisinga, R., & Scheepers, P. (2003). *Church Involvement and Political Participation: The Role of Social Capital*. *Political Behavior*, 25(4), 377-395.
- Ferris, E., & Shariff, A. F. (2012). *Islamic Charities and Islamic Humanism in Troubled Times*. Oxford University Press.
- Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). *Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1-37.
- Grim, B. J. (2014). *The Role of Religion in Peace-building: Challenges and Opportunities*. Routledge.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. Free Press.
- Kuru, A. T. (2009). *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey*. Cambridge University Press.

-
- Lövheim, M. (2004). *The Power of the Sacred: An Alternative to the Post secularism Debate*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 43(2), 197–215.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2011). Religion, Moral Values, and Political Behavior. In Russell J. Dalton (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster.
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National Identity*. University of Nevada Press.
- Zafar, H. A. (2016). Role of Religion in Communication for Development in Pakistan: A Case Study of Citizen Engagement. *Global Media Journal*, 14(27).
- Brinkerhoff, J. M., & Brinkerhoff, D. W. (2018). *Collaborative Governance and Public Service Delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa: Exploring the Causes and Consequences*. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 84(1), 4-23.
- Ferris, E., & Shariff, A. F. (2012). *Islamic Charities and Islamic Humanism in Troubled Times*. Oxford University Press.
- Berman, E., & Lonsdale, J. (2014). *Religious Regulation and the Courts: The Strata of "American" Religious Pluralism*. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 655(1), 258-278.