



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



The religious understanding of Nigerians affinity for Donald trump

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 23(03), 1064–1077

Publication history: Received on 26 July 2024; revised on 07 September 2024; accepted on 09 September 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.23.3.2692>

Abstract

President Trump has a tremendous fanbase from an unlikely place: Nigeria. To bring this to the fore, I compare the perception of Trump in Africa with that of immediate past American presidents of the last decade. He is fondly idealized as a strong man leader who upholds high moral standards, a defendant of the Christian faith, and a fulfillment of Biblical prophecies. I argue that Nigerian's fondness for Trump stems from these religious premises. I aver that although Trump's policies at the time of his administration were seemingly unfavorable to African nations such as Nigeria, many of these nations hold him in high esteem. To understand this paradoxical affinity, I point to religious themes that resonate with many Nigerians' fundamentalist religious teachings. Such themes include Trump's policies on same-sex marriage, abortion, the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and his stance on religious terrorism, amongst others. My argument is premised on the notion that for many Nigerians, Trump's policies, which directly impacted the nation and African region, can be understood as God's will and purpose, which is geared towards a positive end. It exemplifies the Christian idealistic fundamentalist positivist mindset and attitude.

Keywords: Religion and politics in Africa; Religious idealization; Nigeria-American relationship; President Donald Trump

1. Introduction

President Trump has a great sense of followership and unwavering fans in Nigeria. He is one that is greatly idealized as a moral and strong man leader with leadership qualities that are far-reaching in the nation. I argue that these idealizations and fascination are religiously influenced. Although the Christian half of the nation majorly idealizes him, Nigerian Muslims think of Trump as an ethical and assertive leader whose policies on some moral codes are in line with Islamic teachings.

To highlight and trace the origin of Nigerians and Trump relatedness, we point to a series of documented news media events that define the parallel relationship between Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, and Nigerians. These reports showcase the premises on which this essay is based, one which suggests that religious notions influence the relationship. I also interviewed 33 Nigerians (21 Christians and 12 Muslims). The data from this interview substantiates the social media thoughts of many Nigerians on Trump.

Ernest Enebi, a journalist, describes this relationship as a surprising and conflicting alliance. The premise of conflict is that President Trump does not "care" much about Nigerians like many Nigerians do about his administration, personal life, and the state of affairs in America during his administration. I argue that religion is the premise on which this alliance is formed and framed. This could be understood when compared with Trump's rationalization of his partnership with American Evangelicals' support. The rise of Christian nationalism in the United States, and especially during the Trump administration, is a result of Trump's appeal to the Christian divide as some 'savior' and upholder of their true faith.

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Further, it is noteworthy to state that for many Americans and non-Americans, migrant-related issues, travel bans, and border closure were the central themes in President Trump's campaign and administration. More so, one can argue that Nigerians had a tough time getting visas to America during the time of Trump's presidency. His immigration policies and travel ban list, which was initially to Muslim-dominated countries, extended to Nigeria in 2020. One would have felt that this kind of policy could have an impact on the ways Trump is perceived in the country. As I will argue further, it is evident that many Nigerians found a way of rationalizing these kinds of policies, and this rationalization can be traced to a religious idealization.

To underscore the assertion above, we reference a fake and viral infamous remark allegedly made by Trump about Africans and specifically about Nigerians during his campaign in Alaska in February 2016. The viral report states that he called for the deportation of Nigerians living in the United States, alleging that they are taking jobs that are meant for Americans. It states as follows:

"We need to get the Africans out (of the USA). Not the blacks, the Africans. Especially the Nigerians. They're everywhere. I went for a rally in Alaska and met just one African in the entire state. Where was he from? Nigeria! He's in Alaska taking our jobs. They're in Houston taking our jobs. Why can't they stay in their own country? Why? I'll tell you why. Because they are corrupt. Their governments are so corrupt, they rob the people blind and bring it all here to spend. And their people run away and come down here and take our jobs! We can't have that! If I become president, we'll send them all home. We'll build a wall at the Atlantic Shore. Then, maybe, we'll re-colonize them because obviously they did not learn a damn thing from the British."

Although it is tagged as a fake report, it has been viral and is still believed to be factual statements of Trump by social commentators on Nigerian social media platforms. I argue that this alleged pre-election speech had or could have the potential to set the precedent for the kind of relations Nigeria would have with a President Trump administration. However, we presume that the expected animosity that the speech would have generated has been demystified by the religious idealization Nigerians have placed on Trump.

For example, interview respondents asserted that they believed President Trump made the statements and that the White House attempted to retract the news from the public by labeling it as a fake report. However, they see nothing wrong with the speech credited to Trump. Mrs. Njoku, a Christian in the southeast of Nigeria, opines as follows: "Trump is a truthful man and a Christian who understands that there is no point running away from reality. We must, at least, be truthful to ourselves as Nigerians. We cannot deny the fact that our brothers and sisters make up the large population of immigrants in the US. But that is not the problem. My problem with Nigerian immigrants is that they support bad leadership and policies of the Nigerian government. They are not living with us here in Nigeria to feel the pains and impact of the government's bad approach to leadership."

Another respondent, Michael, asserts: "I support President Trump's plan to deport Nigerians back to Nigeria. I wish European countries could do the same thing. The solution to the leadership problem in this country is not for us to run away to other countries; rather, let us stay back and make our own nation a destination for other people. We have the resources and wealth; we only lack in the aspect of godly and people-oriented leadership."

To understand the premise and comments of the respondents above, I reference further famous news tabloids in Nigeria, such as Premium Times, which reports that Mr. Trump in December 2017 referred to Nigeria as a hut, at the same event where he referenced HIV/AIDS infestation to Haiti and Afghanistan as a terrorist haven. Although these reports have been debated on the use of his words during the event, they indeed shaped the public discourse on American immigration policies and should have impacted Nigeria's perception of Trump's administration. However, Nigerians argue that Trump's speech is a result of the failure of successive Nigerian governments in governance/ leadership, and as such, it was a well-deserved comment from the then-aspiring president. This reflects many Nigerian's attempts at rationalizing President Trump's treatment and perception of Africans. Religion, I argue, is the premise on which this kind of rationalization is portrayed and projected.

For example, one of my interview respondents stated: "When I look at Mr. Trump, I see the Old Testament prophets in him. Many think he is uncouth, but that is how the prophets of old spoke truth to power, seeking social justice for the poor. If he treats African, and especially the Nigerian government with kid gloves of diplomacy, this government will trample on us all. I am glad that there is at least one world leader that say things the way they are."

Another respondent stated in reference to the above: "But there were no lies told... I mean, Nigeria is a hut. You are coming from the US for this interview; make comparisons and see for yourself if Trump lied in his description of the

country. The world has left this nation (Nigeria) behind. This place is a zoo and we should not be angry if Trump described it as a hut or shithole.”

It is germane to note that amidst the ‘hard talking points during the campaign,’ upon assumption of office, President Trump’s relationship with Nigeria took a ‘positive’ twist different from the campaign phase. These twists initiated high hopes that the Trump administration would bring about proactive bilateral relationships between both nations.

Trump was among the first world leaders to contact and congratulate General Buhari Muhammadu on winning the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections. Many Nigerians saw this as an affinity between a ‘strong military’ leader and a tough American president, a combination that will bring to an end issues related to corruption and insecurity in Nigeria and the African region. This is also a pointer to the fondness of a strong-man leader appeal of the Nigerian electorates, as one of the premises on which Trump’s affinity in Nigeria is sustained (see footnote 1.)

More so, and as that which had overarching reasons for Nigerian’s affinity to Trump and his administration, President Trump played a critical role in Nigeria’s challenge with terrorism. In context, his administration was keen on combatting international terrorist groups such as ISIS. In this bid, the Trump government supported Nigeria with military equipment to fight terrorist groups such as Boko Haram. This, I argue, could serve as the starting point on which a Christian idealization of Trump as one who has come to support their fight against terrorism and Christian persecution. These two premises are discussed further in this research.

Amidst these ‘positive twists’ highlighted above, President Trump’s administration had several forms of foreign aid cut off in Nigeria, and at a time, Nigeria went into recession in 2016. In January 2018, he referred to Nigeria and other African countries as ‘shithole’ countries, a statement he denied on social media. NBC reports that when a group came to discuss immigration policies from Africa, Trump asked why America would want immigrants from shithole countries. For him, immigrants from countries such as Norway were to be welcomed more than Africans. Reuters reports that Norwegians reacted to Trump’s offer by rejection, one regarded as a reflection of his administration’s policy on migration.

Although the White House released a statement that did not deny Trump’s comment, the United Nations Office on Human Rights described Trump’s statement as “shocking, shameful and racist.”

This notion above corroborates Reuben Abatti’s viewpoints at the onset of President Trump’s administration, where he predicted that the administration would be a reality of a “sad and traumatic” outcome. However, the reality turned out to be; it is evidenced that the Trump administration meant different things to Nigerians across the board, as the realities were different for citizens who lived in the United States and other parts of the world and those who lived in Nigeria, as well as different for Christians and Muslims alike.

2. The religious understanding of Nigerians’ affinity for Donald trump

Religion, in its dogmatic and fundamental praxis, is exemplified in Nigeria and colored by pockets of fanaticism. Often, the nation is known as a deeply religious people and traditional in culture and norms.

It is in this regard that in an idealized line of thought, Adaobi Nwaubani avers that for Nigerian conservatives, Trump’s policies are seen differently through the lens of religion. For them (Nigerian conservatives), his policies are overwhelmingly favorable to people who maintain some sense of morals and adherence to religious norms. In her words:

“They feel he’s an instrument being used by God. People make references to people in the Bible, like Nebuchadnezzar or Pharaoh, who were instruments, who were used by God to do different things or elevate God’s people...to push what they felt was God’s agenda, even when they were not necessarily good men. So, people tend to agree he is not the nicest person, he’s not the most righteous human being. But they believe that he’s an instrument in God’s hands to push God’s agenda in this time.”

This, therefore, means that for many Nigerians, Trump’s policies, which directly impacted the nation and African region, can be understood as God’s will and purpose, which is geared towards a positive end. It exemplifies the Christian idealistic fundamentalist positivist mindset and attitude. This kind of rationalization holds sway in Nigeria, especially among the Christian half of the nation.

My respondent's thoughts align with my argument above as follows: "The world is in crisis. Nigeria is in a far deeper crisis than the rest of the world. But you see a popular saying is that the darkest time of the night signifies that the morning is near. The Bible also says that weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. As Christians, we have suffered great darkness and persecution in the country, but we believe that victory is near and that God can use anyone to give us victory over these terrorists. I think God had placed Trump as United States president at a crucial time in Nigeria when we had one of the most contemptible presidents. If not that Trump was in power, this administration would have wiped out the Christian population."

Furthermore, it is essential to note that, on the other hand, Nigerians often pose a religious positivist notion on elected leaders. They find ways to rationalize how good or bad policies work for the good of the 'righteous' in the long run or as that which is to usher the expected kingdom of God. These are ways politicians are excused from their failures or given soft landing spots on the failure of their administration.

For example, a leading Pentecostal pastor in Nigeria, Paul Adefarasin, in his 2023 pre-election speech, admonished his followers to accept rigged and marred election results. Speaking in Christian parables, he told the followers that "Saul will come before David," which means they should accept the election results even if a bad leader rigs his way to office. For him, the nation should continue its experience of bad leadership as a forerunner for the election of a good leader. This is one of the many pulpit rationalizations of political leaders and their decisions by the clergy class, which informs the Nigerian Christians' use of religious affirmations to bolster their support and affinity for Trump.

Beyond the pulpit, my Nigerian respondents opine that bad leadership and corruption in the nation are signs of the end of the world and ushering in the kingdom of God. One of my respondents said, "As Christians, we are not citizens of this world, of Nigeria, or any tribe. This world is a transit, not a destination. I am not worried about the bad leadership we have. It is a fulfillment of biblical prophecies, and I would rather have God's word as true. Trump, America, the kind of policies and things they advocate for, and all that is happening in the world are fulfilling the signs of the end time. Trump is just the only lone voice that leans toward godliness. I hope that he is strengthened for the task ahead."

To underscore Nigerian's affinity for him, portraits of President Trump adorned in Nigerian native attire are hung in the homes and offices of many Nigerians, indicating his appealing influence, personality, and popularity in Africa's most populous nation.

His portraits, according to Emmanuel Akinwotu

"have grown more common among the impressionist depictions of notable religious and political figures often sold from open stalls, art shops, printing press, and being hawked on popular highways by roadside merchants."

In Nigeria, portraits of prominent political leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Sani Abacha, and that of religious leaders are often hung in idealized forms at homes and offices of people who hold in high esteem the values that these men stood for. It is interesting and surprising for many to see Trump, amongst other past American presidents, in this category. Abraham Lincoln is one of America's past presidents who is closely idealized in this form of imagery as Trump. Lincoln's images are often placed side by side with the famous Lincoln's 'Letter to My Son's Teacher' and used as a guiding principle for schools.

One of my respondents is a Nigerian with a Trump sticker stamped on his tricycle. He reiterated that the sticker is just one of those vehicle decoration wares sold on Lagos traffic. However, he likes Trump because he did not allow President Buhari to carry out his hidden Islamization agenda in Nigeria. According to him, "When we (Christians) say that the world is watching, it is Trump we meant. His administration was really timely for Christians, or we would have been all dead."

In some of the images, he (Trump) is depicted wearing a suit, shirt, and tie, while in others, he is dressed in photoshopped Nigerian traditional attires or the army green Nigerian military uniforms closely similar to that of former military rulers such as General Sani Abacha. The imagery and idealization of Trump in these images strike a chord, especially considering this idealization is found in a country where his admiration, we presume, is traced to religious convictions.

It is important to analyze some of these photoshops or artistic depictions of Trump, especially those that are in line with the theoretical basis on which this research leans. For one, he is framed and idealized artistically in traditional attires as a charismatic and political leader, an image that draws close allusions to the cultural embeddedness and politics of the people. It presupposes an indication of the variant ways Nigerians think and interpret political leaders as those who

(should) uphold or have a sense of charisma, perceived and idealized based on cultural values and faith. These values and perceptions often focus on matters of morals, ethics, and general conduct in societies.

In another image, he is depicted in Nigerian military regalia. This idealization is traceable to Nigerian military rule that lasted from 1983 to 1991 through coups, civil wars, and counter-coups. Here, I argue that Nigerians have a strong fascination for past military rulers such as Sani Abacha, General Obasanjo, Badamosi Babangida, and Muhammadu Buhari and, in a way, reflect this fascination with Trump. On social media platforms, citizens describe these past military heads as “sharp, smart, intelligent, and intelligent think tanks.” They draw a comparison to President Abraham Lincoln, who had previously served in the armed forces and who eventually became one of America’s foremost democratically elected presidents. For many Nigerians, a military background foregrounds one with the traits of discipline and trains one in leadership skills. However, the nation has not recorded upward mobility in the recent years of a military dictator reinventing itself into a civilian democratic elected president.

Further analysis of the images shows that Trump is depicted as a symbol of Christian tradition. Many Christians idealize him as one who will defend the faith against Islamic and anti-church elements. I will discuss this in detail in subsequent paragraphs. However, this line of thought and, in recent times, many see his arraignment on charges that he falsified business records as being likened to the crucifixion of Jesus. This opinion was fueled especially at the time of his first arraignments, which occurred during the Christian commemoration of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. To this end, many of his African supporters believe that he (Trump) will triumph and win the 2024 elections, just as Jesus was raised from the dead after his persecution.

Beyond analysis of these images, it is also important to compare the perception of Trump in Africa with immediate past American presidents of the last decade. For one, President George W Bush was fondly popular and loved in Africa (Nigeria). The basis of this fondness, according to David Pilling, is that President Bush championed the President Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPAF), a health initiative that reportedly saved the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS, especially in Africa. This initiative provided antiretroviral drugs and prevented mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. On this aspect, one can point to an altruistic premise in which President Bush obtained a wide range of fondness in Nigeria and in other parts of the African continent and beyond. This is in contrast with the subject matter of Trump, whom we believe in this research that affinity and fondness from Nigerian’s for him are religiously influenced.

Consequently, we consider the perception of President Obama across Africa. It can be best described as that which remains dynamic and can easily be misconstrued based on his African descent and race. Although this categorization of Obama serves as an indicator of either fondness based on his African descent or dislike (disappointment, based on the expectations Africans had of his administration), Obama is the closest to Trump’s hero and cultic following any American president has had in Africa. A BBC report states, “After his win in 2008, Mr. Obama’s portrait was painted on walls, buses, and T-shirts across Africa. Restaurants, schools, and even children were named after him.” This basis for Africa’s affinity for Obama and, in comparison, to Trump, is summed up by Isaac Donvere, who avers that “Africa’s a continent where politics is all about patronage, and a president of the United States with Kenyan roots seemed to many Africans like the ultimate political patron.”

I argue that the notion above is the basis on which many perceive that Africa had an unrealistic imagery of an African-American president. In this regard, the African continent is often seen as one in need of aid, and this was not a priority of Obama’s administration for Africa. He was more interested in the Young African Leaders Initiative, trade, and economics. In contrast to Trump, these categories do not suggest Obama enjoyed Trump's level of popularity during and after their tenure as president.



Figure 1 A popular and viral photoshopped image of President Trump adorned in the traditional Igbo “isi agu” chieftaincy attire retrieved from Twitter

Although Trump’s popularity and his book “The Art of the Deal” were a bestselling and household piece in Nigeria before his election as president of the United States of America, conflicting reasons exist for the endearing affinity he enjoys with Nigerians. According to Felix Abiodun, a bookshop owner in Lagos, Nigeria, interviewed by Emmanuel Akintowitu, Trump’s books do not stay on the shelves. His book is found on shelves where famous American authors such as Ben Carson and evangelical authors such as Joyce Meyer, Billy Graham, and John C Maxwell pieces are found. The basis for the popularity of the book and his personality prior to his election is surprising to many social commentators. Many wonder if Trump owns franchises in Africa or if he was just a popular figure before his entry into politics.



Figure 2 Portrait of Trump in Nigerian military uniform, commissioned by an artist named Sunshine. He told British-American journalist Anna Cunningham the piece sold out quickly

It is therefore important to analyze President Trump's popularity in Nigeria based on the theory of religious idealization and some measures. For one, it must be understood that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic/ religious nation. In the north, where Islam is the predominant religion, Trump's fondness is dynamic. However, the reason he is popular and liked in that region could easily be traced to his book 'Art of the Deal.' He is also seen as a successful business mastermind whose business acumen is worthy of emulation. Interestingly, the northern part of Nigeria is known for its agro-based economy, and it is home to Africa's richest man, Aliko Dangote. Although Trump is seen as anti-Muslim, he is believed by this demographic to be a strong man leader. However, the Christian South remains Trump's most embracing fan, and this is obviously traced to his Christian affiliation and perceived moral stance, especially on same-sex and abortion-related policies. These bases are highlighted in later sections of this research.

Further, we consider Conor Gaffey's assertion in his 2017 article, which highlights variant views of Nigerians on Trump, ones he admitted differ across faith traditions. He premises his argument on a poll that showcases that 70% of Christians in Nigeria expressed confidence in Trump's international leadership abilities, while 46% of Muslims of the Muslim population think Trump lacks the capacity to will international leadership.



Figure 3 Image showing an oil on canvas painting of Donald Trump by a Nigerian artist, Peter Udokang

The following is given as an understanding of Nigeria's affinity for Trump:

For one, Conor observes that Nigerians like a "strong man leader." The basis of this viewpoint is traced to the moribund security challenges facing the nation, a challenge they opine requires a strong man leader to handle. They envisage a leader who is bold and possesses an appealing, impulsive decision-making quality. It is these qualities that are believed to have fueled the election of Muhammadu Buhari, a retired military general who participated in and spearheaded one of the many military coups (1983) that truncated the nation's democratic government. These qualities, as described by Nigerian foreign expert at Chatham House and cited by Conor Gaffey, are best understood "in a context where the nation is facing insecurity and an economic recession, thereby possibly resonate with a leader who is 'decisive and sharp' with a brash approach to issues." In this context, President Trump's pattern of leadership, such as talking hard to the press and paying less or no attention to national and international critics, typically exemplified in his outright decision to withdraw the United States' membership to the Paris Climate Accords, amongst other international and national policies exemplifies the kind of leadership Nigerians desire; a leadership style described as archetypical of African autocratic leaders. This notion is specifically drawn from Nigeria's perception of President Goodluck Jonathan's administration as weak and incompetent. This assertion is based on the premise that the Boko Haram terrorist group actively kidnapped and killed many in northern Nigeria, with the Chibok Girls secondary school kidnapping being the most prominent of the insecurity during his administration. Africans and Nigerians resonate with Trump greatly in this context, and as described by Stremalu, preference is accorded to people of perceived strong characters and will, at the detriment of strong institutions. Thus, weak institutions are undoubtedly the cause of the failing state of the Nigerian economy and political structures.

Abortion: abortion is illegal in Nigeria as it is enshrined in the abortion laws of the Criminal Code sections 228, 229, 230. A seven-year jail term is prescribed, and a 14-year jail term is given to the medical practitioner, along with a revocation of the medical practice license. In this regard, Nigerians felt a strong affinity to the person and administration of Trump as he, on his first day in office, signed an executive order banning federal funding of international groups associated

with abortions. The Trump global gag rule policy is also known as the ‘protecting life in global health assistance policy.’ The policy states the ban on foreign NGOs that receive US Government family planning assistance from using funds from any source to provide abortion services, counseling, or referrals or advocate for the liberalization of their country’s abortion laws. The Trump administration goes further, applying these restrictions to nearly all federal global health assistance, including, for the first time, HIV funding through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

This policy resonated with Nigerians who uphold a religious principle that all abortion is illegal and termed murder, except when performed to save a woman’s life. This conservative principle is deeply impressed on the people by the three dominant faith traditions (Islam, Christianity, and Traditional religion) theological teachings of abortion. According to respondents, American values have a way of being translated as the standard for the entire world. They state, “As Christians, and our Muslim brothers will agree with us on this: abortion is unethical. It is good that Trump has stood his grounds against this act.” Another respondent states as follows: “Making abortion lawful is a far-reaching kind of freedom that should not be introduced in Africa. When people have unprotected sex, they should have a sense of responsibility that the end product of it is pregnancy. We also do not have the medical facilities to cater for abortion complications. The feminist activists who are championing abortion laws should rather contribute to developing our medical facilities and hospitals. Abortion is free-will murder, and Trump understands this thing better.

Abortions performed in the country are, in secret, contributing greatly to the nation’s rising maternal mortality rate. Trump’s policy on abortion makes up one of the major socially conservative values of the Republican party, which aligns with Nigeria’s cultural and religious value system.

Same Sex-Marriage: although President Trump had considered issues related to same-sex marriage settled and resolved by the Supreme Court, Nigerians, on the other hand, believe that his administration had taken this stance only on paper and not in principle. They point to the Conservative Republican Party, which expressed a desire to overturn the legalization in the 2016 election. To further buttress their stance, they mention that Trump’s Vice President Mike Pence, as governor of Indiana, opposed same-sex marriage, as he supported the ‘conversion therapy programs.’ As a member of Congress, Pence supported a constitutional amendment to define marriage as being between a man and a woman, and he opposed both the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would have protected LGBTQ workers, and the repeal of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell.’

As Donald Trump’s Vice President, Pence was part of an administration that had opposed nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ Americans, banned transgender service members, and allowed child welfare agencies to reject same-sex prospective parents.

In comparison, the Nigerian National Assembly passed the law prohibiting same-sex marriage in 2014, which proscribes 14 years imprisonment upon conviction. Nigerian Muslims and Christians unanimously reject LGBTQ rights. It is in this regard that religion plays a prominent role in the advocacy of the nation’s laws on homosexuality. In a statement culled from a tabloid, it avers that “punishing gays is one of the few common themes that politicians can promote with equal zest in the mainly Christian south and the largely Muslim north.”

It is also notable that the Anglican Church in Nigeria upheld same-sex marriage as the basis on which they seek secession from worldwide Anglican communion. The Nigerian Conference of Catholic Bishops, on the other hand, opposed The Pope’s directive on the blessing of same-sex couples. Same-sex marriages are also frowned upon in the Pentecostal churches in the nation.

Beyond this, for many Nigerians, “homosexuality is a virus that degrades the family and its values, corrupts human cohabitation, and offends God. It eventually leads to social decline.” Therefore, the social and normative understanding of homosexuality, incorporated into religious doctrines, is one of the many reasons Nigerians idealize Trump. Respondents noted as follows in this regard: “Homosexuality is against God’s will for humanity. It is not a part of our culture. You asked me why I like Trump, and I can quickly point to this one reason.”

Another comment is as follows: “Trump is a Christian, and he understands that modernity does not change the laws of God. People often talk about homosexuality as a modern thing. No, it existed in Biblical times, in Sodom and Gomorah and that is why God destroyed that city. As a Christian, I do not think you expect me not to like a leader that upholds godly principles of marriage.”

Truth to Power: Nigerians believe that President Trump is one who speaks truth to power, especially truth to world leaders and African leaders. They posit that his remarks and speeches about African countries have made the world know the true situation of things in the continent and country. His alleged racist and derogatory reference about Nigeria

and other black nations are believed by many citizens to be fair and well-deserved remarks, as African leaders have failed in leadership of their country. His criticism of African leaders as corrupt and holding on to power for life has been welcomed by citizens who hail Trump for his dogged stance on African leaders.

Recognition of Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel/fulfillment of end-time prophecies: many Nigerians believe that Trump's presidency was ordained by God and that he fulfills the biblical prophecy in Zechariah chapter 1 verse 1-17 by recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. I argue that this act endeared his administration to Nigerian Christians who resonated with it as they see themselves as the new Jerusalem and a victory for the Christian faith over their adversaries. A former minister of aviation in Nigeria, Fani Kayode, commended Trump for the national dailies event as a great and courageous act, one which Christians are overjoyed about.



Figure 4 A screenshot of charcoal on Bristol paper 6ft drawing of Donald Trump by an 18-year-old Nigerian named Mayor Olajide. It is one of the most popular artworks of Trump by Nigerians. The then Nigerian minister of Youth and Sports, Mr. Sunday Dare, was one of the admirers of this piece and requested through the comment section for the artist's phone number and details.

More so, Nigerian Christians idealize Trump when speaking of Christian eschaton. For many, Trump's policies, actions, and inactions mirror biblical prophecies on eschatologies. Adaobi Nwaubani, a journalist interviewed by Carol Hills, states that she has "heard deep conversations- people feeling that Trump is an instrument in arranging world affairs so that the stage is set for the prophecies and predictions for the end time."

Adaobi's comments are not unfounded. My respondents opine that God is about to judge the world, and he has appointed world leaders such as Trump to prepare God's people for the end of time. One of my respondents states as follows: "See, Trump is God's battle axe. He represents a sense of light in a world where everything seems to be in darkness. You noticed how governments of other nations feared his administration. They know he has a heavenly mandate. Even our (Nigerian) government is aware. It is just a matter of time before everyone understands these things. "This goes ahead to showcase the depth and influence of religion in Nigeria and the basis of the religious idealization of a world leader.

Biafran Secessionist groups are dominant in the southeast region of Nigeria. They are popularly known as the Igbo and are a Christian-dominated ethnic group who were involved in the Nigerian civil war from 1967-1970. They strongly believe that Trump's administration will assist in the achievement of the self-determination rights of the Biafrans. Their

conviction was premised on one of Trump's infamous social media posts on Twitter (X), where he tweeted in favor of Brexit. Trump had said that "self-determination is the sacred right of all free people's, and the UK have exercised that right for all the world to see".

Although the White House made no reference to the secessionist group, they held pro-Trump rallies in Nigeria, celebrating his win at the polls and other anniversaries.

The secessionist groups are seen as surprising fans of Trump, considering his alleged anti-black disposition. They, on the other hand, are friends at arms with Trump, as they are not always in agreement with his policies. However, in one of the pro-Trump rallies organized by the group in January 2017, about 20 members were killed by the Nigerian police. Consequently, the White House did not issue a statement in this regard. More so, beyond the group's hopes of assistance towards self-determination, their fondness for him is traceable to his strong stance on radical Islam. This is premised on the group's perceived cultural and religious clash with the dominant Islamic culture in northern Nigeria.



Figure 5 Picture of a printed T-shirt by Biafrans at one of the group's pro-Trump rallies in Nigeria in January 2020. At the top right is the image of the jailed leader of the group, Nnamdi Kanu

Aversion for President Obama: For many Nigerian Christians, their affinity for Trump is in part motivated by an aversion for President Obama. The reason for this aversion is premised on his prioritization of gay rights in the United States, allegations of arm-twisting African leaders to accept gay marriages, refusal to sell ammunition to the Nigerian government to fight against terrorism, and his role in the 2015 elections, which brought about the election of Muhammadu Buhari.

It must be noted that the crux of the above-mentioned affinity stemmed from the premise that prior to 2015, the Obama administration had refused to sell 12 Embraer A-29 Super Tucano aircraft to the Nigerian military based on the premise of an absence of trust and that "the Nigerian military had been accused of war crimes and extra-judicial killings of Boko-Haram suspects." Many Nigerians, however, as well as members of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's administration, held the view that the Obama regime had refused the purchase of the war airplanes on account of the Nigerian government's stance against same-sex laws. Trump's sale of weapons and war aircraft to Nigeria to fight and combat terrorism also resonated with Nigerian Christians who understand terrorism, especially that of the Boko-Haram and Fulani militia, as an effort of the Muslim world to Islamize the country. To them (the Nigerian Christians), Trump was assisting the country to end these Islamization attempts, which the government of the day was unable to deal with.

Beyond this, although Obama's presidency resonated with pride among Africans and the black nation as America's first black president, his administration has been examined by Africans as less impactful. Contrary to the expectations of many Africans, the Obama administration did not portray the overtly African focus many had envisaged. This brought

about a great sense of disappointment to Africans and Nigerians, who often think Obama's only gift and policy for Africa was the campaign for the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Religious Liberty and Fight against Islamization: Nigeria is a multi-faith society that has witnessed decades of inter-faith crisis. In May 2018, President Trump gave a warning to the government of Nigeria headed by Muhammadu Buhari on the killing of Christians in the country. He reiterated that the United States "have had very serious problems with Christians who are being murdered in Nigeria," stating the decision of his administration to work on that problem "very, very hard because we (the United States) won't allow that to happen." In 2015, about 4,028 Christian killings were recorded in Nigeria, and 198 churches were destroyed in Nigeria. Therefore, Trump's assertion was seen as important and a call for global attention to the religious crisis that has bedeviled the nation.

Trump's statement resonated with Nigerian Christians and reinforced the affinity they have had for him and his administration. My respondents noted as follows in this regard: "It is one thing to call on the international community when government-sponsored religious intolerance is happening, and it is a very different thing for a government to respond to that call or acknowledge and address the issues. No other world president has spoken directly to our leaders about religious conflicts and persecution except Trump. He is aware; he is holding our leaders responsible, and that is what we had expected from Obama in the wake of Boko Haram." Another stated: "As a Christian, we have lived in the fear that the present administration has a hidden Islamization agenda. Our feelings are not unfounded in that Christian communities have been attacked repeatedly, and the government has been silent. In many cases, security men are withdrawn with orders from government authorities, and in minutes, a community is ransacked by terrorists. It has a coloration of ethnic and religious cleansing. For Trump to speak out for us gives us a sense of belonging, that at least a powerful world leader has our issues in his thoughts."

3. Mistargeted fascination or a premised one?

The highlights of the different forms in which many Nigerians have developed a religious following of Donald Trump can be interpreted in many ways. It leaves one to wonder if this is a mistargeted fascination or if there are grounds on which this fascination can be explained.

We have stated earlier that it is a one-sided fascination, as Donald Trump does not care so much about Nigerians in like manner as they do. This is evidenced in the policies of his administration towards Africa, especially on immigration-related matters.

I have also highlighted the variant religious basis on which Nigerians rationalize their fondness for Trump. These attributes and premises, I posit, are religious standpoints that outweigh and overshadow their understanding of Trump's administration policies on immigration, bilateral trade, economy, and other aspects of relations with Nigeria. These circumstances, I argue, generate themes as to ways in which religion impacts idealizations of the socio-political and cultural life of the nation, including international relations.

However, one may question why Nigeria, an independent nation, should idealize or care so much about America and its leaders. It is germane to mention that the United States of America shares decades of ties and bilateral affinities with Nigeria, spanning through years of engagement across economic, political, and social interactions. Nigeria is the largest and most populous democratic African nation and Africa's leading producer of oil, with an emerging population of over 200 million people. These attributes are some of the many reasons the United States is one of the closest allies of the Nigerian nation and government. This historical friendship is premised on the United States' involvement and influence in Nigeria's military and internal security, their global war on terrorism, trade, and investment, as well as debt relief and financial assistance to Nigeria over the years. It is also understood from the basis of foreign policy analysis of 'dependency' characterized by economic ties with an advanced country (US) in terms of aid, private direct investments, and trade.

Further, Nigeria's democratic dispensation, which began in 1999, is modeled on the US. According to Chatham House, a Think-tank body, Nigeria's federal system of government and constitution is a prototype of the US, with the latter offering guidance and serving as watchdogs.

In line with the notion above, a research conducted in 2020 by the Congressional Research Service, prepared for members and committees of the United States of America Congress, reports that the U.S -Nigeria relationship, which was instituted in 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence from British colonial rule is described by numerous U.S. administrations as the most significant in sub-Saharan Africa. In accordance with this friendly relationship, Nigeria consistently ranks among the top annual recipients of U.S. foreign aid globally. Consequently, Nigeria is the African region's second-largest trading partner and third-largest beneficiary of U.S. foreign direct investment. More so, Nigeria

has a significant political and economic influence on Africa at a regional level. Nigerians also are the largest group of African Americans, accounting for billions of dollars in remittance outflows each year.

However, this cordial relationship was seemingly severed in 2015, a time when the Nigerian government witnessed its first democratic transition of power between two major political parties. The reason for the severance in relations is traced to conflicting ideologies and differences on vital domestic interests as well as issues on human rights. This overarching relationship also witnessed a new twist with the election of Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, in 2016. The successive changes in government in both nations brought about an evaluation of old policies and the implementation of new ones. It is, therefore, these issues that this research brings to the fore, highlighting the diverse religious premises on which Trump's popularity holds sway in Nigeria.

4. Conclusion

Nigerians' perception of Trump is traced to the notion that he upholds social conservatism, values, ethics, and religious morals that resonate with African religious and cultural values. The religious understanding given for the affinity to Trump idealizes him as one who embodies, strengthens, and upholds a wide range of moral codes of conservatism, which prominently resonates with Nigeria's religious and cultural traditions.

Religious idealization in the context studied can be multi-dimensional. It can either be healthy or unhealthy. However, it is seen as unhealthy in the case of Trump being idealized by many Nigerians. Religious idealization potentials of being unhealthy are evidenced, especially when the object idealized is seen as infallible, flawless, and having a followership that is irrational.

But are Nigerian Christian conservatives alone, or are their affinity for Trump irrational? One would state that this fondness reflects American conservative White evangelicals who, in many ways, exemplify the same idealizations of Trump. Grace Yukich avers on President Trump and his links to Christian Nationalism, a movement that Christians in Africa resonate with. In her work, *Religion is Raced*, she highlights that "commentators pointed to the fact that, while on the campaign trail, Trump frequently defended the importance of Christianity in American public life and argued that in Trump, Evangelicals had found a defender of a Christian nationalism they perceived as under attack. They forecast continued politicization of religion in the United States not despite, but because of, increasing religious disaffiliation."

The belief by Nigerians that his administration fulfilled biblical prophecies, his idealization as a moral figure, and his firmness against Islamic terrorism underscores the points made above. The idealization of Trump has fanatic and fundamentalist tendencies. This is evidenced in the attention they pay to his books, the religious following he enjoys, and the belief he fulfills biblical prophecies, amongst others, demonstrating these notions of illusions. One can also mention that the idealization of Trump across the board by Nigerians is 'wished' to be true, especially when considering his projection as a moral figure.

As we prepare for the 2024 presidential elections in America and Donald Trump in the race, coupled with his civil fraud trial, one anticipates the conversations that will be built around a return or not of a Trump presidency and or the outcomes of his court cases. Researchers and foreign policymakers, therefore, owe it to themselves to follow the stories as they unfold and draw out analysis that informs the public through unbiased academic research.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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