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Contact Without Contamination: Exploring the African Apostolic Indigenous Churches' Perception of Politics in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamic relationship between the Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs) and the political landscape in Zimbabwe. The primary objective of this literature-based conceptual study is to investigate how JMAC perceives and engages with political processes in Zimbabwe. The study explores the impact of their beliefs, values, and practices on their political engagement and identity, ultimately fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in the context of AICs in Zimbabwe. Utilising extensive literature analysis, the study aims to uncover the complexities of political identity and activism within the context of AICs. It highlights how the AICs shape their adherents' views on governance, civic responsibility, and social justice, ultimately contributing to a broader understanding of religion's role in shaping political perceptions in Zimbabwe. The implication of this study is the illumination of the critical intersection between religion and politics in Zimbabwe, particularly through the lens of the AICs. The findings will make a significant contribution to the broader discourse on the role of religion in politics, particularly in African contexts. This study challenges the prevailing oversimplification of religion as merely a tool for political control, revealing it instead as a space for active engagement and potentially transformative political critique. This study lays the groundwork for further exploration into the political roles of other AICs and religious groups in Zimbabwe and beyond, advocating for a more nuanced examination of how diverse faith communities engage with political structures. Conclusively, this study will not only elucidate the political perceptions of a specific religious group but also make a substantial contribution to the discourse on the complex relationship between religion and politics in contemporary societies.

Keywords: contact, contamination, AICs, perception, politics, Zimbabwe, JMAC.

Introduction

The intricate relationship between religion and politics has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, especially within the African context, where diverse belief systems coexist with complex political realities. In Zimbabwe, the landscape is particularly notable for the emergence and influence of Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs), which have gained substantial followings and play significant roles in shaping social and political attitudes. The AICs encompass a variety of denominations deeply rooted in African cultural traditions and Christian beliefs, offering a unique lens on the interplay between faith and civic engagement (White, 2024).

This study examines the Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC), a prominent Apostolic Indigenous Church (AIC) in Zimbabwe, to elucidate how its members perceive and engage with political processes. The JMAC, like many other AICs, is characterized by a distinctive

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blend of African spiritual practices and Christian doctrine that collectively provides its adherents with a framework for interpreting their social realities. This research hypothesizes that the beliefs, values, and practices inherent to the JMAC significantly shape its members' political identities and civic responsibilities. Through rigorous literature analysis, this study seeks to uncover the complexities of political engagement within the context of religious faith. It aims to illuminate how the JMAC shapes its followers' perspectives on governance, social justice, and their roles as active citizens in a nation facing significant socio-political challenges. Furthermore, this exploration aims to challenge the prevailing narrative that often relegates religion to a mere instrument of political control, positing instead that it can serve as a dynamic arena for active engagement and potential transformation.

Understanding the relationship between religion and politics in Zimbabwe through the lens of the JMAC is crucial not only for comprehending the country's political landscape but also for contributing to the broader discourse on the role of faith in public life. This study provides insights that extend beyond the JMAC, paving the way for further investigations into the political roles of other AICs and religious groups in Zimbabwe and the wider African context.

Methodology

In this literature-based conceptual study, participant observation was used in conjunction with a thorough review of secondary sources, encompassing both published literature and unpublished documentary materials, to gather comprehensive data. The involvement of the researcher, who previously held membership in the African Initiated Churches (AICs), facilitated participant observation within the congregations she frequently attended, including the Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC), as well as her own church community. This dual role allowed the researcher to engage as a subjective participant while concurrently functioning as an objective observer throughout the research process.

The primary objective of participant observation is to gain an in-depth understanding of the values, beliefs, and lifestyles of a specific demographic (Pine, 2009: 208). In this context, I became a subjective participant by drawing on knowledge acquired through personal experiences with the study's subjects. Such engagement fostered greater interaction and broader access to the group, providing insights often unattainable through traditional survey methods. Moreover, participant observation enabled the researcher to serve as an objective observer, meticulously documenting the observations while striving to prevent personal emotions and biases from influencing data collection and interpretation.

As a participant observer, I exercised critical self-reflexivity, acknowledging the potential impact of my presence on the research process and the data obtained. This study sought to maintain objectivity while analysing the perspectives of JMAC on politics in Zimbabwe, drawing upon the researcher's dual perspective as both a researcher and a member of the AIC community. One of the principal advantages of participant observation lies in its capacity to provide profound insights, enabling researchers to explore social issues and phenomena through the lens of those who experience them firsthand (Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, 200).

Historical Background of Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe

This study uses the term 'indigenous churches' because the AICs are largely embedded in African culture in their teachings. Before looking at the JMAC, I will start by defining AICs: a broader term referring to Apostolic indigenous Churches that originated in Africa as a whole and to churches with no foreign attachment in their day-to-day operations. AICs do not rely on external funding; their members generate their own income for the day-to-day running of the church. This study focuses on AICs, narrowing down my research to JMAC. Scholars such as Sundkler (2000:47) summarized AICs as those “churches that have emerged in Africa through African initiatives with a wish to change existing missionary protestant Christianity and

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revitalize African culture under the guise of Christianity." Matikiti (2014) further describes AICs as churches that are aimed exclusively at African converts, use local traditions more extensively, and have a healing focus on African issues like barrenness and bewitchment. The emergence of Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe is intricately linked to the country's colonial legacy and the profound socio-political transformations that unfolded throughout the 20th century (Rugwiji, 2025). AICs represent a significant dimension of Zimbabwe's religious landscape, characterized by a distinctive amalgamation of African traditional belief systems and Christian doctrines (Anderon, 2001). The inception of AICs in Zimbabwe can be traced to several pivotal movements that reflect the diverse expressions of religious practice among the population.

AICs are deeply rooted in African cultural traditions, which adds a layer of identity politics to their engagement with the state. Members often navigate their religious and cultural identities in ways that affect their political affiliations and loyalty. While some narratives portray religion as a tool for political control, many AICs, including the JMAC, actively critique political systems and advocate for change. This challenges the oversimplified view of religion as merely reinforcing existing power structures. AICs often engage in discussions around social justice, equity, and governance, positioning themselves as voices for the marginalized. This activism can lead to a reimagining of political engagement, with religious organizations advocating for transformative change.

Colonial Influence on AICs

Varied responses to colonial missionary endeavours, the integration of indigenous cultural practices into the Christian faith, and a proactive stance toward socio-political issues mark the historical trajectory of AICs in Zimbabwe. As prominent religious entities, AICs have not only influenced the spiritual lives of their adherents but have also played a pivotal role in shaping Zimbabwe's broader political and social landscape (Tarusarira & Humbe, 2022). Their enduring influence continues to resonate today, as they navigate the complexities and opportunities presented by the nation's evolving socio-political environment.

The arrival of European missionaries in the 19th century marked the beginning of organized Christian evangelization in Zimbabwe. Missionary groups, primarily from Europe and America, sought to convert indigenous populations to Christianity, often disregarding local customs and traditions. While some indigenous people embraced Christianity, others resisted the foreign influence, creating a complex religious environment. The relationship between Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs) and politics in Zimbabwe is intricate and multifaceted. AICs have emerged as significant social and religious movements within the country, often influencing political attitudes and civic engagement among their members.

As a response to colonial missionary practices, AICs began to emerge in the early 20th century, notably after World War I. These churches offered an alternative to mainstream missionary denominations and appealed to those who sought a more culturally relevant expression of faith. The churches were characterized by their emphasis on healing, prophecy, and spiritual experiences, drawing from African spirituality and incorporating indigenous practices into Christian worship (Mapuranga, 2013). AICs blend African traditional beliefs with Christian doctrines, creating a unique framework for understanding social and political issues. This blend helps members navigate their identities in a post-colonial context and shapes their perceptions of governance and authority. Members of AICs, particularly prominent groups like the Johane Marange Church (JMAC), engage with political processes in various ways. While some may support the government or political leaders due to perceived alignment with their spiritual beliefs, others may use their religious platform to critique and challenge political injustices, advocating for social justice and civic responsibility.

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AICs often promote values such as community cohesion, social justice, and ethical governance. This motivates congregants to participate in political activism and civic duties, reinforcing their role as engaged citizens who influence local and national politics. The socio-political context of Zimbabwe during the mid-20th century played a significant role in the expansion and influence of AICs. The struggle against colonial rule and the fight for independence in the 1960s and 1970s heightened the political consciousness among the populace. AICs provided a platform for social mobilization and community organization, often advocating for social justice and political engagement in the face of oppression. Their leaders emerged as prominent advocates for the rights of marginalized communities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two interrelated key theoretical perspectives that provide a robust foundation for understanding the complexities of religion and politics within AICs in Zimbabwe. The theories include Political Theology and Civic Engagement Theory. These theories collectively explore the intersection of religion and politics, particularly the role of Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwean politics. The following theories are used to analyze the complexities of political identity and engagement within the context of the Johane Marange Church (JMAC).

Political theology

Political theology is a theological study that focuses on the interplay between religion and politics, analysing how beliefs shape political structures and practices. It addresses topics such as the role of faith in governance, moral implications of authority, and the interaction of religious and secular ideologies (Laustsen, 2013). Key figures in this field include Augustine of Hippo, who distinguished between earthly and heavenly cities; Martin Luther, who emphasized individual conscience in challenging unjust authority; John Calvin, who stressed the moral responsibility of civil authorities; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who advocated for resisting unjust systems; Gustavo Gutiérrez, who highlighted the importance of engaging with systemic injustices; and Cornel West, who explored the connections between race, religion, and justice.

Political theology promotes ethical engagement in the political sphere, encouraging believers to seek justice, peace, and the well-being of marginalized communities (Ibe, 2025). It critically examines the nature of authority, urging accountability to moral standards. This framework will be applied to analyse how beliefs within African Apostolic Churches (AICs) shape perceptions of authority and civic responsibilities in Zimbabwean politics.

Civic Engagement Theory

Civic engagement theory is a framework that focuses on how individuals participate in civic life, including voting, activism, and community service (García-Cabrero, B., Pérez-Martínez, M.G., Sandoval-Hernández, A., Caso-Niebla, J., and Díaz, C., 2016:38). This study will explore how JMAC doctrine promotes or inhibits civic engagement among its members, revealing how religious values might translate into political action or indifference.

By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, this study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between the JMAC's religious practices and members' political engagement. This multifaceted approach will provide insights into how faith and politics are interwoven in the context of AICs in Zimbabwe, contributing to a broader discourse on the role of religion in shaping political identities and civic responsibilities in contemporary society. The findings of this study could potentially include the following insights:

AIC's contact with Politics in Zimbabwe

JMAC emphasize their spiritual mission and often advocate for political neutrality. They encourage their members to prioritize faith over partisan politics, which can be interpreted as

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a stance against aligning with any specific party. Leadership within these churches significantly shapes political perceptions. Some leaders support the ruling party and align with government initiatives or policies, especially when they believe these initiatives or policies benefit their congregations. For instance, the JMAC church supports the ruling party, ZANUPF, and was given land and financial support to build a high School called St Noah in Bocha Mafararikwa and another primary school in Nyajezi, Nyanga. In supporting Mugabe, some AIC leaders were at the forefront, instructing their members to vote for Mugabe and his party in previous elections and pledging to support him in the 2018 harmonized elections (Chimininge, 2020:99).

In contrast, certain leaders have adopted a critical stance toward governmental actions that threaten social justice and infringe on human rights. A notable example of such violations is the 2008 Operation Murambatsvina, which had profound repercussions for a significant number of individuals, resulting in widespread homelessness. This operation was characterized by the systematic demolition of illegal structures and buildings by the government, forcing countless residents to relocate to rural areas and contributing to an increase in street children. The negative outcomes of Operation Murambatsvina were largely downplayed by the Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs), which regarded the actions as clear violations of human rights and social justice principles (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2008). Additionally, during the re-run of the election period in 2008, where numerous individuals were subjected to violence, and some were killed, the AICs vehemently denounced their members who engaged in violent acts, asserting that such behaviour was contrary to divine law. Even today, individuals are discouraged from taking prominent roles in political activities to avoid bloodshed, reinforcing the notion that political participation should not compromise one's faith or moral integrity.

The political climate in Zimbabwe significantly shapes AIC members' political perspectives. During periods of political unrest, these churches frequently mobilize their congregations to address pressing social issues, thereby demonstrating a collective aspiration for societal change and reform. Within these communities, however, individual members often hold diverse political opinions regarding the ruling party and government. While some may support governmental initiatives, others may adopt a more critical stance, creating a complex mosaic of political views within congregations.

Furthermore, the JMAC emphasizes the principles of unity, peace, and reconciliation among its members and within the broader community. It holds that political stability is predicated on these foundational principles and actively promotes peaceful coexistence among diverse political factions. For many adherents of the JMAC, political engagement is perceived as an extension of their faith; they assert that church teachings should guide their conduct in public affairs. This synthesis of spiritual and civic engagement fosters an activism rooted in both religious conviction and political responsibility. The JMAC encourages its members to navigate the complex political landscape by harmonizing their spiritual beliefs with civic action, thereby positioning themselves as proactive agents in shaping their societal context while remaining faithful to their religious ethos.

The JMAC also emphasizes the principles of unity, peace, and reconciliation among its members and within the broader community. It holds that political stability is predicated on these foundational principles and actively promotes peaceful coexistence among diverse political factions. For many adherents of the JMAC, political engagement is perceived as an extension of their faith; they assert that church teachings should guide their conduct in public affairs. This synthesis of spiritual and civic engagement fosters an activism rooted in both religious conviction and political responsibility.

In contemporary Zimbabwe, AICs are increasingly perceived as active participants in the political arena, with particular emphasis on the ruling party, ZANU-PF, orchestrating political mobilization. The party's leadership frequently engages with these religious organizations, often visiting the Johane Marange Church (JMAC) shrine and occasionally putting on church

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regalia to cultivate support among congregants (Matikiti, 2023). This interaction has led JMAC leaders to be co-opted by political figures to mobilize their members to support ZANU-PF in elections. This is evidenced by the formation of a group called '*Mapositori for ED*', which means that, no matter what, the AICs are geared to support the ruling party, ZANU PF, led by Mnangagwa. However, this also becomes very controversial to the church's core business of aligning politics with the Divine Law. With this group formed, it will be very difficult to challenge the government's corruption and evil acts. Such dynamics occur within a context where the church's leadership appears to overlook the socio-economic hardships facing their congregants, many of whom are grappling with extreme economic crises, including poverty. When reflecting on Mugabe's engagement with the Marange church through his constant visits to the shrine, his wearing of the JMAC regalia, and his holding of their rod (Chitando, 2014), one must consider whether the sentiments expressed by church members during the visits would endure over time. It is plausible that if asked whether they still regard the President as "one of them," many would respond in the affirmative, despite the potential for the President himself to have become detached from this identity. Such allegiance poses questions of loyalty that could significantly impact electoral dynamics; it is unlikely that church members would feel inclined to "betray" someone whom they perceive as part of their community at the ballot box.

Furthermore, the religious leaders are reportedly incentivized through various means, such as the provision of church land, vehicles, and monetary gifts, to persuade their members to endorse the ruling party. This situation raises critical questions about the ethical implications of such political alignments and the impact on the congregants' welfare (Manyonganise, 2010). However, this lack of autonomy has hindered AICs, particularly the JMAC, from serving as a platform for fostering social cohesion and cultural identity while navigating the challenges posed by the socio-political landscape.

JMAC and the political landscape in Zimbabwe

The relationship between Apostolic Indigenous Churches and the political landscape in Zimbabwe is complex and multifaceted. AICs, particularly prominent groups such as the Johane Marange Church (JMAC), have significant influence on social and political attitudes across the country. AICs often encourage their members to engage with political processes and civic responsibilities. This includes participating in elections and advocating for social justice issues, which can empower communities and influence broader political dynamics. The beliefs and values espoused by AICs provide a moral framework that shapes how adherents perceive governance and leadership. This can lead to critical engagement with political authority, as members might hold leaders accountable to ethical standards derived from their religious teachings.

The relationship between AICs, such as the Johane Marange Church and Johane Masowe Church, and the prevailing political dynamics is multifaceted and varies among different factions within these denominations. AICs have sought to maintain a degree of independence from political party affiliations, prioritizing spiritual matters and community development. This independence has allowed them to serve as platforms for social cohesion and cultural identity, while simultaneously navigating the complexities of the socio-political landscape in which they operate. Currently, AICs in Zimbabwe are seen as actively involved in politics through political mobilisation by the ruling party, ZANU-PF, which frequently visits the shrine of JMAC and sometimes wears the church's regalia to garner support from church members. This was noted by Manyonganise when she elucidates:

> Robert Mugabe's visit to the Johanne Marange church, during which he wore the church's robes and carried their ceremonial rod, sparked significant public discourse regarding the motivations behind his actions. Observers in both television and print media questioned the President's decision to engage with the church in this manner (Manyonganise, 2010:170).

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Following the above, Manyonganise further commented that this raises an intriguing question: Was this a manifestation of naivety, or a strategically calculated maneuver? A critical analysis reveals that Mugabe's actions were likely deliberate, rooted in a political philosophy that posits, “If you want people on your side, then you should pretend to be one of them.” The response from the Marange church members was one of elation, as they perceived the President’s involvement as both verbal and demonstrative. When reflecting on Mugabe's engagement, one must consider whether the sentiments expressed by church members during the visit would endure over time. Such allegiance poses questions of loyalty that could significantly impact electoral dynamics; it is unlikely that church members would feel inclined to “betray” someone whom they perceive as part of their community at the ballot box.

Furthermore, it is notable that Noah Taguta, a faction leader within the JMAC, publicly endorsed the ZANU-PF party following the President's visit. This endorsement was catalyzed by Mugabe's reassurances that the new constitution would not challenge the legitimacy of their polygamous practices. As a national leader, one might expect that the President would utilize this platform to address the implications of polygamous marriages, particularly concerning the heightened risks of HIV and AIDS and the potential detrimental effects on overall national development. Nevertheless, his choice to prioritize political expediency over public health and societal progress warrants critical scrutiny (Manyonganise, 2010:170).

Political leaders are now using the JMAC leaders to mobilize their members to vote for and support ZANU-PF. This is done by casting a blind eye to the plight of its congregants, where people are living in extreme economic crises, such as poverty. The religious leaders, because of poverty, are given church stands, cars, and cash to persuade their members to support the ruling party. This now occurred against the backdrop of political theology, where religion is supposed to keep the state in check and maintain social justice. The relationship between AICs, specifically the Johane Marange Church, and prevailing political dynamics is complex and reflects significant variations across factions within these religious denominations. Critics argue that the church's political alignment may compromise its prophetic role as a moral voice in society. AICs have become extensions of political parties (Machoko, 2013: 21).

Historically, African Indigenous Churches (AICs) have endeavored to maintain a degree of autonomy from political affiliations, placing paramount importance on their spiritual and community-oriented missions (Chitando, 2014). This autonomy has enabled them to serve as platforms for fostering social cohesion and cultural identity while navigating the challenges posed by the socio-political landscape. However, contemporary dynamics indicate a notable shift, as certain churches, such as the JMAC, have increasingly engaged in political activities. This involvement is exemplified by leaders aligning with the ruling political party, ZANU-PF, in efforts to mobilize support among congregants, often in exchange for material incentives. Such relationships raise significant concerns regarding the role of religion in fostering social justice and accountability, particularly in the context of economic crises that adversely affect church members.

Political Mobilization

AICs can serve as platforms for political mobilization, particularly during elections. Their organizational structures enable them to rally large groups of people, influencing electoral outcomes and political discourse. Considering this, Manyonganise highlights that:

> The religious leaders are forced to invite political leaders to their meetings and conferences, where, in most cases, the political leaders pledge allegiance and promise that all their members will vote for them. This usually happens when ZANU PF politicians attend African Initiated Churches (AICs). For example, religious leaders such as Nehemiah Mutendi, Ezekiel Guti, Emmanuel Makandiwa, and Walter Magaya, among others, have graced political functions, while figures like the late Robert Gabriel Mugabe, Grace Mugabe, Joyce Mujuru, Emmerson Dambudzo

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> Mnangagwa, and Morgan Richard Tsvangirai, to name a few, visited various AICs to get support during elections. However, a few have attended religious meetings and conferences (Manyonganise, 2022:107).

In line with Manyonganise (2022), Matikiti (2023: 152) also postulates that some AICs have invited political leaders to address congregations during church gatherings. Following the ruling party's defeat in the 2000 elections, there was a concerted effort to win over AIC members. Prominent figures such as Noah Taguta of the Johane Marange, Godfrey Nzira of the Johane Masowe eChishanu Apostolic Church, and Paul Mwazha of the African Apostolic Church were strategically co-opted into ZANU-PF politics and subsequently served as conduits for countering transformative political movements (Mkunga, 2013: 38). In Zimbabwe, it is well documented that the ruling party effectively manipulates AICs to secure electoral victories. This is evidenced by church members wearing political party attire during church events, where politicians are often invited as guest speakers. Notably, the former president, Robert Mugabe, was seen engaging with the white-garment worshippers, even wearing their attire to solicit votes during election campaigns. The religious constituency represents a pivotal electoral base for political parties, comprising a significant portion of the electorate in Zimbabwe.

Machoko (2013:21) describes that, although Robert Mugabe was a Catholic by both baptism and marriage, he wore the bishop's vestments of the Johane Marange, grasped a sacred wooden bishop's crook, and enthusiastically participated in religious songs alongside congregants at Mafarikwa village. Following this act, one might question whether such conduct is indicative of the proper ordination of bishops. This practice does not align with traditional ordination processes, which require a thorough evaluation of an individual's loyalty and commitment to the church. According to a report by The Standard (August 3, 2011), AICs have publicly aligned themselves with and endorsed politicians from the ruling party. Conversely, media reports indicate that these politicians have been observed wearing regalia associated with independent churches, leading to criticism from other religious groups who deem this practice blasphemous, sacrilegious, and an exploitation of the sanctity of religious observance.

The political presence of JMAC can sometimes lead to tensions with the government, especially when their teachings and activism challenge the status quo or call for greater accountability from political leaders. In summary, JMAC is not just a passive observer of the political landscape; it actively engages with it, shaping its members' political identities and participation. This engagement reveals the potential of religious organizations to serve as agents of social change while simultaneously navigating the challenges posed by the political environment.

AICs in the post-Independence Era

The post-independence government respected the Church and its mission but bullied the church into supporting the government’s political agenda. There is a tendency by politicians to manipulate the church for their own benefit (Matikiti, 2023). Whilst collaborating and networking with the government is critical, church leaders should avoid nurturing close personal ties with politicians. Church leaders should avoid aligning themselves with specific political parties or groups, as the government may make decisions that conflict with the church’s moral teachings. JMAC has failed to condemn the government’s brutality because they support the ZANU-PF government’s ideology. Church leaders, when speaking on behalf of the church, must help define the relationship between the church and the state, grounded in freedom as a fundamental right.

Following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, AICs continued to thrive, contributing to the country's socio-political dynamics. With a growing membership, these churches began engaging more actively in political discourse, challenging government policies and advocating

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for social change. The emphasis on civic responsibility and political engagement became central to the identity of many AICs. Despite challenges such as government scrutiny and regulatory attempts, AICs have maintained their relevance in Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape. AIC continues to provide spiritual guidance, support social justice initiatives, and act as a conduit for political discourse, reflecting the intersection of faith and activism. Political leaders always call upon the leaders of these AICs for political guidance and direction on how they should rule the Nation. For instance, the former president, Robert Mugabe, visited the shrine of Wimbo, the leader of the Wadzidzi church, one of the AICs in Zimbabwe, for political guidance (Matikiti, 2023).

Analysis of the theoretical frameworks with the findings of the study

The findings of the study on the Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC) and its engagement with political processes in Zimbabwe resonate deeply with the field of political theology. Political theology examines the relationship between religious beliefs and political authority, exploring how religious traditions influence political thought and civic engagement. The study illustrates how the beliefs, values, and practices of the JMAC shape the political identities of its adherents. This aligns with political theology's focus on how religious communities interpret governance and civic responsibility through their faith, suggesting that theology directly informs members' political perspectives. By challenging the notion that religion serves as a tool for political control, the research highlights the potential of faith-based groups to foster critical political engagement. This perspective echoes key tenets of political theology, which posits that religious communities can be sites of resistance and transformative critique within political contexts. The findings emphasize the JMAC's role in fostering social justice and civic responsibility among its members. This reflects the political-theological concept of the prophetic tradition, where faith communities advocate for justice and critique unjust political systems, thereby influencing public policy and governance.

The study emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between religion and politics. Civic organizations can use this research to educate their members about the political implications of faith-based engagement, promoting dialogue and awareness of how religious beliefs can inform civic action. The findings challenge the notion that religion is merely a tool for political control. Civic organizations can use this perspective to engage with religious communities more constructively, recognizing the potential for faith-based organizations to foster democratic practices and civic engagement rather than hindering them. The insights gained from this study can inform civic organizations' policy advocacy efforts by providing evidence of the impact of religious beliefs on political identity and engagement. This can lead to more inclusive policies that recognize the role of faith communities in civic life.

The relationship between the findings of this study and civic organizations can foster a more integrated approach to civic engagement, encouraging cooperation between religious institutions and civic initiatives. This synergy can enhance the overall impact of both sectors in addressing the socio-political challenges faced in Zimbabwe and beyond. The study underscores the complexities of the relationship between religion and politics, showing that, for the JMAC, faith is intertwined with civic life. This illustrates the idea in political theology that religious beliefs do not exist in a vacuum but are profoundly connected to the public sphere and societal integrity. In essence, the study enriches political theology by revealing the active role that faith communities, particularly the JMAC, play in shaping political perceptions and fostering civic engagement in Zimbabwe, encouraging a more dynamic understanding of the interplay between religion and politics.

Political Theology and Divine Authority in JMAC

Political theology examines the relationship between religious beliefs and political authority, exploring how faith informs governance, power, and public life. Within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC), political theology is rooted in the belief that all authority ultimately

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originates from God. This understanding shapes the church's leadership structures, members' attitudes toward the state, and their participation in political processes. The concept of divine authority, therefore, provides the theological foundation upon which the church organizes its religious and social life.

The Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC) upholds the belief that leadership is divinely ordained. Within this church, leaders are seen as individuals chosen by God rather than those elected through democratic means (Sibanda, F., & Vengeyi, E., 2014). Their authority is validated through prophetic calling, spiritual gifts, and a lineage of succession within the church's established traditions. As a result, members of JMAC are expected to respect and obey their leaders, viewing them as representatives of God's will (Makamure, 2020). This perspective is supported by biblical passages such as Romans 13:1–2, which states that governing authorities are instituted by God, and Hebrews 13:17, which encourages believers to submit to their spiritual leaders. Furthermore, the church refers to Old Testament examples of divinely appointed leaders, such as Moses, David, and the prophets, to strengthen the belief that legitimate authority is derived from God.

The JMAC has teachings and perspectives on politics deeply intertwined with its religious beliefs and practices. The JMAC emphasizes the role of spiritual authority in governance. They believe that divine principles should guide leaders and that their authority is derived from God. Thus, political leaders are seen as accountable to a higher moral standard. Members of the JMAC are encouraged to engage in civic responsibilities, including voting and participating in community affairs. Their teachings promote the idea that being a good citizen aligns with spiritual values and obligations. The church strongly advocates for social justice and the welfare of marginalized populations. It posits that political engagement should be oriented towards maintaining justice and opposing oppression, reflecting the church's dedication to the well-being of its communities. The teachings of the JMAC frequently incorporate critiques of corruption and unethical practices within the political sphere. Followers are encouraged to hold political leaders accountable and to resist behaviours that threaten the integrity of social and moral frameworks. However, this can be debated, as church leaders tend to support the ruling party, ZANU-PF, casting a blind eye to people’s plight and forgetting that, as a church, one of its roles is to maintain checks and balances on the state.

Political Theology and the State

The political theology of JMAC underscores the importance of peaceful coexistence with political authorities. The church has historically encouraged its members to respect governmental institutions, uphold social order, and refrain from rebelling against established authorities (Matikiti, R., & Pandasvika, 2023). In various contexts, this theology has fostered close relationships between church leaders and political elites, with both parties seeking mutual legitimacy and support. Critics contend that such interpretations may dissuade critical engagement with issues of injustice or authoritarian governance. Conversely, some argue that the church's focus on peace and obedience plays a vital role in promoting social stability and national cohesion. These contrasting viewpoints render JMAC a significant case for exploring the interplay between religion and politics in Southern Africa.

Divine Authority and Church Governance

Within JMAC, divine authority plays a crucial role in shaping internal governance. Leadership decisions are typically seen as guided by prophetic revelation and spiritual discernment rather than by popular vote (Mare, 2022). This hierarchical model promotes unity, discipline, and continuity within the church; however, it may also restrict opportunities for accountability, gender inclusion, and democratic participation. Scholars have increasingly examined how women and younger members navigate authority within these structures. Perspectives from

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feminist, womanist, and Bosadi frameworks indicate that traditional interpretations of divine authority can reinforce patriarchal leadership while simultaneously fostering environments where women wield significant spiritual influence through avenues such as prayer, healing, prophecy, and community leadership.

Contemporary Perspectives

Contemporary political theology invites a critical re-examination of divine authority within JMAC, considering democracy, human rights, constitutionalism, and social justice. A decolonial perspective further asks whether inherited models of authority empower African communities or perpetuate hierarchical systems that limit participation and accountability. Such an inquiry encourages dialogue between biblical theology, African Indigenous knowledge systems, and modern democratic ideals. Nonetheless, Political theology and divine authority remain central to understanding the Johane Marange Apostolic Church. The belief that authority originates from God shapes ecclesiastical leadership, state relations, and community life. While this theology has fostered unity, discipline, and continuity, it also raises important questions regarding accountability, gender equality, democratic participation, and social justice. Further research can deepen understanding of how JMAC negotiates these tensions within the rapidly changing political and religious landscape of Southern Africa.

Implications from the literature reviewed

The study elucidates the profound influence of beliefs and practices within the JMAC on its members' political identities, thereby offering critical insights into the intersection of religious faith and civic engagement. It posits that religion transcends its conventional perception as merely an instrument of political control, advocating for a more nuanced understanding that acknowledges faith communities as active participants in political discourse and as potential catalysts for social change. The findings contribute significantly to the broader academic literature on the role of religion in politics, particularly in African contexts, and they call for further investigation into the political involvement of other AICs and religious groups.

Recognizing the political engagement of religious communities is essential for informing policymakers and social leaders about the values and motivations that shape public opinion and foster community activism, ultimately leading to more effective governance. This study establishes a foundational framework for subsequent research into the political dynamics of various religious groups, encouraging scholars to examine diverse faith traditions and their interactions with political structures in Zimbabwe and beyond. The implications of this research suggest that religion, especially within indigenous contexts, plays a multifaceted and dynamic role in shaping political perceptions and behaviours, thereby enriching our understanding of contemporary political landscapes in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

This study has explored the intricate relationship between the AICs and Zimbabwe's political landscape, shedding light on how their members' beliefs, values, and practices inform their political identities and civic engagement. The findings indicate that the JMAC does not merely function as a religious entity but also serves as a crucial platform for fostering political awareness and social responsibility among its followers. By analyzing congregants' perceptions of governance, civic duty, and social justice, this research has illustrated the potential of the JMAC and other AICs to influence political discourse in Zimbabwe. Rather than being viewed solely as instruments of political control, these religious organizations can be seen as arenas where individuals critically engage with political issues, advocate for social change, and promote civic participation.

In conclusion, this study lays a foundation for future research on the political roles of other AICs and religious organizations, emphasizing the need to continue exploring how diverse

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faith communities engage in the political sphere. It is imperative to acknowledge the transformative potential of religion in advancing social justice and civic engagement, thereby positioning faith as a vital component of Zimbabwe's contemporary political landscape.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should expand the scope to include a wider range of Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs) beyond the Johane Marange Church (JMAC). This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how various AICs engage politically and their diverse perceptions. Encourage collaboration among theologians, political scientists, and sociologists to deepen analysis of the intersection of religion and politics. Such interdisciplinary approaches can offer richer insights into the influence of faith on civic engagement. Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in political perceptions and engagement among JMAC members over time. This can help identify whether shifts occur in response to changing political landscapes or social dynamics.

Organizing workshops that bring together both church leaders and policymakers can provide a platform for engaging discussions about the study's findings. Such dialogues are essential for exploring how religious beliefs can constructively contribute to governance, civic engagement, and social justice in Zimbabwe. It is imperative to promote educational programs within the AICs that prioritize civic responsibility, human rights, and social justice issues. These initiatives are instrumental in enhancing members' awareness and capacity to engage actively in political processes.

Furthermore, JMAC leaders are encouraged to leverage various media platforms to articulate their perspectives on governance and social justice. This approach could amplify their voices, thereby reinforcing the role of religion in public discourse. A critical examination of how gender dynamics within the JMAC influence political perceptions and engagement is also necessary. A nuanced understanding of these dynamics can elucidate the unique challenges and opportunities faced by different segments of the congregation.

Additionally, developing frameworks that delineate how AICs, including the JMAC, can respond to political crises or social injustices will be beneficial. Adopting a proactive stance allows these communities to position themselves as advocates for positive societal change. Comparing the findings of the AICs with those of similar organizations, both across Africa and globally, could yield valuable insights into universal themes and context-specific factors that shape the interplay between religion and politics. The insights gained from the JMAC also contribute to a broader understanding of how various faith communities in Africa navigate their political environments.

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