



[Digital Transformation, Sustainable Innovations and Development in the African Continent]

[Thursday 31st July and Friday 1st August 2025]

[KWUST 2025 Conference Proceedings]

ABSTRACT NO. 36

The Rise of Theocracy in Kenya: The Nexus of Religion and Political Power from 2013 to 2024

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the increasing influence of religion in Kenyan politics, focusing on how President William Ruto and the Kenya Kwanza administration have leveraged it to promote their political agenda. Utilizing existing documents, daily newspaper updates, and mass media discussions with politicians, the study employs both chronological and thematic analyses covering the years 2013 through 2024. It argues that by strategically using religion to frame their campaign around themes of divine destiny, hope, and moral revival, Ruto and the Kenya Kwanza administration successfully won the 2022 election. The paper investigates the early relationship between religion and politics, beginning with the 2013 elections. It highlights the use of prayer rallies during International Criminal Court (ICC) cases and the growing concentration of religious power within political campaigns. Ruto's strategic alignment with evangelical churches following the "Handshake" controversy in 2018 reinforced the role of religious discourse in politics. The paper examines how religious symbolism and financial support for churches transformed Kenya's political discourse post-2022, with Kenya Kwanza increasingly depending on religious platforms for political legitimacy. However, emerging tensions (2023–2024) suggest a shift in church-state relations as religious leaders begin to criticize economic hardships, corruption, and poor governance. Generally, the article argues that while religion has served as an effective tool for political mobilization, it is not a viable long-term strategy for the Kenya Kwanza administration. The over-reliance on religious discourse risks undermining public trust, damaging the government, and alienating secular groups within society.

Key Words:

Theocracy, Religion, Governance, Clergy, Politics, Gen Z.

