

From Fatalism to Agency: Reversing the Civic Expectancy-Prayer Paradigm in African Development

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Abstract

Background: Persistent underdevelopment across African nations has been increasingly attributed to a "civic expectancy-prayer paradigm" wherein populations exhibit passive reliance on divine intervention, external assistance, or government benevolence rather than active civic engagement in addressing collective challenges. While religiosity remains central to African cultural identity, the predominance of prayer as a primary response to development problems, often excluding concrete civic action, raises questions about the cultural and psychological foundations of sustainable development.

Objective: This study examined the relationship between religious orientation, civic agency, and development outcomes in African contexts, identifying psychological and social mechanisms through which the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm operates and exploring pathways for its reversal.

Methods: A mixed-methods design combined quantitative survey data from 3,600 respondents across six African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa) with 120 qualitative interviews conducted between January and September 2024. The structured questionnaire measured religious orientation dimensions (intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, theological fatalism, religious practice frequency), psychological mediators (locus of control, individual self-efficacy, collective efficacy), and civic engagement indicators (political participation, community involvement, collective action). Data analysis employed univariate descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, and structural equation modeling to test hypothesized mediation pathways.

Results: Univariate analysis revealed high levels of religious commitment (intrinsic religiosity $M=4.23$, $SD=0.78$) and theological fatalism ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.85$) coexisting with external locus of control ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.81$) and below-midpoint civic engagement across all dimensions (political participation $M=2.45$, community involvement $M=2.67$, collective action $M=2.34$). Bivariate correlations demonstrated that theological fatalism was strongly negatively associated with internal locus of control ($r=-.52$, $p<.01$), collective efficacy ($r=-.51$, $p<.01$), and civic engagement dimensions ($r=-.32$ to $-.49$), while psychological mediators showed robust positive correlations with civic participation ($r=.49$ to $.73$). Structural equation modeling ($CFI=.952$, $RMSEA=.043$) revealed that theological fatalism exerted substantial negative effects on internal locus of control ($\beta=-.487$, $p<.001$) and collective efficacy ($\beta=-.456$, $p<.001$), which in turn strongly predicted civic engagement ($\beta=.312$ and $\beta=.425$ respectively). Mediation analysis indicated that psychological factors accounted for approximately 75% of theological fatalism's total effect on civic engagement (total effect $\beta=-.389$, direct effect $\beta=-.098$, total indirect effect $\beta=-.291$), confirming that fatalistic theology suppressed civic participation primarily through its impact on agency-related cognitions. Critically, intrinsic religiosity demonstrated positive direct effects on civic engagement ($\beta=.142$, $p<.001$) when controlling for fatalistic beliefs, indicating that personal faith commitment itself supported rather than hindered active citizenship.

Conclusion: The civic expectancy-prayer paradigm operates through specific psychological mechanisms linking theological fatalism to diminished civic agency, but religious commitment per se need not oppose active citizenship. Reversing this paradigm requires theologically-informed civic education, experiential interventions building

collective efficacy, and institutional reforms creating meaningful opportunities for citizen influence, thereby transforming passive expectancy into active agency while respecting faith's centrality in African cultural identity.

Keywords: civic engagement, religious orientation, theological fatalism, collective efficacy, African development, civic agency, locus of control, structural equation modeling

Introduction

The persistent underdevelopment challenges facing many African nations have increasingly been attributed not merely to economic or structural constraints, but to deeply embedded cultural and psychological orientations that shape civic engagement and collective action (Adams, 2025; Oseni, 2018; Tukon, 2024). Central to this discourse is the observation that significant segments of African populations exhibit what may be termed a "civic expectancy-prayer paradigm"—a behavioral pattern characterized by passive reliance on divine intervention, external assistance, or government benevolence rather than active citizen agency in addressing societal challenges. This phenomenon represents a complex interplay between religious worldviews, historical experiences of disempowerment, and contemporary governance failures that have collectively fostered fatalistic attitudes toward social change (Bell et al., 2022; Sánchez-Arrieta et al., 2021). While faith and spirituality constitute invaluable dimensions of African cultural identity and have historically served as sources of resilience, the predominance of prayer as a primary response to developmental challenges, often to the exclusion of concrete civic action, raises critical questions about the conditions necessary for sustainable development (Chan & Kawalerowicz, 2024; Zahnow, 2024). This study examines the mechanisms through which this paradigm operates, its implications for democratic participation and development outcomes, and the pathways through which it might be reversed to cultivate greater civic agency. By exploring the tension between fatalism and agency in African development discourse, this research contributes to broader debates about the cultural foundations of economic progress, the role of citizen participation in governance, and the conditions under which communities transition from passive expectancy to active engagement in shaping their collective futures (Julius & Geoffrey, 2025; Julius & Milly, 2025; Julius & Sula, 2025).

Background of the Study

The intersection of religious orientation and civic engagement in African societies has evolved through distinct historical phases that have shaped contemporary attitudes toward social change and development. Pre-colonial African societies generally maintained integrated worldviews where spiritual practice and communal action were complementary rather than contradictory, with collective problem-solving embedded in traditional governance structures and community mobilization frameworks (Ari Maisule et al., 2023; Hamzani et al., 2021; Julius & Kazaara, 2025b). The colonial period introduced disruptions to these indigenous systems while simultaneously propagating forms of Christianity that often emphasized submission to authority, acceptance of suffering, and otherworldly salvation, creating theological foundations for passive responses to injustice. Post-independence experiences across the continent have been characterized by recurring cycles of failed governance, economic crises, and unfulfilled political promises, which have reinforced perceptions of citizen powerlessness and contributed to a retreat into religious explanations for societal conditions (Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025; Labadi, 2024; Sanjeewa, 2021). Contemporary African Christianity, particularly in its Pentecostal and charismatic expressions, has experienced explosive growth while often promoting prosperity theology and spiritual warfare doctrines that frame socioeconomic

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challenges primarily as spiritual battles requiring prayer rather than systemic reform. Concurrently, African nations have witnessed declining indicators of civic engagement, including low voter turnout in many contexts, limited participation in community organizations, and widespread disillusionment with democratic institutions, suggesting a broader crisis of civic agency (Ari Maisule et al., 2023; Guyo, 2017; Hamzani et al., 2021; Summers, 2019). Research has documented correlations between high levels of religiosity and reduced civic activism in various African contexts, though the causal mechanisms remain underexplored (Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025; Ssegantebuka, 2019). The developmental implications of this paradigm are significant, as sustainable progress requires active citizen participation in governance, accountability mechanisms, and collective action for public goods provision (Earle, 2025; Eyita-Okon, 2022; Petersen, 2022). International development agencies have increasingly recognized that technical interventions and resource transfers achieve limited impact without corresponding shifts in citizen agency and demand for accountability, yet culturally appropriate frameworks for catalyzing such shifts remain underdeveloped (de Haas, 2017; Ezenwa Osuigwe, 2023).

Problem Statement

Despite substantial investments in democratic institutions, governance reforms, and development interventions across African nations, many societies continue to exhibit limited citizen agency in addressing collective challenges, with significant populations defaulting to prayer, external dependency, or fatalistic acceptance rather than civic engagement and organized advocacy for change (Katusiime & Igba, 2024; Mlambo, et al., 2019). This civic expectancy-prayer paradigm manifests in multiple dimensions: political participation remains shallow, with citizens often viewing elections as rituals rather than mechanisms for accountability; community responses to service delivery failures frequently emphasize spiritual explanations over demands for governmental responsibility; and social mobilization around shared grievances remains fragmented and episodic rather than sustained and strategic (Ezeoha & Uche, 2024; Makol, 2025). The persistence of this pattern creates a self-reinforcing cycle wherein low civic expectations produce poor governance outcomes, which in turn validate fatalistic worldviews and reinforce reliance on non-civic coping mechanisms. While existing literature has documented various aspects of this phenomenon—including studies on religious behavior, political culture, and social capital in African contexts—there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific pathways through which religious orientation, civic efficacy, and development outcomes interact, particularly regarding the conditions under which fatalistic orientations might be transformed into productive civic agency (Bridget & Geophrey, 2023; Iyamba & Yusuf, 2025; Julius & Kazaara, 2025a; Thomsen, 2023). Furthermore, interventions designed to strengthen democratic participation have often failed to account for the deep cultural and psychological dimensions of civic disengagement, resulting in programs that address symptoms rather than underlying belief systems and behavioral patterns. The lack of empirically grounded frameworks for understanding and reversing the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm represents a critical obstacle to sustainable development, as meaningful progress requires not only improved institutions and resources but fundamental shifts in how citizens perceive their role and capacity in shaping collective outcomes.

Main Objective

To examine the relationship between religious orientation, civic agency, and development outcomes in African contexts, and to identify the psychological, social, and institutional mechanisms through which the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm can be reversed to enhance citizen participation in sustainable development processes.

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Specific Objectives

1. To assess the extent to which religious beliefs and practices influence civic efficacy and engagement behaviors among African populations, identifying specific theological orientations and religious practices that either inhibit or facilitate active citizenship.
2. To analyze the mediating role of psychological factors—including locus of control, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy—in the relationship between religious orientation and civic participation, examining how these cognitive frameworks shape responses to development challenges.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies designed to cultivate civic agency while respecting religious identity, identifying best practices for community mobilization, civic education, and institutional reforms that successfully bridge the gap between spiritual practice and active citizenship.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do different dimensions of religious orientation (theological beliefs, worship practices, religious community involvement) predict variations in civic engagement behaviors and perceived civic efficacy among African populations?
2. What psychological mechanisms mediate the relationship between religious orientation and civic participation, and how do factors such as locus of control, individual self-efficacy, and collective efficacy explain the pathway from faith-based worldviews to civic action or inaction?
3. Which intervention approaches—including civic education programs, community mobilization strategies, and institutional reforms—have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing civic agency among religiously oriented populations, and what contextual factors determine their success or failure?

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews conducted across six African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa) between January and September 2024, selected to represent diverse religious landscapes, governance contexts, and development trajectories. The quantitative component utilized a structured questionnaire administered to a stratified random sample of 3,600 respondents (600 per country) aged 18 years and above, recruited through multistage cluster sampling that ensured representation across urban-rural divides, socioeconomic strata, and religious affiliations. The instrument measured religious orientation through adapted scales assessing intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, theological fatalism, and frequency of religious practices; civic engagement was operationalized using validated indices of political participation, community involvement, and collective action; psychological mediators were assessed through established scales measuring locus of control, general self-efficacy, and collective efficacy; while development outcome perceptions were captured through self-reported assessments of community progress and satisfaction with public services. Data analysis proceeded in three phases: univariate analysis examined the distribution and central tendencies of all key variables, establishing baseline patterns of religious orientation, civic engagement, and psychological characteristics across the sample; bivariate analysis employed chi-square tests for categorical variables and Pearson correlation coefficients for continuous variables to explore preliminary associations between religious dimensions and civic engagement indicators, while independent samples t-tests and ANOVA examined differences across demographic groups; structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized to test the hypothesized mediation

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model, specifying religious orientation constructs as exogenous variables, psychological factors (locus of control, self-efficacy, collective efficacy) as mediating variables, and civic engagement behaviors as endogenous outcomes, with model fit assessed through multiple indices (CFI, TFI, RMSEA, SRMR) and path coefficients examined for direct and indirect effects (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). The qualitative component involved 120 semi-structured interviews (20 per country) with purposively selected civic leaders, religious figures, community organizers, and citizens representing diverse engagement profiles, which were transcribed, coded thematically, and analyzed to provide contextual depth and explanatory insights into the mechanisms linking religious worldviews to civic behavior patterns, with qualitative findings integrated with quantitative results to triangulate conclusions and develop nuanced interpretations of the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm and its reversal pathways.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Univariate Analysis of Key Study Variables (N=3,600)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Religious Orientation Dimensions						
Intrinsic Religiosity	4.23	0.78	1.00	5.00	-1.12	1.45
Extrinsic Religiosity	3.67	0.92	1.00	5.00	-0.34	-0.21
Theological Fatalism	3.89	0.85	1.00	5.00	-0.67	0.33
Religious Practice Frequency	4.01	0.96	1.00	5.00	-0.89	0.52
Psychological Mediators						
Internal Locus of Control	2.98	0.88	1.00	5.00	0.12	-0.45
External Locus of Control	3.76	0.81	1.00	5.00	-0.56	0.28
Individual Self-Efficacy	3.12	0.94	1.00	5.00	0.08	-0.38
Collective Efficacy	2.87	0.97	1.00	5.00	0.23	-0.52
Civic Engagement Indicators						
Political Participation Index	2.45	1.02	1.00	5.00	0.45	-0.34
Community Involvement Index	2.67	1.08	1.00	5.00	0.38	-0.41
Collective Action Participation	2.34	1.15	1.00	5.00	0.52	-0.48
Civic Efficacy Perception	2.56	0.99	1.00	5.00	0.41	-0.29
Development Outcome Perceptions						
Community Progress Assessment	2.78	1.06	1.00	5.00	0.29	-0.55
Public Service Satisfaction	2.42	1.12	1.00	5.00	0.48	-0.39

The univariate analysis revealed several critical patterns in the distribution of variables across the study sample. Religious orientation dimensions demonstrated consistently high mean scores, with intrinsic religiosity (M=4.23, SD=0.78) showing the highest average and exhibiting negative skewness (-1.12), indicating that the majority of respondents clustered toward the upper end of the scale, reflecting deep personal religious commitment. Theological fatalism also registered above the midpoint (M=3.89, SD=0.85), suggesting widespread acceptance of divine

determinism in life outcomes. The psychological mediators presented a concerning pattern, with external locus of control (M=3.76, SD=0.81) substantially higher than internal locus of control (M=2.98, SD=0.88), indicating predominant attribution of life outcomes to external forces rather than personal agency. Similarly, collective efficacy (M=2.87, SD=0.97) scored below the theoretical midpoint, revealing low confidence in community capacity for collective action. Most notably, all civic engagement indicators registered below the scale midpoint, with collective action participation showing the lowest mean (M=2.34, SD=1.15) and positive skewness (0.52), suggesting that the majority of respondents exhibited minimal engagement in organized advocacy or protest activities. The relatively high standard deviations across civic engagement measures indicated substantial heterogeneity in participation patterns within the sample.

These descriptive findings provided compelling empirical evidence for the existence of the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm across the six African countries studied. The combination of high intrinsic religiosity and theological fatalism alongside low internal locus of control and civic engagement created a profile consistent with passive civic orientation grounded in religious worldviews. The fact that respondents demonstrated strong personal faith commitment but simultaneously exhibited low confidence in their individual and collective capacity to effect change suggested a disconnect between religious identity and civic agency. This pattern aligned with theoretical frameworks suggesting that certain theological orientations, particularly those emphasizing divine sovereignty and human submission, may inadvertently undermine the psychological foundations necessary for active citizenship. The below-midpoint scores on all civic engagement dimensions were particularly troubling from a development perspective, as they indicated that across this diverse sample of African populations, citizen participation in democratic processes, community initiatives, and collective action remained substantially limited. The positive skewness observed in collective action participation was especially revealing, as it demonstrated that organized advocacy and protest activities were concentrated among a small subset of the population, while the majority remained largely disengaged from such forms of civic expression. These patterns suggested that interventions aimed at enhancing civic agency would need to address not only the structural and institutional barriers to participation but also the underlying psychological and cultural frameworks that shaped citizens' perceptions of their role and capacity in development processes. The variation captured in the standard deviations offered some optimism, indicating that despite overall low engagement levels, meaningful diversity existed in how individuals navigated the relationship between religious commitment and civic participation, providing potential exemplars for understanding successful integration of faith and active citizenship.

Table 2: Bivariate Correlations Between Religious Orientation, Psychological Mediators, and Civic Engagement (N=3,600)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Intrinsic Religiosity	1.00											
2. Extrinsic Religiosity	.42**	1.00										

3. Theological Fatalism	.58**	.51**	1.00									
4. Religious Practice Freq.	.67**	.48**	.54**	1.00								
5. Internal Locus of Control	-.31**	-.18**	-.52**	-.28**	1.00							
6. External Locus of Control	.44**	.39**	.64**	.41**	-.68**	1.00						
7. Individual Self-Efficacy	-.23**	-.12**	-.47**	-.21**	.71**	-.59**	1.00					
8. Collective Efficacy	-.28**	-.15**	-.51**	-.25**	.66**	-.62**	.74**	1.00				
9. Political Participation	-.19**	-.08**	-.38**	-.16**	.54**	-.48**	.62**	.69**	1.00			
10. Community Involvement	-.14**	-.05*	-.32**	-.11**	.49**	-.42**	.58**	.66**	.72**	1.00		
11. Collective Action	-.22**	-.11**	-.43**	-.19**	.58**	-.51**	.65**	.71**	.76**	.68**	1.00	
12. Civic Efficacy	-.26**	-.13**	-.49**	-.23**	.63**	-.56**	.69**	.73**	.71**	.64**	.74**	1.00

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The bivariate correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between religious orientation dimensions and both psychological mediators and civic engagement outcomes, with patterns that illuminated the mechanisms underlying the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm. Theological fatalism demonstrated the strongest negative correlations with internal locus of control ($r = -.52, p < .01$), individual self-efficacy ($r = -.47, p < .01$), collective efficacy ($r = -.51, p < .01$), and civic efficacy ($r = -.49, p < .01$), indicating that beliefs emphasizing divine control over life outcomes were powerfully associated with diminished sense of personal and collective agency. Conversely, theological fatalism showed strong positive correlations with external locus of control ($r = .64, p < .01$), suggesting that fatalistic theological frameworks reinforced attribution of outcomes to forces beyond individual or community control. Intrinsic religiosity, while showing negative correlations with civic engagement indicators, exhibited weaker associations (ranging from $r = -.14$ to $r = -.26$) compared to theological fatalism, suggesting that personal devotional commitment per se was less determinative of civic behavior than specific theological content. The psychological mediators demonstrated robust positive correlations with civic engagement dimensions, with collective efficacy showing particularly strong associations with collective action participation ($r = .71, p < .01$) and civic efficacy ($r = .73, p < .01$), indicating that confidence in community capacity was a critical prerequisite for organized civic engagement.

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Among the civic engagement indicators themselves, intercorrelations were substantial (ranging from $r=.64$ to $r=.76$), suggesting these behaviors formed a coherent syndrome of active citizenship.

These correlation patterns provided empirical support for the theoretical framework positing that specific dimensions of religious orientation, particularly theological fatalism, undermined civic agency through their effects on psychological mediators. The finding that theological fatalism exhibited stronger negative associations with civic engagement than intrinsic religiosity suggested an important distinction: the problem was not religious commitment or devotion itself, but rather specific theological content that framed human agency as limited or irrelevant in the face of divine sovereignty. This nuance had significant implications for intervention design, indicating that efforts to enhance civic engagement need not require secularization or reduction in religious practice, but rather theological reorientation toward frameworks that integrated divine providence with human responsibility and agency. The strong negative correlation between theological fatalism and internal locus of control ($r=-.52$) while showing strong positive correlation with external locus of control ($r=.64$) suggested that fatalistic theology functioned as a cognitive framework that systematically directed causal attributions away from individual and collective action toward external spiritual forces. This pattern illuminated why prayer might become a predominant response to societal challenges: if outcomes were perceived as primarily determined by divine will rather than human effort, religious practices aimed at influencing divine favor would logically appear more efficacious than civic action.

The robust positive correlations between psychological mediators and civic engagement dimensions confirmed that internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy served as critical psychological resources enabling active citizenship. The particularly strong relationship between collective efficacy and collective action ($r=.71$) was theoretically consistent, as participation in organized advocacy required not only personal confidence but belief that coordinated community effort could achieve meaningful change. These findings suggested that interventions seeking to reverse the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm would need to operate at both cognitive and behavioral levels: transforming theological frameworks that undermined agency while simultaneously building concrete experiences of successful collective action that reinforced efficacy beliefs. The substantial intercorrelations among civic engagement indicators ($r=.64$ to $r=.76$) revealed that political participation, community involvement, and collective action tended to co-occur, suggesting that civic engagement represented a generalized orientation rather than domain-specific behaviors. This pattern indicated potential for spillover effects, wherein interventions successfully mobilizing citizens in one domain might catalyze broader civic activation. However, the moderate strength of correlations between religious orientation and civic engagement (rather than deterministic relationships) also indicated that the pathway from theology to civic behavior was complex and likely moderated by additional contextual factors not captured in simple bivariate analysis, necessitating the multivariate modeling approach employed in the structural equation analysis.

Table 3: Structural Equation Modeling Results - Mediation Analysis of Religious Orientation, Psychological Factors, and Civic Engagement

Pathway	Standardized β	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI
Direct Effects: Religious Orientation → Psychological Mediators					

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Theological Fatalism → Internal Locus of Control	-.487	.018	-27.06	<.001	[-.522, -.452]
Theological Fatalism → Collective Efficacy	-.456	.019	-24.00	<.001	[-.493, -.419]
Intrinsic Religiosity → Internal Locus of Control	.124	.021	5.90	<.001	[.083, .165]
Intrinsic Religiosity → Collective Efficacy	.089	.022	4.05	<.001	[.046, .132]
Direct Effects: Psychological Mediators → Civic Engagement					
Internal Locus of Control → Civic Engagement	.312	.023	13.57	<.001	[.267, .357]
Collective Efficacy → Civic Engagement	.425	.024	17.71	<.001	[.378, .472]
Individual Self-Efficacy → Civic Engagement	.267	.025	10.68	<.001	[.218, .316]
Direct Effects: Religious Orientation → Civic Engagement					
Theological Fatalism → Civic Engagement (total)	-.389	.020	-19.45	<.001	[-.428, -.350]
Theological Fatalism → Civic Engagement (direct)	-.098	.024	-4.08	<.001	[-.145, -.051]
Intrinsic Religiosity → Civic Engagement (total)	.067	.023	2.91	.004	[.022, .112]
Intrinsic Religiosity → Civic Engagement (direct)	.142	.025	5.68	<.001	[.093, .191]
Indirect Effects (Mediation Pathways)					
Theological Fatalism → Internal LOC → Civic Engagement	-.152	.012	-12.67	<.001	[-.175, -.129]
Theological Fatalism → Collective Efficacy → Civic Engagement	-.194	.013	-14.92	<.001	[-.219, -.169]
Intrinsic Religiosity → Internal LOC → Civic Engagement	.039	.008	4.88	<.001	[.023, .055]
Intrinsic Religiosity → Collective Efficacy → Civic Engagement	.038	.009	4.22	<.001	[.020, .056]
Total Indirect Effect (Mediation)					

Theological Fatalism → Mediators → Civic Engagement	-.291	.018	-16.17	<.001	[-.326, -.256]
Intrinsic Religiosity → Mediators → Civic Engagement	-.075	.012	-6.25	<.001	[-.098, .052]

Note: Model Fit Indices - $\chi^2(247) = 1,876.34, p < .001$; CFI = .952; TLI = .946; RMSEA = .043 [90% CI: .041, .045]; SRMR = .038. Civic Engagement measured as latent construct with political participation, community involvement, and collective action as indicators.

The structural equation model demonstrated excellent fit to the data, with fit indices exceeding conventional thresholds (CFI=.952, TLI=.946, RMSEA=.043, SRMR=.038), indicating that the hypothesized mediation model adequately represented the relationships among religious orientation, psychological mediators, and civic engagement. The path coefficients revealed that theological fatalism exerted substantial negative direct effects on both internal locus of control ($\beta=-.487, p<.001$) and collective efficacy ($\beta=-.456, p<.001$), confirming that fatalistic theological beliefs significantly undermined the psychological foundations of agency. In contrast, intrinsic religiosity showed modest positive direct effects on these same mediators ($\beta=.124$ and $\beta=.089$ respectively, both $p<.001$), suggesting that personal devotional commitment, independent of fatalistic theology, actually enhanced agency-related psychological characteristics. The psychological mediators, in turn, demonstrated strong positive effects on civic engagement, with collective efficacy showing the largest coefficient ($\beta=.425, p<.001$), followed by internal locus of control ($\beta=.312, p<.001$) and individual self-efficacy ($\beta=.267, p<.001$). Critically, the analysis revealed significant mediation effects: the total effect of theological fatalism on civic engagement ($\beta=-.389$) was substantially reduced when accounting for the indirect pathways through psychological mediators (direct effect $\beta=-.098$), with the total indirect effect ($\beta=-.291$) accounting for approximately 75% of the total relationship, indicating strong mediation. The bootstrapped confidence intervals for all indirect effects excluded zero, confirming statistical significance of the mediation pathways.

The structural equation modeling results provided robust evidence for the psychological mechanisms through which the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm operated and suggested pathways for its reversal. The finding that theological fatalism's effect on civic engagement was predominantly mediated through psychological factors (75% mediation) revealed that fatalistic theology did not directly suppress civic behavior per se, but rather operated through its impact on cognitive frameworks related to control, efficacy, and agency. This distinction had profound implications: it suggested that the relationship between religious orientation and civic passivity was not immutable or culturally deterministic, but rather contingent on specific psychological processes that could potentially be targeted through intervention. The substantial negative effects of theological fatalism on internal locus of control and collective efficacy ($\beta=-.487$ and $\beta=-.456$ respectively) illuminated the precise mechanism: when individuals internalized theological frameworks emphasizing divine control and human powerlessness, they developed corresponding psychological orientations that attributed outcomes to external forces and doubted their capacity for effective action, which in turn inhibited engagement in civic activities requiring belief in human agency and collective capacity.

The contrasting pattern for intrinsic religiosity was theoretically important and practically significant. While intrinsic religiosity showed a small negative total effect on civic engagement ($\beta=.067$), this obscured a more complex dynamic: intrinsic religiosity actually had positive direct effects on civic engagement ($\beta=.142, p<.001$) when controlling for its

relationship with psychological mediators. The negative total indirect effect ($\beta=-.075$) indicated that intrinsic religiosity was associated with certain psychological orientations (likely through correlation with theological fatalism) that suppressed civic engagement, but the positive direct effect suggested that personal religious commitment itself contained resources supportive of civic participation. This finding challenged simplistic narratives portraying religiosity as inherently antithetical to civic engagement and instead pointed to the critical importance of theological content and cognitive frameworks. The strong effects of collective efficacy on civic engagement ($\beta=.425$) confirmed that beyond individual psychological characteristics, beliefs about community capacity were paramount for mobilizing collective action. These results suggested a multi-level intervention strategy for reversing the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm: theological education or reframing that maintained religious commitment while challenging fatalistic interpretations; experiential programs that built internal locus of control through demonstrating connections between effort and outcomes; and community organizing initiatives that created successful collective action experiences reinforcing collective efficacy. The excellent model fit and consistent significance of pathways across the 3,600-person sample provided confidence that these mechanisms operated broadly across the diverse African contexts studied, though the moderate proportion of variance explained ($R^2=.56$ for civic engagement) indicated that additional factors beyond religious orientation and psychological mediators also contributed to civic engagement patterns, warranting further investigation of structural, institutional, and contextual moderators.

Conclusion

This study provided compelling empirical evidence that the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm observed across African contexts operated through specific psychological mechanisms linking theological fatalism to diminished civic agency, while simultaneously revealing that religious commitment per se need not be antithetical to active citizenship. The structural equation modeling demonstrated that theological beliefs emphasizing divine determinism and human powerlessness undermined internal locus of control and collective efficacy, which in turn suppressed political participation, community involvement, and collective action, with these psychological factors mediating approximately 75% of the relationship between fatalistic theology and civic disengagement. Critically, the finding that intrinsic religiosity showed positive direct effects on civic engagement when controlling for fatalistic beliefs indicated that the pathway from faith to civic passivity was not inevitable but contingent on specific theological content and cognitive frameworks. The robust negative correlations between theological fatalism and all civic engagement dimensions, combined with below-midpoint means on civic participation indicators across the 3,600-person sample from six African nations, confirmed the breadth and severity of the civic agency deficit while the substantial variation in these measures suggested heterogeneity that could be leveraged for intervention. These results supported a theoretical framework wherein sustainable development in African contexts required not secularization but rather theological reorientation that integrated divine providence with human responsibility, psychological empowerment initiatives that built efficacy beliefs through concrete success experiences, and institutional reforms that created meaningful opportunities for citizen influence, thereby transforming passive expectancy into active agency while respecting the centrality of faith in African cultural identity.

Recommendations

Implement Theologically-Informed Civic Education Programs: Development organizations, faith-based institutions, and government agencies should collaboratively design and deploy civic education interventions that

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explicitly engage with religious worldviews rather than ignoring or opposing them, utilizing theological frameworks that emphasize human stewardship, co-creation with the divine, and faithful action as essential complements to prayer. These programs should partner with progressive religious leaders to develop curricula that reframe scriptural narratives around themes of prophetic advocacy, justice-seeking, and community responsibility, while providing concrete examples of how faith communities have historically mobilized for social change. Implementation should occur through existing religious institutions including churches, mosques, and faith-based community organizations to ensure cultural legitimacy and broad reach, with particular emphasis on youth and women's groups where attitudinal shifts may have greatest long-term impact.

Design Experiential Interventions Building Collective Efficacy: Governments and civil society organizations should prioritize community-driven development initiatives that provide populations with direct experiences of successful collective action, creating demonstration effects that challenge fatalistic worldviews and build confidence in community capacity. These interventions should begin with achievable, tangible projects where community effort demonstrably produces visible outcomes—such as infrastructure improvements, service delivery enhancements, or local governance reforms—that citizens can directly attribute to their collective agency rather than external assistance or divine intervention. Programs should incorporate structured reflection processes that help participants explicitly connect their actions to outcomes, thereby reinforcing internal locus of control and collective efficacy, while gradually scaling to more complex advocacy and accountability initiatives as psychological foundations strengthen.

Establish Institutional Mechanisms for Meaningful Civic Influence: African governments should undertake governance reforms that create genuine opportunities for citizen participation in decision-making processes, as civic engagement will remain limited when citizens accurately perceive that their participation has minimal impact on actual outcomes. These reforms should include participatory budgeting mechanisms at local levels, citizen oversight boards for service delivery, transparent accountability systems with accessible grievance procedures, and constitutional protections for civic organization and advocacy. International development partners should condition assistance on measurable improvements in civic space and citizen voice, while supporting capacity building for both government institutions to engage citizens constructively and civil society organizations to mobilize communities effectively, recognizing that reversing the civic expectancy-prayer paradigm requires not only psychological and cultural transformation but also structural changes that validate and reward active citizenship.

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