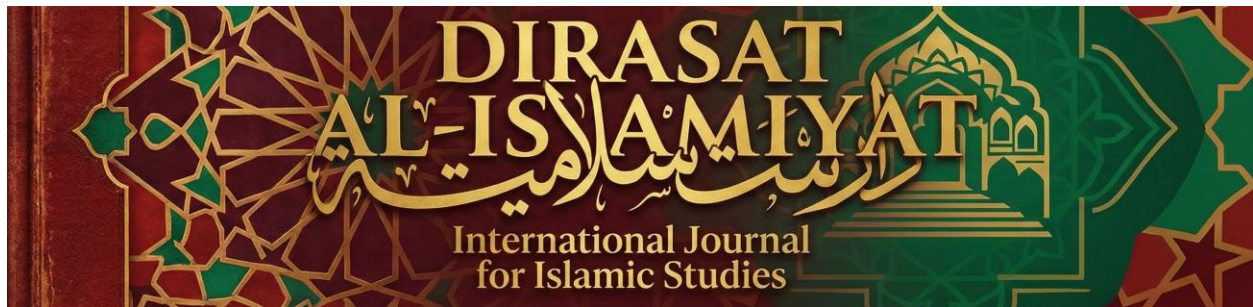




Islamic Ethics and Political Activism in Nigeria: Moral Responsibilities and Contemporary Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in Islam is not merely a social position but a religious duty intrinsically linked to moral accountability. Nigeria, a religiously plural society comprising predominantly Muslims and Christians, presents a unique context in which religion and politics intersect. Historically, political leadership has alternated between adherents of both faiths, with Muslims occupying a significant proportion of leadership roles at both federal and state levels. However, the intersection of Islamic ethics and political activism poses substantial challenges. Despite Islam's emphasis on justice, honesty, and respect for lawful authority, Nigeria's political system continues to grapple with corruption, poor governance, and socio-economic inequality. This study examines the relationship between Islamic ethical principles and political engagement, focusing on the responsibilities of Muslims in contemporary Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the study draws on primary Islamic sources, including the Qur'an and Hadith, alongside relevant contemporary scholarship. In addition, selected case studies of Muslim political actors are analyzed to explore how ethical principles are interpreted and implemented in practice. The findings indicate that Islamic ethics grounded in justice ('adl), accountability (amānah), and the promotion of public welfare (maṣlaḥah) play a significant role in shaping Muslim political activism. However, tensions persist between ethical ideals and political realities, including systemic corruption, public perception, and intra-community dynamics. The study concludes that the political responsibilities of Muslims are firmly rooted in Islamic teachings and moral obligations. It further argues that a principled integration of these ethical values into political engagement can enhance advocacy for justice, equity, and good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Islamic Ethics; Political Activism; Nigeria; Leadership; Governance.

INTRODUCTION

The interplay between Islamic ethics and political activism has garnered significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of rising global socio-political challenges. As Muslims navigate complex political landscapes, the moral responsibilities rooted in their faith play a crucial role in shaping their engagement in civic life. Islamic teachings emphasize principles such as justice ('adl'), accountability, and the welfare of the community (Ummah), which serve as foundational elements for ethical political behavior. Islam does not see politics as a means to acquire power, but rather as a means to establish justice and righteousness in society. Muslim politicians are expected to uphold Islamic ethical principles, such as fairness, honesty, and compassion, in their decision-making processes.

In recent years, the intersection of Islamic ethics within the realm of modern politics has garnered significant attention, particularly in the context of Nigeria, a nation characterized by its rich cultural diversity and complex political system. With a substantial Muslim population, the moral responsibilities of Muslim politicians in Nigeria are pivotal not only for the governance of the country but also for the preservation of Islamic values in a modern politics. However, the reality of Nigerian politics often falls short of these ideals with corruption, nepotism and inequality persisting as major challenges. There is no gain saying the fact that Nigerian Muslims activists face numerous challenges, including political marginalization, Islamophobia, and the struggle to balance traditional values with the realities of modern governance.

This article seeks to explore the moral responsibilities of Muslim politicians in Nigeria, examining the intersection of Islamic ethics and political activism. By discussing the role of morality in Islamic politics and the challenges faced by Muslim politicians in Nigeria, The paper hopes to shed light on the ways in which Islamic ethics can inform political decision-making and promote a more just and equitable society irrespective of the political system particularly in Nigerian where democracy is applied as a political system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualizing Morality and Politics

The Arabic term "khuluq" refers to the character or traits that a person develops, becoming integral to their natural disposition. "Morality" examines the virtuous essence of humanity and distinguishes it from the darker aspects of human nature. It encourages individuals to purify their souls through virtues while overcoming their inner demons. This process fosters a sense of belonging within society and leads to profound inner satisfaction (Tabatabaei,1988, Syaiful& Anam,2024, Abdullah, 2025). Garba (2018) citing Ambali (2003), submits that the teaching of morality and moral conduct constitutes the basic principle of Islam, and the moral themes form a large part of it. The Qur'an and the Hadith serve as the primary source for moral conduct of peoples by adopting a morally good character and showing kindness to the people, justice and equity in dealing with one another, kindness and charity to the poor including the helpless member of the society. Islam also emphasizes forgiveness, respect to parents and elders, fulfillment of promises, being kind to people and to animals, being patient in adversaries, maintaining justice and being honest in nature and in the administration of the people under our leadership both at formal and informal levels (Garuba, 2018).

In the same vein, Politics encompasses the strategies used to address human issues, whether they are personal, social, or economic. In a broader sense, it involves any aspect of governance and managerial skills (Maryam & Abdolreza, 2017). Thus, discussions about politics inherently relate to the exercise of power, primarily through government. Politics applies to the management of government, leadership across various societal sectors, power struggles, and relationships between political parties. The study and application of these management methods fall under the umbrella of political science. A crucial consideration in politics is the nature of ultimate power within government, which German sociologist Max Weber described as the defining "limit" of governmental authority indicating that a government's power is constrained by the extent of its capabilities. (Ashoori, 1994).

Evolution of Politics in Islam

Political Islam is primarily understood as a movement oriented toward the pursuit and exercise of power, state governance, and political authority. (Abbas, 2025) however, political activism in Islam has a rich and complex history that reflects the dynamic interplay between religious principles and political realities. The foundations of political activism in Islam were laid during the early Islamic period, beginning with the life of the Prophet Muhammad. His leadership in Medina was not just a spiritual role but also involved significant political and social responsibilities. The Constitution of Medina, established in 622 CE, is a seminal document that outlines the principles of governance and inter-group relations based on Islamic ethics (Baidar, Ahmad, Hussein, 2025). The constitution is structured around six core pillars which includes; Sustainability, Prosperity, Innovation, Respect, Trust, and Compassion—which collectively promote a holistic model of development beyond economic growth, emphasizing social justice, national unity in diversity, and transparent, accountable governance. (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2023)

As the first written constitution in Islam, it established enduring principles for governing a pluralistic society grounded in the rule of law, contractual rights, and mutual responsibilities (Hamidullah, 1985; Serjeant, 1978; Sadzali, 2019). It further emphasized justice, mutual respect, and the collective welfare of the community, thereby setting a lasting precedent for Islamic political thought (Lings, 1983; Ahmad, 2009). Modern scholarship highlights enduring relevance of constitution of Medina. For instance, Yusuf Faisal Ali (2021) argues that the Constitution articulated essential elements of state formation such as governmental structure, models of authority, law enforcement, and inter-group relationships which remain strikingly pertinent in contemporary state-building discussions. The Constitution managed pluralism by forging a cohesive Ummah among Muslims, Jews, and pagans, showcasing social justice, inclusivity, and institutional innovation decades before modern nation-states emerged.

Following the Prophet Muhammad's death, the succession crisis led to the emergence of the Rashidun Caliphate where the first four caliphs (Khulafā' Rāshidīn) served as both religious and political leaders. This early period is widely recognized for its efforts to apply Islamic ethical ideals in governance especially justice ('adl) and social welfare and for promoting consultative governance through majlis al-shūrā (councils of consultation), notably under Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattāb. Recent scholarship highlights how the tradition of shūrā, as institutionalized in the Rashidun era, continues to influence modern Islamic political systems;

fair leadership rooted in collective decision-making and accountability remains a key ideal in contemporary Muslim governments. (M Siddiqui & Saira Taiba, 2023)

Likewise, the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE) saw the expansion of the Islamic state, but it also faced criticism for perceived deviations from the early principles of justice and equity. The Umayyads were challenged by various movements, such as the Kharijites and the Shi'a, who advocated for a return to what they viewed as the true principles of Islamic governance (Kennedy, 2004). Similarly, the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE) introduced significant cultural and intellectual advancements but also faced challenges regarding political legitimacy and ethical governance. The rise of the Abbasids was supported by revolutionary movements that sought to correct perceived injustices of the Umayyad rule. This period also saw the development of Islamic jurisprudence and political theory, including the works of scholars like Al-Mawardi and Al-Ghazali, who explored the ethical dimensions of governance and leadership (Lapidus, 2002)

In the 13th-20th Century during the medieval period, the Islamic world experienced a variety of political systems and governance models. The Ottoman Empire, which lasted from the 14th to the early 20th century, represents a significant chapter in Islamic political history. The Ottomans adopted a sophisticated administrative system and engaged in extensive political and military activism. The Ottoman Sultans and Islamic scholars, such as Shaykh al-Islam, played crucial roles in integrating Islamic principles into statecraft and law (Berks, 2004). The decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of colonialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries prompted new forms of political activism among Muslims. Movements such as the Pan-Islamic movement, led by figures like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, sought to address the challenges posed by Western imperialism and advocate for political and social reform based on Islamic principles (Keddie, 2006).

The modern era continues to display a wide array of Islamic political movements, shaped by divergent interpretations of Islamic ethics and political activism. While the 1979 Iranian Revolution remains a pivotal moment ushering in a state grounded in Twelver Shi'a principles more recent decades have seen Islamist parties evolve within nation-states, civil society, and global transnational networks. Scholars now categorize political Islam into three dynamic forms: hegemonic, civil, and transnational each reflecting how movements adapt to modern state bound realities, toeing lines between religious authority and institutional politics. (Cesari, 2020). Islamist social movements in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel emphasize the emergence of hybrid regimes where democratic aspirations blend with authoritarian traits. In these contexts, mobilization strategies are highly contextual and adaptive, informed by national histories and state-religious relationships. (Gade & Bøås, 2020)

Siddiqui, (2025) stresses that Islamist parties across North Africa and the Middle East including Turkey's AKP, Tunisia's Ennahda, and Morocco's PJD have sought inclusion within political systems, engaging with pluralistic principles to limit extremism and promote moderated political participation. The Contemporary movements often grapple with the challenges of integrating Islamic values within secular political systems. The rise of organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood and various Islamic reformist groups highlights ongoing debates about the role of Islam in governance and the ethical responsibilities of Muslim activists in modern political contexts (Hafez, 2000).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative methodological approach to explore the relationship between Islamic ethical principles and political engagement. A qualitative design is justified and selected because the research focuses on complex, non-quantifiable human elements, such as character traits (*khuluq*), moral accountability, and ideological perspectives within civic life. Rather than relying on statistical frequencies, the study utilizes a descriptive-analytical framework integrated with selected case studies. This allows the researcher to capture how abstract religious ideals are practically interpreted, adapted, and implemented within a highly fluid modern political arena.

Research Location, Subjects, or Objects of Study

The primary geographical and socio-political setting of this research is Nigeria, a deeply religious and pluralistic nation where state governance and political affiliations are heavily influenced by its predominantly Muslim and Christian populations. The core objects of study are the foundational Islamic ethical principles of justice (*‘adl*), accountability (*amānah*), and the promotion of public welfare (*maṣlahah*), specifically evaluating how these ideals withstand contemporary challenges like systemic corruption and socio-economic inequality. The research subjects encompass contemporary Muslim political activists navigating modern governance systems, alongside a historical timeline of Nigerian leaders from 1960 to 2026. Former President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua is selected as a specific case subject to model ethical governance in public office. Additionally, the study includes a comparative object of study involving Indonesia to benchmark institutional anti-corruption mechanisms and social safety nets against those in Nigeria.

Data Sources

To build a comprehensive narrative, data were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data consist of text-based revelations from foundational Islamic sources, specifically the Qur’an and Hadith, which dictate absolute guidelines for governance, truthfulness, and leadership. Primary data also include firsthand empirical qualitative insights from interviews conducted with Muslim political activists regarding their lived experiences with political marginalization, stereotypes, and Islamophobia. Secondary data supplement this framework, drawing from contemporary academic scholarship on political Islam, historical documentations of early Islamic caliphates, constitutional archives like the Constitution of Medina, and recent 2024 global assessment reports from the World Bank concerning poverty levels and the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).

Data Collection Techniques and Research Instruments

Data collection was carried out using complementary techniques of documentary analysis and qualitative interviewing. Textual mapping of religious scriptures and political literature was executed to establish the theoretical evolution of Islamic statecraft from the Prophet’s era to the modern era. As a vital research instrument for historical documentation, a specialized tracking matrix was compiled by the researcher to detail the names, states of origin, tenures, and religious affiliations of sixteen major Nigerian leaders from independence up to the year 2026. To gather

the human dimension of the data, semi-structured interviews were deployed as the primary interactive instrument, capturing the specific testimonies and socio-political responses of active Muslim figures.

Data Analysis Techniques

The gathered data were processed using qualitative interpretative and comparative analysis methods rather than statistical software. First, thematic coding was applied to textual data from the Qur'an and Hadith to distill invariant moral obligations, which were then used as benchmarks to assess the performance of modern political administrations. Second, case study analysis was used to scrutinize the public policies of past leaders, particularly comparing the transparent asset declarations of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua against the overarching landscape of systemic corruption. Finally, cross-national comparative analysis was applied to external data instruments, using the 2024 World Bank poverty assessments and national CPI scores to contrast Nigeria's institutional structures with Indonesia's universal health insurance coverage. This synthesis demonstrates how institutionalizing ethical governance values can serve as a practical panacea for public distrust and social crises in Nigeria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Morality as a Catalyst for Politics: Islamic Perspective

In Islam, politics and morality are deeply intertwined. This is exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who served as both a religious and political leader. He stated that: "I was sent to perfect the ethical conduct" (Ahmad, 2012). In Islamic thought, religion and politics are not seen as separate spheres but rather as interconnected elements of a cohesive worldview. The concept of governance in Islam is often referred to as the "Caliphate" (Khilafah), where the Caliph serves as both a political and religious leader. The Caliphate is grounded in the principles of Shura (consultation) and Ijtihad (independent reasoning) based on Islamic law (Sharia). Sharia law encompasses legal, moral, and ethical guidelines for both personal and public spheres, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. Its implementation in governance aims to ensure that political and legal systems align with Islamic principles (Kamali, 2019:56). The Qur'an addresses various aspects of social and political life. For instance, in Surah An-Nisa, Allah commands obedience to those in authority: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you" (Q4:59). The Qur'an also emphasizes justice and equality as core principles of governance, as seen in Surah Al-Ma'idah: "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves, your parents, or your relatives" (Q5:8).

Furthermore, the protection of individual rights and the promotion of welfare are key aspects of Islamic governance, as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad and the rightly guided caliphs. This includes the protection of religious minorities and ensuring fair treatment for all. The sayings and actions of the Prophet provide guidance on leadership and justice; for example, a Hadith from Sahih Muslim states: "The leader of a people is their servant." Allah introduces belief in revelation, the unseen world, and the hereafter as keys to salvation. Thus, belief in the meaning of life, values, and morality within Islamic ideology becomes firm and non-relativistic. In this context, true value lies in self-cleansing rather than oppressing human

demands. As Motahhari stated, “The job of religion is not to accuse demands but to control and manage them; otherwise, it is impossible to meaningfully address those demands” (Mutahhari, 2008).

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib posited that the measure of morality in government is the level of equality and respect for Sharia’h. He believed that ethics are the core value of moral governance and strived to spread equality and truth among his people, asserting that the best form of morality in politics is equality (Maryam et al, 2017). Al-Farabi (1980) categorized religion into two types: religious and civil. He viewed politics and ethics as part of the civil realm, emphasizing the relationship between people and their rulers. Arguing that studying politics without a foundation of morality is impossible, considering morality an essential complement to politics (Farabi, 1980). Islamic tradition holds that moral qualities and good actions elevate the status of both leaders and followers in society. It encourages sincerity among individuals in the administration of the state, which, if embraced, could help ease the social crises and threats of disintegration facing the world today.

Contemporary debates among Muslim scholars continue to explore the compatibility between Islamic systems of governance and modern political system especially democratic ones. Babayo Sule argues that democracy can be thoughtfully integrated within Sharia-based governance, advocating for a “domesticated” version of democracy that aligns with Islamic principles (Sule, 2022). Similarly, Attaimi et al. Emphasize the need for *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and contextual reinterpretation proposing that Islamic political thought can adapt to contemporary governance models when grounded in foundational texts. They stress that democratic principles can harmonize with Islamic values, as both emphasize justice, equality, and human rights. (Attamimi, Darmawan & Aryani, 2025)

Moreover, a reflective critique observes that Islamic values such as *shura* (consultation), *ijma'* (consensus), and *ijtihad* resonate with democratic norms, though their interpretation and implementation remain under debate highlighting how democratic notions can be developed from within Islamic principles rather than imported wholesale (Middle East Forum, contextual critique). They advocate for a model where governance reflects Islamic ethics while upholding democratic institutions. Thinkers like Abdul Rahman al-Kawakibi, Sayyid Qutb, and Mahmood S. have explored how Islamic principles can coexist with democratic processes, although their perspectives vary. They argue that Islam’s emphasis on justice (*adl*) aligns with democratic principles, and Islamic teachings promote equality (*musawat*) among citizens, a fundamental democratic value. Moreover, Islam holds human rights in high regard, paralleling democratic principles (An-Na’im, 2008:123). Yavuz suggests several democratic models that align with Islamic principles, including Turkey’s secular democracy with Islamic influences, the Iranian model, and the Indonesian model (Yavuz, 2009: 123).

Nigeria’s Political Context: Religion and Power

Religion has contributed enormously to the politics in Nigerian right from the early days. It is observed that religion can be instrumental in political mobilisation and collective actions. This is because the activities of religious organisations are often reluctantly restricted by the government. Furthermore, religious organisations do have pre-established platforms and

instruments for mobilisation including worship centres, schools, and community activities. Religion remains a major uniting force that can bring together peoples of different ideologies, classes, race, ethnicity, and ages (Fox, 2003). This is more apparent in the early political parties in the country, given the influential role religion plays in its social system. Religion took a central role in the ideology and membership profile of the first political parties that emerged in Nigeria in the 1950s, following the concession of the colonial government to the nationalists' demands for wider political participation. The three major northern political parties that emerged the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) – displayed a religious character. This was especially true of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which was the most popular party in the region and was heavily influenced by Islam. (Onapajo,2016).

Nigerian state has been making conscious efforts during both the military interregnum and civilian rule to balance religious interests. This is by using informal power-sharing mechanisms and sharing executive positions between Christians and Muslims at federal, state and local government levels (Ojo, 2020) It has successfully managed to contain religious violence in central (Federal) politics, through accommodative arrangements that provide for the equitable representation of the country's largest groups, Christians and Muslims. However, such strategies have either not been instituted or have been unsuccessful at lower tiers of governance and in many Nigerian States, diverse Muslim, Christian and other groups see each other mainly as competitors. It is significant to note that apart from the ethnic, geographic and regional factors that play out in the practice of politics and democracy in Nigeria, religion plays a fundamental role in influencing political affiliations. This is seen in the choice of the president and governor of some states. Northern people in the northern fringes of the country will prefer a Muslim governor to a Christian Governor. While the southern part of the country prefers Christians including Governor and Deputy. For the office of the president, season after season, in Nigeria, religious influences hold sway. The office of the President is negotiated politically on the altar of religion. It is either a Muslim president or a Christian president. (Joseph, 2024) And most times if the president is a Christian and southerner, the vice president is a Muslim and vice-versa. But that common understanding was jettisoned in the 2023 presidential elections when the Muslim ticket for both president and vice president was made and this resulted in serious debates and acrimony. The history of political leadership in Nigeria is interlaced and intertwined with religion. The electoral process was characterised by the contestants and their parties meeting with religious leaders, ostensibly in order to use these leaders to favourably influence their followers' votes (Umeanolue,2020). For example, following several overt and covert meetings Jonathan had with the Christian leadership presidential aspirant under Labour party (LP) did the same. Similarly, the incumbent president of federal republic of Nigeria tasked the Muslim scholars to be prayerful for his succession during one of his campaigns in 2023. (TVC News, 2023). This shows how religious affiliation influence the politics in the country.

Table 1: Nigerian Leaders and their Religious Affiliation from 1960-2026

No	Name	State	Date	Religion	Name of Vice	State	Religion
1	Tafawa Balewa (PM)	Bauchi	1959-1966	Islam	Nnamdi Azikiwe (cere -	Anambra	Christianity

					monial presiden		
2	Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi	Anambra	Jan.- July 1966	Christianity	-----	-----	-----
3	Gen. Yakubu Gowon	Plateau	July 1966 1975	Christianity	Chief Obafemi Awolowo (vice chair man of FEC)	Ogun	Christianity
4	Gen. Murtala Mohammed	Kano	1975- 1976	Islam	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo	Ogun	Christianity
5	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo	Ogun	1976- 1979	Christianity	Gen. Sheu Yar'Adua	Katsina	Islam
6	Sheu Shagari	Sokoto	1979- 1983	Islam	Alex Ekwueme	Anambra	Christianity
7	Gen. Muhammed Buhari	Katsina	1983- 1985	Islam	Gen. Tunde Idiagbon	Kwara	Islam
8	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	Niger	1985- 1993	Islam	Commo dore Ebitu Ukiwe & Rear Admiral Augustus Aikhomu	Anambra	Christianity
9	Ernest Shon ekan (head of Interim Govt.)	Ogun	1993	Christianity	Gen. Sanni Abacha was head of the military	Kano	Islam
10	Gen. Sanni Abacha	Kano	1993- 1998	Islam	Gen. Ola dipo Diya	Ogun	Christianity
11	Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar	Niger	1998- 1999	Islam	Rear Ad miral Mike Aigbe	Edo	Christianity
12	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	Ogun	1999- 2007	Christianity	Al-haji Atiku Abubakar	Adamawa	Islam
13	Musa Yar'Adua	Katsina	2007- 2010	Islam	Dr. Goodluck	Bayelsa	Christianity

					Jonathan		
14	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	Bayelsa	2010-2015	Christianity	Dr. Nama di Sambo	Kaduna	Islam
15	Muhammed Buhari	Katsina	2015-2023	Islam	Prof. (Pastor) Yemi Osinbajo	Ogun	Christianity
16	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	Lagos	2023 till date	Islam	Kashim Shettima	Borno Maiduguri	Islam

Source: Compiled by the researcher, 2026

Moral Responsibilities of Muslims in Political Activism

Undoubtedly, Muslim political activism is deeply intertwined with ethical considerations rooted in Islamic teachings. While Islam does not prescribe a specific political system, it does outline distinct principles and features of political administration that Muslims are expected to uphold, regardless of the system they adopt. The Qur'an and Hadith offer guidance on justice, community welfare, and moral conduct, shaping the political engagement of Muslims. As political landscapes evolve, understanding these moral responsibilities is essential for active and responsible citizenship. Among these responsibilities are the following:

Justice and Equity

Islam emphasizes justice ('adl) and equity (ihsan) as fundamental principles guiding the behavior of Muslims in all aspects of life, including politics. The Qur'an explicitly commands justice in several verses; for instance, Qur'an 4:135 states: "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses in equity..." These principles obligate Muslims to advocate for fair policies and practices. Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) integrates justice within its foundational principles, emphasizing that laws should uphold fairness and equity (Kamali, 2003: 8). Islam mandates that every person be given fair and equal treatment under the law, whether rich or poor, powerful or weak. A notable example from the Prophet Muhammad's life illustrates this: when a woman from a noble family was arrested for theft, her family sought to intercede with the Prophet to avoid shame. He firmly responded:

The nations that lived before you were destroyed by Allah because they punished the common man for his offenses while allowing their dignitaries to go unpunished for their crimes. I swear by Him who holds my life in His hand that even if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, had committed this crime, I would have amputated her hand. (Bukhari, 1994)

Ibn Taymiah highlights that justice is a universal value that transcends religious affiliation. He asserts that even if a non-Muslim nation is just, it is more beloved to him than a Muslim nation that is unjust (Ibn Taymiah, 1421/2000). Therefore, it is incumbent upon any

Muslim engaged in political activism to uphold absolute justice for all citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnic group. If this principle were judiciously incorporated into modern democracies, the levels of injustice and corruption prevalent in all spheres of administration could be significantly reduced, leading to a more harmonious world.

Accountability and Integrity

Islam emphasizes accountability as a fundamental value, with individuals being held responsible for their actions and decisions (Amer, 2018). Transparency is essential for ensuring accountability, allowing citizens to hold their leaders responsible for their actions. Muslims are expected to uphold accountability and integrity in their political conduct, which includes being honest, transparent, and resistant to corruption. The importance of integrity is echoed in numerous Islamic texts. For instance, Al-Ghazali (1991) emphasizes that leaders must possess moral virtues to fulfill their roles effectively. In Islam, a leader is not appointed as a tyrant over the people but as a guardian responsible for their welfare. He will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment for how he discharged that responsibility. Abu Sa'id reported that the Prophet Muhammad said:

Verily, the most beloved in the sight of Allah on the Day of Resurrection and the nearest to Him in respect of seat will be the just leader. Conversely, the most hated of men in the sight of Allah on the Day of Resurrection, the most severely punished, and the furthest from Him in respect of seat will be the tyrannical leader. (Bukhari, 1994)

In light of this Hadith, it is clear that Islam mandates Muslim political activists to incorporate the ethics of accountability and integrity in their dealings, regardless of the political system in place. Every individual is undergoing a trial, and their use of power for good or evil is being monitored and recorded for the day they will account before their Creator for how they exercised that power. In the modern politics, As revealed in the respond of interviewees, Muslim activists face unique challenges, including Islamophobia and stereotypes, which can impact their ability to promote accountability and integrity. Despite this, Muslim activists need to see accountability as fundamental aspect of political engagement.

Honesty and Transparency

Honesty is a mean between boastfulness and humility; however, Islam holds honesty and transparency as key pillars of politics, regardless of its form. Citing a Qur'anic verse, Allah says:

"O you who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are truthful." (Q9:119). The verse emphasizes that Muslim leaders must be truthful in their dealings and decisions. Ibn Kathīr (1999) argues that the verse emphasizes the importance of truthfulness and sincerity in all aspects of human actions, including politics. Similarly, Al-Qurtubi (2003:245-246) asserts that truthfulness is a vital trait for leaders, as it ensures justice and fairness in governance.

Both Western and Islamic scholars emphasize the importance of honesty and transparency in political activism, as these values ensure that citizens are informed and

empowered to hold their leaders accountable. Archon Fung advocates for transparency in democratic governance, emphasizing that participation is key to ensuring accountability. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun asserts that honesty is the foundation of justice, and justice is the bedrock of governance (Ibn Khaldun, 1958: 157). Likewise, Fung (2013) views transparency as a means to empower citizens, enabling them to make informed decisions. Contemporary scholarship reinforces and expands on this principle, highlighting the alignment between Islamic ethical norms and good governance. For instance, Islamic governance principles emphasize justice ('adl), truth (ḥaqq), trust (amānah), and consultation (shūrā) values deeply compatible with modern ideals of openness and public accountability (Kamali, 2021; Al-Ahsan & Adeeb, 2022; Sulaiman & Noor, 2023). Moreover, Rastgar et al. (2023) specifically explore how transparency, as conceptualized through Islamic teachings especially during the reign of Imam 'Alī positively influences the quality of public governance, suggesting that transparency rooted in Islamic ethics enhances societal trust and institutional integrity.

While honesty is not always possible in modern politics due to the complexities of decision-making, it remains true that honesty can enhance an activist's credibility. This notion is exemplified in the statement of the first caliph of Islam, Abu Bakr, who declared:

"I did not ask God for this authority in secret or public. God has entrusted me with a great responsibility for which I have neither power nor capacity... O people, I have not been placed in my position because I am better than you; therefore, whenever you see me upright, obey me, and when I am wrong, correct me." (Ahmed, 2006)

The above statement illustrates Abu Bakr's commitment to policy of transparency. In executing his policies, he leaves no doubt regarding his strict compliance with Islamic ethics. In today's complex political barony, where public trust is often undermined by corruption and dishonesty, the Islamic principles of honesty and transparency are particularly relevant for Muslim politicians.

Similarly in Nigerian, this ethics could be envisaged from a Muslim politician, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who are widely recognized for embodying Islamic ethics of governance especially in anti-corruption, justice and transparency despite the systems distinct. Yar'Adua was Governor of Katsina State between 1999 and 2007, and later President of Nigeria between 2007 and 2010. As Governor, he cleared the massive state debt inherited from his predecessor and built a substantial surplus in the state treasury, demonstrating prudent financial stewardship. He was also notably the first Nigerian governor to publicly declare his assets, signaling commitment to accountability and transparency (Campbell, 2010). His actions reflect key Islamic principles such as amanah (trustworthiness) and integrity, modeling transparent and just governance in public office.

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility in political activism refers to the obligation of individuals, groups, and organizations to promote the well-being of society and protect human rights through informed and engaged citizenship. Islam emphasizes social responsibility as essential for the establishment of a just society (Sayyid Qutb, 1964:123). This view is echoed in the works of Ibn Taymiah and Hashim, who assert that social justice is a fundamental principle of Islam (Ibn

Taymiah, 2000; Hashim, 2015). In the context of politics, Islam charges leaders with the duty to show compassion and mercy to all citizens, particularly the weak and vulnerable, while promoting virtue and preventing vice in society. (Opwis, 2007) Osman (2019) notes that, in an Islamic society, the state is responsible for the welfare of the poor, responding to their needs, providing employment for the unemployed, and ensuring security. This includes protecting the state from external threats, assisting men and women facing social and economic difficulties, and caring for widows and orphans.

A typical example of social responsibility can be seen during the period of Caliph Umar, he instituted a public welfare program that included stipends for the poor, orphans, and those in need. He ensured that funds from the state treasury were allocated to support vulnerable populations, reflecting the Islamic principle of caring for the less fortunate. During times of famine or drought, Umar took direct action to ensure that food supplies were adequate. He organized the distribution of food to those in need, often visiting neighborhoods personally to assess the needs of the population. Umar placed great emphasis on the welfare of women and orphans. He established legal protections for their rights and ensured they received support from the state. He famously stated that if he heard of a woman being mistreated, he would take action to protect her. (Al-Tabari,1996). Umar's policies and actions exemplified a commitment to social justice and the welfare of all citizens, reinforcing the Islamic ideals of compassion and responsibility towards others. His legacy continues to influence contemporary discussions on social welfare within Islamic contexts. The duties of the Islamic state encompass the establishment of schools, hospitals, mosques, and public buildings necessary to provide social services. Additionally, it involves organizing public infrastructure, such as streets and sidewalks, to ensure the safety of roads for passengers and travelers. Social responsibility not only enhances individual credibility but also balances individual and collective interests, contributing to the building of sustainable movements.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that out of the sixteen Nigerian leaders from 1960 to 2026, ten are Muslims. This indicates that Muslim politicians have played a major role in the political leadership of Nigeria since independence. Their presence in leadership shows the demographic and religious diversity of the country, where Islam remains one of the dominant religions. Muslim political leaders in Nigeria have occupied different positions such as Heads of State, Presidents, military rulers, and democratic leaders. These leaders include both military and civilian administrations. Their leadership periods have contributed to shaping Nigeria's political, economic, and social development. However, the presence of Muslim politicians in government does not automatically imply the practice of Islamic ethics in governance. Islam places strong emphasis on moral conduct, justice, and responsibility in leadership. Therefore, Muslim leaders are expected not only to identify with Islam religiously but also to demonstrate Islamic values through their actions and policies.

The findings suggest that although Muslim politicians formed the majority among Nigerian leaders, many administrations were criticized for corruption, poor accountability, lack of transparency, and weak commitment to social welfare (Sule, 2022). This raises concerns about the gap between religious identity and ethical governance. In Islamic teaching, leadership is

viewed as a trust (amanah) given by God and society. Muslim politicians are expected to govern with fairness, honesty, and fear of accountability before both the people and Allah (Kamali,2015). Where these values are absent, leadership may fail to meet Islamic ethical standards. Islamic ethics of government are built on principles such as justice, accountability, honesty, transparency, and social responsibility. These values are essential in ensuring good governance and protecting the rights and welfare of citizens.

Justice is one of the central principles of Islamic governance as discussed above. Leaders are expected to treat all citizens equally, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or social status. The findings indicate that many Nigerian governments struggled with issues such as political favoritism, unequal distribution of resources, and regional imbalance. Such practices conflict with Islamic teachings on justice. Similarly, accountability requires leaders to be answerable for their actions and decisions. According to the findings, accountability was largely absent in most administrations. However, the period of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua is viewed differently. His administration is often associated with efforts to promote transparency, rule of law, and public responsibility. Yar'Adua publicly declared his assets and emphasized due process in governance, which the Islamic principle of accountability. Also, honesty in leadership means truthfulness, integrity, and avoidance of corruption (Sule, 2022). Islamic governance discourages bribery, misuse of public resources, and deception. The findings show that corruption and dishonesty have remained persistent challenges in Nigerian politics. This weakens public trust and contradicts Islamic ethical expectations.

Likewise, transparency requires openness in decision-making and public administration. A transparent government allows citizens to understand how policies are made and how public funds are used (Salleh, et 2022). The findings indicate that many Nigerian governments lacked sufficient transparency, especially in financial management and public projects. This weakens confidence in leadership and creates opportunities for corruption. On social well-being of the citizens, Islamic ethics require leaders to prioritize the welfare of the people, particularly the poor and vulnerable as demonstrated the right Prophet successors. Government should provide social services, reduce inequality, and promote public welfare. The findings suggest that despite periods of economic growth, many Nigerian citizens continued to experience poverty, unemployment, and inadequate social services. This shows limited commitment to the Islamic principle of social responsibility.

Drawing a comparative parallel between Nigeria and Indonesia highlights how Islamic ethics could serve as a panacea within the Nigerian system. According to world bank, 2024 assessment on poverty, Nigeria recorded a Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score of 26/100, ranking 140 out of 180 countries, reflecting only a marginal improvement from the previous year. Indonesia, by contrast, scored 37/100 and ranked 99th, still low but notably stronger than Nigeria. Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) reported its most successful year in 2024–25, recovering nearly \$500 million and securing more than 4,000 convictions. Meanwhile, Indonesia's new administration pledged stronger anti-corruption reforms, though concerns persist about the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), once regarded as a regional model of integrity (Asetya,2026). Nigeria faces severe poverty pressures: World Bank estimates suggest almost half of Nigerians (47%) in 2024 lived in poverty after successive shocks. By contrast, Indonesia has built a broad social safety net

centered on BPJS/JKN health insurance 98% coverage by end-2024, moving the country close to universal health coverage (World Bank, 2024).

Studies show that Islamic governance ethics justice (‘adl), trust (amānah), consultation (shūrā), and truthfulness (ṣidq) map cleanly onto modern accountability tools and, when institutionalized rather than merely preached, can lower corruption risks and improve welfare outcomes. The Indonesia–Nigeria contrast illustrates that sustained institution-building, such as Indonesia’s near-universal health financing platforms, can deliver tangible social benefits even before public perceptions fully align. For Nigeria, embedding these Islamic ethical principles into governance could strengthen anti-corruption measures, enhance transparency, and expand social welfare, providing a sustainable framework for justice and equity in public life.

CONCLUSION

Muslims constituted the majority among Nigerian leaders between 1960 and 2026, Islamic ethical principles were not consistently reflected in governance. Religious identity alone does not guarantee ethical leadership. The practical application of Islamic ethics depends on personal integrity, institutional accountability, and commitment to public service. The case of President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua stands out as an example of a leader who attempted to align governance with principles of accountability and transparency. However, the broader pattern suggests that many Muslim politicians did not fully implement Islamic ethical standards in governance.

This discussion highlights the need for political leaders, regardless of religion, to move beyond symbolic religious affiliation and embrace ethical values in practice. For Muslim politicians especially, leadership should reflect Islamic teachings on justice, honesty, transparency, accountability, and social responsibility. Islamic principles emphasize the importance of leadership as a trust from Allah, requiring Muslim politicians to prioritize the well-being of their citizens. However, the Nigerian political system presents numerous challenges, including corruption, nepotism and inadequate institutional structures, which hinder ethical governance. Despite these challenges, Islamic ethics offer a valuable blueprint for addressing Nigeria’s governance issues. By integrating Islamic principles into political system of the country, Muslim politicians can promote transparency, accountability and justice. This can be achieved through establishing Islamic ethics training programs for politicians, strengthening anti-corruption laws and institutions and fostering civic engagement and citizen participation.

It must be noted that, the success of Nigeria’s governance system depends on the moral responsibility of its leaders. Muslim politicians must recognize their accountability to Allah and the people, prioritizing the common good over personal interests. By doing so, they can restore trust and legitimacy in Nigeria’s governance system, fostering a brighter future for the country and its citizen. As the Qur’an emphasizes, “O you who believe, fear Allah and be with the truthful” (Quran 9:119). This verse serves as a poignant reminder of the moral obligations that Muslim politicians must uphold in their pursuit of justice and fairness.

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