

## THE SOCIAL ROLE OF RELIGION: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

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***Abstract.*** *This article examines the social role of religion and the influence of religious organizations in the political and economic spheres of modern society. Based on sociological theories by Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, and José Casanova, as well as reports from the Pew Research Center and the World Bank, the study analyzes how religion continues to shape governance, social cohesion, and economic ethics in the 21st century. The paper also explores the participation of religious institutions in social welfare, interfaith dialogue, and development initiatives. The findings indicate that religion remains a significant moral and organizational force that affects political stability, civic values, and inclusive economic growth.<sup>1</sup>*

***Keywords:*** *religion, social role, religious organizations, politics, economy, ethics, development, civil society.*

**Introduction.** Religion has been one of the central elements of human civilization, influencing law, morality, and social order throughout history. From ancient empires to modern democracies, religious institutions have played a major role in legitimizing political authority and shaping collective identity.<sup>2</sup> Even in secular societies, religion continues to provide ethical foundations and a sense of belonging that strengthen civil structures. The relationship between religion,

politics, and economics is complex — involving cooperation, tension, and mutual transformation.<sup>3</sup>

**Theoretical Framework.** Max Weber, in his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, argued that religious ethics can stimulate economic development by promoting discipline, responsibility, and rational organization.<sup>4</sup> Émile Durkheim viewed religion as a source of social solidarity, while José Casanova emphasized its public role in modern societies beyond private belief.<sup>5</sup> These theories reveal that religion is not only a spiritual system but also a social institution that influences governance, justice, and development.

**Religious Influence in Politics.** Religious organizations often act as intermediaries between the state and the people. In many countries, they promote moral responsibility among politicians and citizens. In democratic systems, churches, mosques, and temples engage in advocacy for social justice, environmental ethics, and human rights.<sup>6</sup> In Islamic countries, for instance, religious councils provide moral guidance to legislation, while in Western democracies, faith-based lobbies influence debates on education, family, and bioethics. This involvement reflects religion's enduring political legitimacy and capacity to mobilize communities around shared values.

**Economic Contributions of Religious Institutions.** Religious organizations play an increasingly visible role in the economic life of societies. They manage large networks of schools, hospitals, and charities, contributing significantly to social welfare.<sup>7</sup> Faith-based NGOs such as Caritas, Islamic Relief, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee operate across continents to alleviate poverty, deliver healthcare, and promote education.

According to World Bank reports, religious institutions collectively manage billions of dollars in social aid annually.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, religious ethics influence business behavior through principles of honesty, charity (zakat, tzedakah), and stewardship, supporting fair economic systems and responsible consumption.

**Religion and Social Development.** Beyond political and economic dimensions, religion also supports community building and cultural identity.

Religious festivals, educational programs, and interfaith dialogues strengthen trust and cooperation among citizens.<sup>9</sup> In countries like Uzbekistan, Indonesia, and Brazil, religious institutions partner with the government in promoting youth education, family stability, and moral culture. These collaborations demonstrate how religion contributes to national unity and resilience.

**Challenges and Criticisms.** However, the political and economic engagement of religion is not without controversy. Some critics argue that religious influence can lead to political bias, restriction of pluralism, or misuse of moral authority.<sup>10</sup> Economic activities by religious institutions sometimes raise questions about transparency and accountability. Therefore, modern governance must balance religious freedom with secular equality, ensuring that faith-based initiatives contribute to public good rather than division.

**Conclusion.** Religion remains a vital social institution that bridges morality, politics, and economic life. Its influence is visible in public ethics, social solidarity, and developmental projects across the world. The challenge of the 21st century is to harness this power responsibly — encouraging interfaith cooperation, promoting transparency, and integrating ethical values into governance and economics.<sup>11</sup> Properly guided, religion continues to serve as one of humanity's strongest forces for peace, justice, and sustainable progress.

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