

Pentecostals and Voting Behaviour in Ghana's 2024 Presidential Elections

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Abstract

The 2024 general elections in Ghana will mark a historic moment in the Fourth Republic, as both major political parties will be led by a Christian and a Muslim for the first time. This development has sparked a debate among the populace regarding the influence of religion on the election outcome. According to the recent population census, the majority of Christians in Ghana identify as Pentecostals, suggesting that this group will significantly impact the selection of the next President. This research, employing a qualitative design and the social model of voting behaviour as its framework, aims to explore the relationship between religion and the voting habits of Pentecostals in the upcoming elections. The findings revealed a range of responses among participants. Among the formally educated respondents, many asserted that religion would not influence their voting decisions, emphasising the importance of policies instead. Conversely, others expressed a tendency to abstain from voting because their preferred parties are nominating candidates who do not align with their religious views.

Keywords: Pentecostals, Politics, Voting behaviour, Elections, Religion

Introduction

Abamfo Ofori Atiemo emphasised that in Ghana, religion integrates with nearly all aspects of life, including the public sphere.⁴ John S. Pobee further observed that this deep connection has existed since pre-colonial times, resulting in no clear separation between religion and politics.⁵ Elom Dovlo highlighted examples from indigenous African communities that illustrate how religion and politics have historically intertwined.⁶ In this regard, Hans Haselbarth states, "It is part of African tradition that we cannot easily

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⁴ Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, *Religion and the Inculturation of Human Rights in Ghana* (London, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 86.

⁵ John Samuel Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1991), 11.

⁶ Elom Dovlo, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Challenges and Opportunities in Ghanaian Lawmaking, 1989-2004," *BYU L. Rev* 3, no. 4 (2005): 629.

distinguish between the secular and religious realms, even in politics.”⁷ Thus, Haselbarth aligns with Pobee regarding the connection between religion and the public sphere. In this context, religion and politics in Ghana have been closely linked since the origins of the traditional state, making it difficult to separate the two in contemporary times. Traditional thought and practice conferred legitimacy upon the leadership of ethnic groups through religion,⁸ so prior to colonialism, the traditional leaders among various ethnicities were deeply intertwined with religious beliefs.⁹ The stools on which many traditional leaders sat were associated with State deities,¹⁰ and these leaders often had priests as key advisors.¹¹ Policies and State decisions were often viewed as requiring divine approval through divination and oracles. Additionally, there existed a relationship between traditional laws and religious beliefs, with taboos that, if violated, resulted in both civil condemnation and the need for religious restitution.¹²

Colonial rule in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) did not diminish the influence of religion in the public sphere. In British West Africa, the colonial authorities implemented a system of “indirect rule,” which integrated traditional leadership into their governance framework.¹³ This approach established a new relationship between the state and religion.¹⁴ Although Ghana is a secular state, Christianity—the religion of the colonisers—remains the predominant religion.¹⁵ Following the end of colonialism, the role of religion in Ghana's public life was reevaluated. During the decolonisation process, religion played a nuanced role, leading to nationalist movements that challenged Christianity to become more culturally relevant to Ghana and the African context. Consequently, many independent African churches and their leaders actively supported the struggle for independence.¹⁶

⁷ Hans Häselbarth, *Christian Ethics in the African Context* (Daystar Press, 1976), 189.

⁸ Pobee, *Religion and Politics*, 11.

⁹ G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1992) 7, 77-78.

¹⁰ Peter Sarpong, *The Sacred Stools of the Akan* (1st ed.) (Accra: Ghana Publishing, 1971), 8.

¹¹ Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (3rd ed.) (Accra: Ghana Publishing, 1974), 17-18.

¹² Kwasi Wiredu, “Morality and Religion in Akan Thought,” In *African-American Humanism: An Anthology*, Norm R. Allen (ed.) (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991), 210-222.

¹³ Michael Crowder, “Indirect Rule: French and British Style,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 34, no. 3 (1964): 198.

¹⁴ E.K. Quashigah, “Legislating Religious Liberty: The Ghanaian Experience,” *BYU L. REV* 2, no. 6 (1999): 589, 594.

¹⁵ GhanaWeb.com, Legal History and Notable Features of Ghana Law, http://www.ghanaweb.info/law_cms/article.php?ID=2276 (accessed December 2023).

¹⁶ Pobee, *Religion and Politics*, 144-146.

The relationship between the state and religion in Ghana has fluctuated since 1957, largely due to political instability. New religious movements tend to emerge in the aftermath of coups,¹⁷ enabling their leaders to gain significant influence in state affairs. During periods of democratic governance, mainline churches have actively participated in the public sphere, sharing similar structures and ideologies, unlike these new religious movements. Although Ghana has no official religion¹⁸ and has been declared a secular state since its independence—a status that also existed during colonial times—Dovlo argues that a concept he terms “Civil Religion” persists in the country.¹⁹ This notion refers to the incorporation of religious symbols and imagery in public and political life, fostering a sense of patriotic piety and unity among the populace.²⁰ Dovlo further observes that in Africa, religion's role in public life extends beyond these usages. He identifies two specific expressions of religion in politics that are unique to West Africa: religious nationalism and the political manipulation of religion. The latter is particularly evident during election periods when religion is often leveraged for electoral advantage.²¹

A strong connection between religion and politics can be observed in Ghana, particularly during elections. This indicates that politicians are acutely aware of the significant influence religion has on the populace, often leveraging various religious institutions and leaders in their campaigns.²² For instance, in elections held under the Fourth Republican Constitution, phrases like the election of a “God-fearing man” as president emerge,²³ alongside the use of religion to determine truth from falsehood. Traditional religious oracles have been employed to ascertain whether voters who accepted gifts from politicians actually supported them, and to evaluate the validity of accusations against political figures.²⁴ The 2000 election was notable for political parties selecting Christian presidential candidates paired with Muslim running mates, which some perceived as divine intervention. Many believed that angels would ensure victory for the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which indeed succeeded with a Muslim running mate.²⁵ Looking

¹⁷ Elom Dovlo, “Civil Religion in Ghana,” *Orita Ibadan J. Religious Stud* 50 (2003): 37.

¹⁸ Dovlo, “Religion in the Public Sphere”, 634.

¹⁹ Dovlo, “Religion in the Public Sphere”, 634.

²⁰ Patrick J. Ryan, S.J., “Is it Possible to Construct a Unified History of Religion in West Africa?” *Universitas: An Inter-Faculty Journal of the University of Ghana* (1986):107.

²¹ Dovlo, “Religion in the Public Sphere”, 634.

²² Birgit Meyer, *Impossible Representations: Pentecostalism, Vision and Video Technology in Ghana* (Johannes Gutenberg Univ., Dep’t of Anthropology & Afr. Studies, Mainz, F.R.G., Working Paper No. 21, 2003),8.

²³ Joseph Osei, “Manipulation of the Mass Media in Ghana’s Recent Political Experience,” In *Ghana: Changing Values/ Changing Technologies*, Helen Lauer (ed.) (The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 200),2.

²⁴ Dovlo, “Civil Religion in Ghana”, 35.

²⁵ Dovlo, “Religion in the Public Sphere”, 635.

ahead to the 2024 general election, a different dynamic is anticipated in Ghana's Fourth Republic, as it will feature presidential candidates from the two major political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the NPP, each representing the country's predominant religious groups.

This paper seeks to explore the relationship between religion and the voting behaviour of Pentecostals in the forthcoming 2024 general elections in Ghana. The impending election within Ghana's Fourth Republic presents a unique opportunity to assess whether Pentecostals will base their votes on the political parties' manifestos or on the religious affiliations of the presidential candidates. In the upcoming 2024 general election, each of the two major political parties will nominate a presidential candidate: one party will present a Christian (Classical Pentecostal) candidate, while the other will field a Muslim candidate. What role will religion play in these elections, and how might it influence the outcomes?

Sociological Model of Voting Theory

The theoretical framework guiding this research is the sociological model of voting, which posits that while many individuals make voting decisions based on personal factors, various social influences also play a significant role in their choice of candidate. Scholars such as Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee identify key societal factors—such as family, media, region, class, religion, and race—as critical influences on voting behaviour.²⁶ Similarly, Michael Marsh and Kevin Cunningham highlight categories like gender, class, religion, region, and ethnicity as important divisions.²⁷ However, Robert Andersen and Anthony Heath have noted that the sociological model has faced criticism for its emphasis on collective rather than individual motivations behind voting behaviour.²⁸

Despite this, it is essential to acknowledge the voting patterns observed in Africa, particularly in Ghana, where a significant portion of the electorate casts their votes based on ethnic, religious, or regional affiliations.²⁹ This model highlights the importance of these social classifications, which reveal the underlying divisions and tensions within

²⁶ Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

²⁷ Michael Marsh and Kevin Cunningham, "Voting Behaviour," In *Politics in the Republic of Ireland* 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 2017), 157–183.

²⁸ Robert Andersen and Anthony Heath, "Class Matters: The Persisting Effects of Contextual Social Class on Individual Voting in Britain, 1964–1997," *European Sociological Review* 18, no. 2 (2002):125–138.

²⁹ Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Ghanaian society. While ethnic and regional influences are the primary factors shaping voting behaviour in Africa and Ghana, much of the existing research has predominantly focused on these aspects. Additionally, studies examining the role of religion in voting behaviour often emphasise religious divides in relation to regional factors rather than from an individual perspective. This research, however, specifically investigates the voting behaviour of Pentecostals in Ghana as the nation approaches the 2024 presidential election.

Religious Influence on Elections

Before we delve into the influence of religion on voting behaviour, it is important to first explore the meaning of the term “religion.” This term is widely used in both everyday conversation and academic discourse. However, despite its frequent application, the complexities involved in defining “religion” cannot be overlooked. The interpretation of the term varies significantly depending on the context in which it is employed. Therefore, it can be argued that the definition of religion is context-dependent. Various scholars have suggested different definitions, including “functional-based,”³⁰ “content-based,”³¹ “the presence of a belief,”³² “the presence of faith,”³³ and “analogical-based definitions,”³⁴ to name just a few. Despite efforts by scholars to arrive at a fitting definition of religion, the few proposed definitions have faced criticism for being either too broad or too narrow. This highlights the complexities involved in defining religion. This paper will not address the technicalities related to defining religion, as it is not its primary focus. However, given the term’s usage in this study, we will provide a working definition. In this paper, the term “religion” refers specifically to the major world religions, including Christianity, Islam, African Indigenous Religions, Judaism, and others. The emphasis of this section will be on the impact of these major religions on elections.

The impact of religion on politics, particularly in the context of elections, presents multiple dimensions globally, with a specific focus on Africa. This paper will first examine the relationship between religion and politics before delving into its effects on elections. Numerous scholars have highlighted this connection. For example, Christopher Callaway noted that the rise of secularism has not diminished the significance of religion

³⁰ Jesse H. Choper, “Defining Religion in the First Amendment,” *University of Illinois Law Review* (1982): 579-591.

³¹ Choper, “Defining Religion,” 579.

³² Choper, “Defining Religion,” 579.

³³ Andrew W. Austin, “Faith and the Constitutional Definition of Religion,” *Columbia Law Review* 22, no.1 (1992): 33-43.

³⁴ F. Ferré, “The Definition of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 38 (1970):3-16.

in political phenomena worldwide.³⁵ Similarly, Jeffery Haynes argues that religion plays a crucial role in addressing and often intertwining political, social, economic, and developmental conflicts. He emphasises that religion can significantly shape individual and group values, which in turn influence fundamental issues affecting people everywhere.³⁶ In contrast, Jon G. Abbink suggests that, in Africa, the importance of religion can be observed from both a numerical standpoint and its ties to politics and the public sphere. He further observes that the wave of economic liberalisation and democratisation since the 1990s has led to a marked increase in the presence of religion in the public space, highlighting its political relevance in Africa. Abbink asserts that religion will continue to play a vital role in the continent's political trajectory in the future.³⁷

The role of religion in the public sphere across Africa can certainly be observed in Ghana; however, there are unique aspects within the West African context—particularly in Ghana and Nigeria—that render this interaction particularly compelling. The rise of neo-Prophetic Pentecostalism has introduced a distinct dynamic to this arena. Notably, spiritual forecasting, prophesying, or predicting the outcomes of general elections has emerged as a significant practice. When these prophecies materialise, many neo-Prophets anticipate a “role” within the ruling government, aiming to influence decisions accordingly. Fredrick Acheampong, in his assessment of the situation in Ghana, noted that while issues such as spiritual forecasting, religious bloc campaigns, discrediting candidates before religious and ethnic constituencies, and concerns regarding moral and human rights, as well as the use of religious songs in campaigns, may have shifted attention somewhat, these religious matters still play a significant role in the political landscape of the 2008 campaigns.³⁸ Additionally, Jessica Naa Ahiney Boifio emphasises that Ghanaians are deeply religious, suggesting that every campaign message must align with their values and morals. Moreover, any individual aspiring to public office must

³⁵Christopher Callaway, “Religion and Politics,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/rel-poli/>. (accessed December 2023).

³⁶ Jeffrey Haynes, “Religion, Identity, Security and Governance,” In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics* (Routledge, 2016), xv-xvi.

³⁷ Jon G. Abbink, “Religion and Politics in Africa: The Future of ‘The Secular’,” *Africa Spectrum* 49, no.3(2014):83.

³⁸ Fredrick Acheampong, “Religion and Politics in Ghana: An Analysis of Repetitive Issues in Electioneering Campaigns under the 4th Republic (1992-2008),” (Conference: Paper presented at an International and Interdisciplinary conference on “Politics, Probity, Poverty, and Prayer: African Spiritualities, Economic and Socio-Political Transformation”, 2013).

consider the social dynamics of Ghanaian society, particularly the centrality of religion, which serves as a foundational element of public life in the community.³⁹

Building on Boifio's assertion, the 2024 general election is poised to be pivotal in Ghana's Fourth Republic. As previously discussed, the ruling New Patriotic Party is fielding Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, a Muslim candidate, while the opposition National Democratic Congress has nominated John Dramani Mahama, a member of the Assemblies of God Church, a prominent classical Pentecostal denomination in Ghana. Given Boifio's argument that the social dynamics of Ghanaian society – particularly the influence of religion – should be considered when seeking public office, and taking into account that a significant portion of the population identifies as Christian, one must question whether these dynamics will impact the upcoming elections. Is there a connection between religion and voting patterns that could shape the electoral outcomes?

Various studies across the world have demonstrated such a relationship. A study conducted by Mian Gul Said, Aziz Ur Rahman, and Musab Yousufi in Pakistan focusing on the 2013 general election among the electorate of the Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa concerning the voting behaviour presented mixed responses from the electorate. While the research demonstrated a seeming relationship that exists between religion and voting patterns by some of the electorates, others were of the view that the religion that one belongs to does not affect one's decision on the day of elections.⁴⁰ Sarah Botterman and Marc Hooghe, conducting their research from Belgium to examine the relationship between religion and voting patterns for the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), acknowledged that although Christianity is in decline in Western Europe, voting patterns are still influenced by religion.⁴¹ Robyn Driskell, Elizabeth Embry, and Larry Lyon in addition, argued that religion continues to influence the voting patterns of most electorates. They posit that “different types of religious beliefs influence political participation differently. Although some macro religious beliefs significantly increase macro-political behaviour, believers in an involved God are less likely to participate

³⁹ Jessica Naa Ahiney Boifio, “The Battle Is the Lord's”-Religion as a Tool for Political Branding in Ghana's Fourth Republic,” Unpublished Bachelor of Science in Administration Thesis submitted to Ashesi University, 2014.

⁴⁰ Mian Gul Said, Aziz Ur Rahman, and Musab Yousufi, “The Impact of Religion on Voting Behavior,” *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews* 9, no 2 (2021):14-24.

⁴¹ Sarah Botterman and Marc Hooghe, “Religion and Voting Behavior in Belgium: An Analysis of the Relation Between Religious Beliefs and Christian Democratic Voting,” *APSA 2009 Toronto Meeting Paper*, (2009).

politically.”⁴² This then brings out different variables determining such influence in an election.

Focusing on Africa, particularly Nigeria, Cletus Famous Nwankwo examined the impact of religion on voters’ choices in the country. He noted that while there was minimal religious influence in the first two elections of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, from 1999 to 2015, a significant level of religious impact emerged in the 2011 and 2015 elections. Nwankwo argues that the influence of faith on Nigeria’s presidential elections during the Fourth Republic has markedly increased over time.⁴³

The situation in Ghana during its Fourth republic stands in contrast to that of Nigeria. In Nigeria, leading presidential candidates typically hail from either Christian or Islamic backgrounds. In Ghana, however, ethnicity and regional considerations play a more direct role, with religion having a more indirect influence. Gilbert Arhinful Aidoo and Thomas Prehi Botchway emphasise that ethnicity, regionality, and religion significantly shape electoral outcomes in Ghana’s Fourth Republic. They note that politicians often leverage these factors to secure electoral victories. This reliance on identity politics can potentially lead to instability within the nation’s political framework, prompting a call for authorities to address these challenges.⁴⁴ Although their mission is commendable, it may appear "unachievable" at times due to the significant role of identity in human decision-making. It is not uncommon for individuals to act in accordance with their identities. A comprehensive and consistent educational approach is essential to transform this proposed change into reality, beginning in kindergarten and continuing through university. Such education should highlight the importance of prioritising policies over identity when selecting leaders. In contrast to the position presented by Aidoo and Botchway regarding the influence of ethnicity on voting behaviour, Ransford Gyampo and Ricky Appah assert that their empirical evidence reveals a declining impact of ethnicity on electoral choices. Instead, party identification has now taken on a more prominent role in how Ghanaians cast their votes.⁴⁵ This suggests that a growing number of Ghanaians are choosing to vote based on policy or ideological considerations rather than solely on the ethnic affiliation of the candidates.

⁴² Driskell, Elizabeth Embry, and Larry Lyon, “Faith and Politics: The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Political Participation,” *Southwestern Social Science Association* 89, no.2 (2008):294-314.

⁴³ Cletus Famous Nwankwo, “Religion and Voter Choice Homogeneity in the Nigerian Presidential Elections of the Fourth Republic,” *Stat Polit Pol* 10, no. 1(2019)1-25.

⁴⁴ Gilbert Arhinful Aidoo and Thomas Prehi Botchway, “Ethnicity, Religion and Elections in Ghana,” *UCC Law Journal* 1, no.2 (2021): 419-444.

⁴⁵ Ransford Gyampo and Ricky Appah, *Voting Behavior in Elections in Ghana’s Fourth Republic: A Study of Manhyia South, Ho West and Ayawaso West Wuogon* (Mauritius: Editions Universitaires Europeennes, 2018).

Baffour K. Takyi, Chris Opoku-Agyeman, and Agnes Kutin-Mensah identified a correlation between religion and voting patterns in Ghana's 2004 presidential election. They noted that while the majority of Ghanaian Protestant Christians support the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the Muslim community tends to favour the National Democratic Congress (NDC).⁴⁶ This observation is significant for the current study, as the dynamics have changed in the upcoming presidential election. The party predominantly backed by Christians is now fielding a Muslim candidate, while the party with a majority of Muslim supporters is presenting a Christian candidate. This raises an important question: how will this influence the voting behaviours of the electorate?

Methodology

The Pentecostals in Ghana are broadly classified into three main groups: classical Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals, and neo-Prophetic. For this research, the focus was not on a specific category of Pentecostals in Ghana, but rather on engaging any Christian in the two demarcated areas who belonged to any of the Pentecostal groups. This qualitative study employed the purposive sampling technique for data collection. The researchers conducted brief face-to-face interviews with a sample size of 60 respondents, consisting of 30 formally educated Pentecostals and 30 informally educated Pentecostals, with an equal split of 15 males and 15 females in each group.

The study included 30 formally educated Pentecostals, primarily from the University of Ghana Main and Accra City Campuses, as well as 30 uneducated Pentecostals from Nsawam, Achimota, Bekwai, and Hohoe. The respondents belonged to various churches, including the Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God, Christ Apostolic Church International, Lighthouse Chapel International, Spiritlife Revival Ministry, and the Glorious Word Power Ministry International. The research categorised the data into two main themes: formally educated Pentecostals and informally educated Pentecostals, and the data was analysed using the sociological model of voting.

Presentation of Findings

The interview questions focused on two main areas: the voting patterns of participants in the last two elections and the potential influence of religion on their decisions in the upcoming election. The data will be organised into two overarching themes: formally educated Pentecostals and informally educated Pentecostals. It is essential to clarify the

⁴⁶ Baffour K. Takyi, Chris Opoku-Agyeman and Agnes Kutin-Mensah, "Religion and the Public Sphere: Religious Involvement and Voting Patterns in Ghana's 2004 Elections," *Africa Today* 56, no. 4 (2010): 62-86.

meanings of “formal” and “informal” education in this context. These terms are used in their Western sense. Formal education refers to Pentecostals who have received Western-style education, while informally educated Pentecostals are those who have gained knowledge outside of that framework. We contend that education extends beyond traditional classroom settings (the Western model) and encompasses any process of acquiring knowledge that is beneficial to humanity.

Formally Educated Pentecostals

The respondents interviewed in this category represented two voting backgrounds: those who have participated in elections before and those who will be voting for the first time in the 2024 general election. Some expressed their disappointment with the democratic system and have decided against voting in the upcoming election. Conversely, others conveyed their eagerness to participate. For example, the first respondent remarked that elections are fundamentally meant to select leaders who are competent and capable of addressing our issues rather than merely discussing them. Furthermore, she emphasized that the qualities of these leaders are the key factors she will consider when casting her vote, stating that her religious beliefs will not influence her decision.

The second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh respondents first noted that they voted for the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the previous general election in 2020. They explained that their choice was influenced by the appealing policies presented by the NPP. They emphasised that neither religion nor ethnicity played a role in their decision-making process. Consequently, they believe that in the upcoming election, their choice will similarly not be swayed by religious considerations. Instead, they intend to base their decision on the candidate whose policies will be most beneficial to them and the country as a whole.

The eighth respondent, like others, indicated that in previous elections, she voted for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) based on policy considerations rather than religious affiliations. She emphasised that as she approaches next year’s general election, policies will be crucial in her voting decision. Another respondent provided an intriguing rationale for supporting the incumbent party in the last election, revealing that her mother encouraged her to do so in appreciation for the introduction of the free senior high school initiative, from which she personally benefited. This initiative, introduced by President Nana Akufo Addo, aims to make secondary education accessible to all by offering scholarships to students at the high school level. The respondent also expressed that the stress she experienced while casting her vote would deter her from participating in the upcoming election. She commented that elections often become a means of creating

jobs for those in power, frequently to the detriment of the citizenry, as promises made are not fulfilled.

One respondent, in contrast, expressed that he would cast his vote for a Christian candidate. He argued that the Christian values of such an individual tend to shape their governance, as these individuals embody the teachings of Christ. Another respondent, aligning himself with the previous speaker, stated that his decision in the election would not be swayed by religion but rather by policies. When asked if he plans to vote in the upcoming election, he replied, "Of course, why not? If the policies are good, that's all that matters. Remember, Ghana is a secular state; I don't need to belong to any religious sect to vote for someone. Historically, all our presidents have been Christians, and yet we have seen little change. The NDC has been in power for a long time, and their candidates have always been Christians." His comments highlight two key points: the prevalence of Christians in leadership roles within the country and his disappointment in their governance. He concluded by emphasising that, regardless of his vote, he will focus on long-term policies rather than short-term solutions.

Many of the individuals interviewed expressed the belief that policies will significantly influence their voting decisions in the upcoming elections, rather than religious affiliations. Additionally, a number of respondents indicated that they may abstain from voting due to the repeated failures of successive governments to fulfill their promises.

Informally Educated Pentecostals

Most respondents interviewed in this category had mixed reactions to the questions posed. Similar to the earlier responses from formally educated Pentecostals, about half indicated that they planned to vote in the upcoming election based on the policies of the two presidential candidates. They elaborated that having previously experienced both candidates in power, their track records significantly influence their voting decisions. Additionally, some respondents noted that they have benefited from the policies of either the incumbent or the opposition party, and their votes will serve as an expression of gratitude for the contributions made to their lives.

However, Some respondents indicated that their voting decisions would not be influenced by religious affiliations but rather by party loyalty. They expressed that, as supporters of the NPP/NDC, they would vote for whichever candidate their party presents, regardless of the candidate's religious background. While the questions posed focused primarily on the impact of religion in the upcoming elections, a few respondents mentioned ethnicity as a consideration. One individual noted that she would support the

incumbent government because the candidate they are presenting is from her hometown. She further asserted that just as the current president has fostered development in his hometown, she believes that if the incumbent's presidential candidate wins, similar progress will occur in her community.

In contrast to the responses provided earlier, some respondents clearly stated their intent not to participate in the upcoming elections. When probed further about the reasons behind this voter apathy, they expressed that as fervent Pentecostal Christians and supporters of the NPP, they could not bring themselves to vote for a Muslim candidate for the nation's leadership. Consequently, rather than casting a ballot for the NDC, they have chosen to refrain from voting altogether. This sentiment was echoed by many who had made the decision not to participate in the elections. One individual remarked, "I have a friend who is Muslim and an NDC supporter. He mentioned that he would vote for Mahama in the upcoming elections despite Mahama being a Christian. So why did the NPP allow the NDC to mislead them into thinking that nominating a Muslim candidate would secure the Muslim vote?"

Another respondent articulated her reasons for opting out of voting by stating, "How can a Muslim lead us? He will prioritise Islam and elevate it as the primary religion. The Bible teaches that a nation flourishes when the righteous govern. The righteous are filled with the Holy Spirit. Bawumia is a good man, humble in nature, but he lacks the Holy Spirit, which means he cannot discern the voice of God." While some respondents chose to withdraw from the elections due to their party's candidate, others expressed their intent to vote for a Christian candidate.

Data Analysis

The responses outlined above highlight the current role of Pentecostals in Ghana's public sphere. Notably, there were mixed viewpoints from both formally and informally educated Pentecostals. It is particularly fascinating to observe that while the majority of formally educated Pentecostals leaned towards the opinion that religion would not influence their choice of President or their vote in the upcoming 2024 General Election, a couple of respondents expressed opposing perspectives. According to these respondents, religious identity should significantly influence voting decisions. In this context, the criterion of selecting a leader based on competence takes a backseat. It is crucial to consider the demographic of these participants; they are members of the societal elite, who are typically expected to vote based on an individual's qualities, skills, and abilities. Nevertheless, in this instance, religion has emerged as a pivotal factor.

Another significant issue identified was voter apathy. Many of the Pentecostals interviewed expressed that, due to the failures of successive governments, they have chosen not to participate in future elections. Their responses prompt critical inquiries. First, are their decisions truly linked to developmental concerns, or are they influenced by the fact that their preferred political party is fielding a Muslim candidate? This question holds importance, given that the NPP has historically performed well in areas with a more elitist or educated electorate. Consequently, the insights gathered from formally educated Pentecostals raise important questions about the underlying reasons for their apathy.

In contrast, the responses from informally educated individuals provide a clearer understanding of the genuine reasons behind this disengagement in the upcoming elections. According to the respondents, their reasoning is not rooted in the failures of successive governments but rather in the religion of the candidate presented by their political party. Consequently, religion plays a significant role, whether directly or indirectly, in influencing voting decisions. Additionally, one participant pointed out the predominance of Christian leadership during the Fourth Republic, which has yielded little in terms of substantial development. Therefore, the rejection of successive governments by Pentecostals, stemming from a perceived lack of national progress, can be interpreted as a disapproval of Christian leadership in the country. This raises the question: why not consider giving a chance to a candidate from a different religion?

For Pentecostals, individuals from other religious backgrounds are often viewed as neither “righteous” nor “filled with the Holy Spirit.” This perspective suggests that such individuals are perceived as being distant from the voice of God. As one respondent noted, this mindset can contribute to national stagnation and extreme poverty. Consequently, many believe that leadership should ideally be in the hands of a Christian. This brings us back to our earlier discussion: despite having experienced Christian leadership during the Fourth Republic, development has remained elusive. Many Pentecostals contend that they would prefer a Christian in a leadership position – even if progress is minimal – over someone from a different religion.

Furthermore, some responses suggest that when leaders are granted power, they may distance themselves from God. It is argued that true progress for the nation can only be achieved through a closer relationship with God. A recent visit to the Glorious Word Power Ministry, led by Isaac Owusu Bempah, underscored this notion. Owusu Bempah asserted that the current economic challenges in Ghana stem from the president's departure from God's presence, drawing a parallel to King Saul's separation from God. He emphasised that the country's development hinges on the president's return to a

closer connection with God. These sentiments illustrate the significant influence of Pentecostalism in shaping Ghana's public discourse.

Conclusion

This study has revealed a significant shift in the voting motivations of Pentecostals in Ghana as the 2024 general election approaches. Traditionally, it was believed that Pentecostals would primarily support candidates based on their strong Christian and doctrinal values. However, this study indicates a change in this perspective, with many Pentecostals now prioritising party identification, ethnicity, or policy positions over the religious affiliation of candidates. While some still choose to vote based on religious considerations, a significant number are increasingly focused on the potential benefits of a candidate's policies, rather than their religious background.

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