Between Divine Obligation and Democratic Citizenship: Religious and Civic Priorities Among Ghanaian Seventh-Day Adventists

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ABSTRACT:

The relationship between religious obligation and democratic citizenship presents a significant ethical question for religious communities whose practices may conflict with the scheduling of public institutions. This study examines how Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventists negotiate Sabbath observance and civic participation, particularly when elections occur on Saturday. Using survey data from 670 respondents collected in July 2024, the study employs a quantitative descriptive design, supplemented by thematic interpretation of open-ended responses. Findings indicate that 93.1% of respondents considered Sabbath observance very important, while 82.5% affirmed the importance of voting and other civic duties. When asked how they reconciled these commitments, 57.3% prioritized religious obligation, 35.2% believed a balance could be achieved, and 4.0% prioritized civic participation. Among the 140 respondents who reported having faced Sabbath-day voting, 57 indicated that they voted, 79 reported that they did not, and four selected "not applicable." Furthermore, 68.4% agreed or strongly agreed that Sabbath-day voting could be perceived as compromising their faith, while 57.2% rejected the possibility of justifying such voting under certain circumstances. Early voting and postponement were the most frequently preferred alternatives. The study argues that the relationship between religious conviction and civic responsibility is characterized by competing obligations, interpretive diversity, and practical constraints rather than a simple opposition between faith and citizenship. It recommends clearer theological guidance, pastoral education, and constructive engagement between church leadership and electoral authorities. Because the sample's representativeness and individual-level relationships have not been established, the findings are interpreted as descriptive evidence rather than causal or population-wide conclusions.

Keywords: Sabbath observance, democratic citizenship, civic participation, Seventh-day Adventists, Ghana, religious ethics, electoral accommodation

INTRODUCTION

Religion and democratic citizenship intersect in complex ways when the practices of a religious community conflict with the schedules or expectations of public institutions (Bolzendahl et al., 2019). For Seventh-day Adventists, the seventh-day Sabbath is a central expression of religious identity and obedience to God (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990, 2020). For citizens in a democratic society, voting represents an important means of participating in the selection of political leaders and influencing public affairs. When elections are scheduled on Saturday, these commitments can create an ethical dilemma (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995). How can believers remain faithful to their religious convictions while fulfilling their perceived responsibilities as citizens?

In Ghana, elections are a significant component of democratic governance. Electoral participation provides citizens with an opportunity to influence political representation, public policy, and national leadership. Yet the scheduling of elections on a Saturday may create difficulties for members of religious communities that observe the Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset (Oppong et al., 2025). For Adventists, the issue extends beyond convenience because Sabbath observance is associated with creation, worship, rest, spiritual allegiance, and the authority of Scripture.

The resulting dilemma cannot be adequately explained by assuming that religious people are indifferent to public

affairs or that civic participation necessarily contradicts religious faith. Members may value both commitments but disagree about how to reconcile them. Some may regard voting on the Sabbath as incompatible with their religious convictions, whereas others may consider voting a civic responsibility that can be fulfilled under particular circumstances. Still others may seek institutional alternatives that allow them to maintain Sabbath observance without relinquishing electoral participation. The central question is therefore how Ghanaian Adventists prioritize religious obligation and democratic citizenship when the two appear to conflict. Understanding this relationship is important for practical theology, Christian ethics, religious studies, and public policy. It also has implications for church leadership, which must provide theological guidance without disregarding members' responsibilities within the wider society.

This study examines survey responses from 670 Ghanaian Adventists concerning Sabbath observance, civic participation, perceived religious compromise, salvation, reported voting behavior, and possible electoral alternatives. It addresses three research questions: How do Ghanaian Adventists assess the relative importance of Sabbath observance and civic participation? How do respondents reconcile religious obligations with democratic responsibilities when elections occur on the Sabbath? What theological, pastoral, and institutional implications emerge from their reported attitudes and experiences? The study contributes to scholarship on religion and citizenship by examining a concrete situation in which religious practice and democratic participation may come into tension. Rather than assuming that religious and civic commitments are inherently incompatible, it investigates how respondents interpret, prioritize, and seek to reconcile them.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sabbath Observance and Adventist Identity

The Sabbath occupies a central place in Seventh-day Adventist theology. Fundamental Belief 20 describes the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial of creation, a sign of redemption and sanctification, and a day dedicated to rest, worship, and ministry (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, n.d.-a). Its biblical foundations include Genesis 2:1–3, Exodus 20:8–11, and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. These passages associate the Sabbath with divine creation, covenantal obedience, and liberation. Mark 2:27–28 presents the Sabbath as a divine gift for humanity and identifies Jesus as its Lord. Matthew 12:1–12 further illustrates the need to understand Sabbath observance in relation to human need, mercy, and the purpose of divine law. Within Adventist theology, Sabbath observance is therefore more than abstention from employment. It expresses a particular understanding of time, worship, spiritual identity, and allegiance to God. The General Conference statement on Sabbath observance provides a theological framework for understanding the day as sacred time devoted to communion with God and others (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, n.d.-b).

This theological significance explains why Sabbath-day voting may be perceived as a matter of religious integrity rather than merely an inconvenience. However, affirming the sanctity of the Sabbath does not automatically settle every question concerning activities undertaken on that day. Theological application requires consideration of the purpose and character of an activity, its necessity, its timing, and the availability of alternatives.

Voting is a distinctive case because it involves participation in a public political process rather than ordinary commercial employment. Adventists may agree on the importance of Sabbath observance while disagreeing about whether voting constitutes an inappropriate activity, whether exceptional circumstances matter, or whether alternative voting arrangements should be pursued.

Democratic Citizenship and Religious Responsibility

Democratic citizenship involves more than possession of legal status. It includes participation in public life, respect for institutions, and the exercise of rights and responsibilities. Voting is one of the most visible expressions of this participation, although it is not the only means through which citizens contribute to society.

Religious traditions can provide moral resources for civic engagement. Biblical passages such as Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1–7, and 1 Peter 2:13–17 are frequently considered in discussions of the relationship between

religious allegiance and civil authority. These texts raise questions about the obligations of believers to government and the limits of political authority when civic expectations conflict with religious conscience.

In Ghana, the relationship between religion and democracy is an important area of scholarly inquiry. Haynes (2025), for example, examines the relationship between religious morality, political influence, and democratic institutions in Ghana. Although that study addresses a different religious and political context, it demonstrates the importance of examining how religious convictions intersect with public authority and democratic norms. The present study approaches the issue from the perspective of individual religious commitments and electoral participation. Its focus is not whether Adventists should withdraw from public life but how they understand civic responsibilities when election arrangements appear to conflict with Sabbath observance.

Religious Conviction and Behavior

The distinction between belief and action is important for understanding religious practice. People may profess strong convictions yet respond differently when those convictions encounter competing obligations. Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior provides a framework for examining this relationship. The theory proposes that behavior is influenced by intentions, which are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Applied to Sabbath-day voting, attitudes concern whether respondents believe voting on the Sabbath is acceptable. Subjective norms concern perceived expectations from church leaders, family, fellow members, and society. Perceived behavioral control concerns whether respondents believe they can fulfill civic responsibilities without violating their convictions, including whether alternative voting arrangements are available.

This framework is useful because it distinguishes a difference between stated values and behavior from a demonstrated contradiction within an individual. Aggregate data may show that most members value Sabbath observance while some report voting on the Sabbath. However, individual inconsistency can only be established by comparing each respondent's beliefs with that respondent's reported conduct. The present study uses the theory as an interpretive framework. It does not claim to have statistically tested the full theory or established the causal mechanisms underlying respondents' decisions.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Data Collection

The study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design, supplemented by thematic interpretation of open-ended responses. Data were collected in July 2024 using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire link was distributed via various WhatsApp platforms to reach Seventh-day Adventist members across Ghana. The instrument covered demographic characteristics, church participation, Sabbath observance, civic responsibilities, voting experiences, perceived religious compromise, beliefs about salvation, Sabbath-day voting, and preferred alternatives.

Participants and Sampling Procedures

The study obtained 670 responses, comprising 390 church members (58.2%), 161 elders (24.0%), 65 administrators (9.7%), and 54 pastors (8.1%). Respondents included 555 males (82.8%) and 115 females (17.2%). The largest age group was 26–35 years (41.3%), while 72.7% reported at least 20 years of church membership. Since the questionnaire was distributed through WhatsApp platforms, participation depended on access to the link and willingness to respond. Accordingly, the study used a non-probability, voluntary-response sampling approach. Although the survey invited participation from Seventh-day Adventists across Ghana, recruitment depended on respondents' access to the survey link, which was disseminated through various WhatsApp platforms.

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize responses. For multiple-response questions, each option

was counted separately; therefore, percentages could exceed 100%. Analysis distinguished the full sample from the 140 respondents who reported encountering a situation requiring a decision about Sabbath-day voting. Open-ended responses were examined for recurring themes relating to religious conviction, civic responsibility, electoral scheduling, and institutional guidance.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The study received ethical approval before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from respondents. Confidentiality was maintained in handling the collected data. As a descriptive study based on self-reported responses and voluntary online participation, the findings do not establish causal relationships and should not be generalized to all Seventh-day Adventists in Ghana without appropriate qualification.

RESULTS

The Importance of Sabbath Observance

Sabbath observance received strong affirmation from respondents. Of the 670 participants, 624 (93.1%) described it as very important, 44 (6.6%) as important, and two (0.3%) as somewhat important. The finding indicates that Sabbath observance occupies a prominent place in the religious identity of the surveyed participants. It is consistent with the centrality of the Sabbath in official Adventist theology (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, n.d.-a). However, the finding measures stated importance rather than the precise manner in which respondents apply Sabbath principles to every situation. It establishes a strong collective commitment but does not, by itself, determine whether a particular civic activity is regarded as permissible.

The Importance of Civic Participation

A total of 553 respondents (82.5%) affirmed that participation in voting and other civic duties was important. Ninety-seven (14.5%) answered no, while 20 (3.0%) were unsure. Furthermore, 612 respondents (91.3%) reported having participated in voting during a national or local election at some point. Among the 612 who reported previous voting, 336 said they voted in every election, 187 in most elections, 75 occasionally, and 14 rarely. These results demonstrate that electoral participation is familiar to a substantial proportion of the sample. They also indicate that strong religious commitment coexists with considerable reported participation in democratic processes.

The findings challenge a simplistic assumption that prioritizing religious obligations necessarily means rejecting civic involvement. Most respondents considered both Sabbath observance and civic participation important. The principal issue is how they should be reconciled when election day falls on the Sabbath.

Prioritizing Religious Obligation and Civic Responsibility

When asked how they reconciled civic participation with the religious obligation to keep the Sabbath holy, 384 respondents (57.3%) indicated that religious obligation should be prioritized. Another 236 (35.2%) believed that a balance could be achieved. Twenty-seven (4.0%) prioritized civic participation, while 23 (3.4%) were unsure. These findings reveal a clear preference for religious obligation within the sample, but they also demonstrate considerable diversity in how respondents understand the relationship between religious and civic duties.

The 57.3% who prioritized religious obligation may regard Sabbath observance as a non-negotiable expression of obedience to God. The 35.2% who believed that a balance could be achieved may consider it possible to participate in civic life while preserving the purposes of the Sabbath. The small proportion prioritizing civic participation suggests that comparatively few respondents explicitly placed civic responsibility above religious obligation in their stated reconciliation strategy. These interpretations remain provisional because the questionnaire did not require respondents to provide a detailed explanation for every selection.

Perceived Religious Compromise and Salvation

Respondents were asked whether participation in civic duties such as voting on the Sabbath could be seen as compromising their faith. A total of 357 (53.3%) strongly agreed and 101 (15.1%) agreed. Combined, 458 respondents (68.4%) expressed agreement. By contrast, 95 (14.2%) disagreed, 60 (9.0%) strongly disagreed, and 57 (8.5%) were neutral. The results indicate that many respondents perceived Sabbath-day voting as potentially threatening religious integrity. Nevertheless, the responses also reveal disagreement over whether voting necessarily constitutes a compromise of faith.

A related question asked whether voting on the Sabbath could affect a person's salvation. Of the respondents, 341 (50.9%) answered yes, 238 (35.5%) answered no, and 91 (13.6%) were unsure.

This result should not be interpreted as an established doctrinal judgment. It represents respondents' perceptions of the spiritual consequences of Sabbath-day voting. The finding suggests that the issue carries considerable theological significance for many participants, but it does not reveal whether respondents distinguish between salvation by grace and obedience as a response to grace. A sound pastoral response should therefore address the seriousness with which members regard Sabbath observance while avoiding unsupported claims about the eternal destiny of individuals.

Conditional Justification of Sabbath-day Voting

When asked whether voting on the Sabbath could be justified under certain circumstances, 383 respondents (57.2%) answered no, 190 (28.4%) answered yes, and 97 (14.5%) were unsure. The majority rejected conditional justification, indicating a relatively restrictive interpretation of Sabbath-day voting. Nevertheless, more than one-quarter accepted the possibility of exceptions.

Open-ended comments provided examples of the reasoning used by some respondents. Some emphasized civic responsibility, the selection of political leaders, or the potential effects of governance on the wider community. Others suggested that voting after worship or after sunset could help reconcile the two obligations. Some referred to biblical teachings concerning civil authority, while others emphasized obedience to God's law. These comments illustrate interpretive diversity within the sample. They do not establish that every respondent who accepted conditional justification relied on the same rationale. Nor should individual comments be treated as official Adventist doctrine.

Reported Experiences with Sabbath-day Voting

Of the 670 respondents, 140 (20.9%) reported having faced a situation in which they had to vote on the Sabbath, while 530 (79.1%) answered no. Among the 140 respondents who reported facing the situation, 57 (40.7%) said they voted, 79 (56.4%) said they did not vote, and four (2.9%) selected “not applicable.” Among the 136 substantive yes-or-no responses, 41.9% reported voting and 58.1% reported not voting. This result provides a concrete illustration of the dilemma. Some respondents participated in voting when they faced the situation, whereas a larger proportion reported abstaining. However, the figures do not establish that all those who voted acted against their own religious convictions. The survey does not provide a complete individual-level comparison between prior beliefs and actual behavior, nor does it establish the exact circumstances of every voting experience. Some respondents may have considered voting permissible under their interpretation of Sabbath principles, while others may have acted despite reservations. The evidence therefore demonstrates a practical tension between religious commitments and reported civic behavior, but it does not independently establish personal inconsistency among every respondent who voted.

Preferred Alternatives

Respondents were asked what alternatives they would recommend for Adventists who wished to vote without voting on the Sabbath. Early voting was selected by 242 respondents (36.1%), postponement by 209 (31.2%), absentee voting by 111 (16.6%), and other options by 108 (16.1%).

The preference for early voting suggests that many respondents would welcome an arrangement that allows them to exercise their electoral rights without facing a Sabbath conflict. The substantial support for postponement similarly indicates that the problem is understood by many as one requiring institutional accommodation rather than simply a personal decision.

Nevertheless, the alternatives proposed by respondents must be distinguished from the options currently available under Ghanaian electoral law. The Electoral Commission of Ghana provides special voting for eligible voters whose election-related duties prevent them from voting at their regular polling stations on election day. This arrangement is not a general early-voting option for all citizens. Proxy voting is also subject to specific requirements (Electoral Commission of Ghana, n.d.). The survey therefore identifies preferences that could inform dialogue with electoral authorities, but it does not establish that every proposed alternative is currently legally available.

DISCUSSION

Religious and Civic Priorities as Competing but Overlapping Commitments

The central finding of this study is that Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventists who participated in the survey generally value both Sabbath observance and democratic participation, although they differ in how they prioritize these commitments when electoral arrangements create a conflict. Of the 670 respondents, 624 (93.1%) described Sabbath observance as very important, while 553 (82.5%) affirmed the importance of voting and other civic duties. Furthermore, 612 respondents (91.3%) reported having participated in a national or local election. These findings suggest that religious commitment and democratic citizenship are not necessarily perceived as mutually exclusive. Rather, the tension emerges when participation in an electoral process is perceived to conflict with the religious obligation to keep the Sabbath holy.

The responses concerning the reconciliation of religious and civic responsibilities reveal three distinguishable positions. A total of 384 respondents (57.3%) believed that religious obligation should be prioritized, 236 (35.2%) considered a balance achievable, and 27 (4.0%) prioritized civic participation. The remaining 23 respondents (3.4%) were unsure. Although religious obligation was the dominant preference, the substantial proportion favoring reconciliation indicates that respondents did not approach the dilemma uniformly. The findings therefore point to differences in the practical interpretation of religious and civic responsibilities rather than a straightforward division between religious commitment and democratic engagement.

The individual-level analysis provides further insight into these differences. Among respondents who prioritized religious obligation, 265 of 384 (69.0%) believed that voting on the Sabbath could affect salvation, compared with 58 of 236 (24.6%) among those who believed a balance could be achieved. Similarly, 276 of the 384 respondents who prioritized religious obligation (71.9%) rejected the proposition that Sabbath-day voting could be justified under certain circumstances. By contrast, 110 of the 236 respondents who favored balancing the two responsibilities (46.6%) believed that Sabbath-day voting could be justified under certain circumstances.

These associations indicate that respondents' general approaches to reconciling religious and civic obligations were related to their judgments about the permissibility and perceived spiritual consequences of Sabbath-day voting. A chi-square test identified an association between reconciliation preferences and perceptions of whether Sabbath-day voting could affect salvation, ($\chi^2(6)=130.97,\ p<.001$), with Cramér's ($V=.313$). Reconciliation preferences were also associated with views about whether Sabbath-day voting could be justified under certain circumstances, ($\chi^2(6)=109.35,\ p<.001$), with Cramér's ($V=.286$). These are associations of moderate magnitude, although the sparse expected cell counts in some categories warrant caution in interpreting the omnibus tests.

The findings should not be interpreted to mean that respondents who prioritize religious obligation are necessarily less committed to democracy or that those who favor balancing the two responsibilities are less religious. The results instead suggest that the same general commitment to religious observance and civic participation can lead to different practical judgments. A respondent may regard voting as essential to democratic

citizenship while believing that participation on the Sabbath is inappropriate. Another may consider the purpose and timing of the activity, the availability of alternative arrangements, or the implications of political decisions for the religious community when deciding whether voting is permissible.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a useful framework for interpreting this pattern. Ajzen's (1991) model proposes that behavioral intentions are associated with attitudes toward a behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the present context, attitudes concern whether respondents regard Sabbath-day voting as religiously permissible or objectionable; subjective norms concern perceived expectations from church leaders, fellow believers, family members, and the wider community; and perceived behavioral control concerns whether respondents believe they can participate electorally without compromising their religious commitments.

The observed association between religious priorities and judgments about the permissibility of Sabbath-day voting is consistent with the relevance of attitudes to behavioral decisions. However, the study did not formally measure or test the complete relationships specified by the TPB. It is therefore more appropriate to use the theory as an interpretive framework than to claim that the findings empirically validate its proposed mechanisms.

Theological Interpretation, Religious Conscience, and Denominational Position

The findings raise an important theological question: how should Seventh-day Adventists apply Sabbath principles when a civic responsibility coincides with sacred time? Within Adventist theology, the Sabbath is associated with worship, rest, communion with God, and service to others. Biblical passages such as Mark 2:27–28 and Matthew 12:1–12 provide important resources for theological reflection by emphasizing the Sabbath's significance alongside human need and compassionate action. Nevertheless, applying these passages to electoral participation requires contextual interpretation. Neither passage directly addresses modern voting procedures, and their relevance should be established through theological argument rather than an assumed equivalence between voting and the activities described in the Gospel narratives.

The survey reveals substantial variation in respondents' interpretations of this question. While 57.3% prioritized religious obligation, 35.2% believed that religious and civic responsibilities could be reconciled. This variation suggests that respondents differ in how they translate their religious commitments into practical decisions. Some may understand Sabbath observance as requiring abstention from electoral activities throughout the sacred hours. Others may consider the purpose of voting, the availability of alternative arrangements, and whether participation would interfere with worship. The quantitative data establish differences in reported judgments, but they do not independently establish the theological reasoning behind every response.

The open-ended comments provide additional insight into these interpretations. One respondent who considered Sabbath-day voting potentially justifiable wrote: “If it can be done in a solemn way that will not thwart the purpose of observing and keeping the Sabbath Holy.” This response suggests a conditional interpretation in which the permissibility of voting depends on whether the activity is perceived to preserve the purpose of Sabbath observance. The respondent does not simply dismiss the Sabbath obligation; rather, the comment indicates an attempt to reconcile the religious principle with a civic responsibility under particular conditions. Another respondent expressed a contrasting position: “We should keep the sabbath day and make it only.” Although the statement is brief, it illustrates the categorical language used by some respondents to express the priority of Sabbath observance. Read alongside the conditional response, it demonstrates that participants approached the same dilemma through different interpretations of religious obligation. These quotations are illustrative rather than representative of every respondent within either position.

Three levels of analysis must therefore remain distinct. First, theological principles refer to biblical and doctrinal considerations concerning Sabbath observance, obedience, conscience, salvation, and responsibility toward others. Second, individual religious interpretations concern how respondents apply those principles to the circumstances of electoral participation. Third, official denominational positions refer to statements or policies formally adopted or authorized by the relevant church bodies. Although these levels may overlap, they are not interchangeable. Individual survey responses cannot establish an official denominational position, and a biblical

principle should not be presented as a direct institutional ruling on Sabbath-day voting without supporting documentation.

This distinction is particularly important when interpreting the finding that 341 respondents (50.9%) believed that Sabbath-day voting could affect salvation. Another 238 (35.5%) answered no, while 91 (13.6%) were unsure. These results demonstrate that the issue carries perceived spiritual significance for many participants, but they do not establish that respondents share a single understanding of the relationship between Sabbath observance and salvation.

The individual-level analysis reinforces this distinction. Among respondents who prioritized religious obligation, 69.0% believed that Sabbath-day voting could affect salvation. However, the corresponding proportion among those who favored balancing religious and civic responsibilities was 24.6%. This association indicates that perceptions of salvation were closely related to respondents' broader approaches to the dilemma. It does not establish whether a particular theological interpretation caused respondents to adopt one position or whether their views about salvation followed from an already established religious conviction.

Within the broader Adventist theological framework, Ephesians 2:8–10 presents salvation as God's gift of grace received through faith and connects the resulting life of faith with good works. This distinction provides a basis for discussing obedience without treating an individual electoral decision, considered in isolation, as an automatic determinant of eternal destiny. Nevertheless, it would be equally inappropriate to use this principle to dismiss the seriousness with which respondents approach Sabbath observance. The findings point instead to the need for careful pastoral teaching on grace, obedience, religious conscience, and the practical application of biblical principles.

The open-ended responses also reveal a desire for clearer denominational communication. One participant stated: “Members should not be left to decide. There should be official communique from the church leadership in Ghana.” This comment indicates that at least some respondents want institutional guidance rather than having to resolve the dilemma entirely through individual judgment. It also illustrates the distinction between individual interpretation and official denominational position: respondents may seek authoritative clarification precisely because they do not regard their personal conclusions as sufficient to settle the question for the wider church. Pastoral and denominational engagement should therefore clarify the relevant biblical principles, identify any applicable official statements through direct documentary evidence, and acknowledge the limits of what can be inferred about individual salvation. If no authoritative denominational statement specifically addresses Sabbath-day voting, the discussion should acknowledge that limitation rather than attribute a particular position to the church.

Civic Participation, Electoral Behavior, and the Theory of Planned Behavior

The survey indicates that civic participation is important to most respondents. A total of 553 participants (82.5%) affirmed the importance of voting and other civic duties, and 612 (91.3%) reported having voted in a national or local election. These findings suggest that democratic participation is widely recognized as a meaningful civic responsibility within the participating sample. Voting can be understood as a means of influencing decisions concerning education, healthcare, security, economic conditions, public accountability, and religious freedom. However, the importance assigned to voting in principle does not necessarily establish an intention to participate in every election or a willingness to vote when polling conflicts with religious observance.

The individual-level results demonstrate why these distinctions matter. Among respondents who prioritized religious obligation, 353 of 384 (91.9%) reported having voted in a national or local election. The corresponding proportions were 220 of 236 (93.2%) among respondents who believed that a balance could be achieved and 23 of 27 (85.2%) among those who prioritized civic participation. Although the overall association between reconciliation preferences and having ever voted was statistically significant, (\chi^2(3)=16.31,\ p=.001), its magnitude was small (Cramér's (V=.156)). Furthermore, the very small number of respondents in some categories, particularly those unsure about reconciliation, requires caution.

The substantive implication is that prioritizing religious obligation does not necessarily correspond to general electoral disengagement. Respondents who prioritize the Sabbath may still participate in elections when polling does not conflict with their religious commitments. The more relevant distinction concerns participation under the specific circumstances in which voting coincides with the Sabbath.

Among the 140 respondents who reported having faced the Sabbath-day voting issue, 57 reported voting on the Sabbath, 79 reported not voting, and four selected "Not applicable." Excluding the four non-applicable responses, 57 of 136 respondents (41.9%) reported voting, while 79 (58.1%) reported abstaining. These figures reveal a more differentiated pattern than the overall participation rate: a majority of respondents who had faced this particular situation reported not voting on the Sabbath, even though most respondents in the full sample reported having voted in a national or local election.

Religious priorities were strongly associated with reported behavior within this subgroup. Among the 82 respondents who prioritized religious obligation and provided a valid yes-or-no response about Sabbath-day voting, 16 (19.5%) reported voting on the Sabbath, compared with 66 (80.5%) who did not. Among the 48 respondents who believed a balance could be achieved, 36 (75.0%) reported voting and 12 (25.0%) did not. Four of the five respondents who prioritized civic participation reported voting, although this subgroup is too small to support a stable generalization.

A binary comparison of those prioritizing religious obligation with all other respondents who provided valid answers found a strong association with reported Sabbath-day voting (Fisher's exact test, ($p<.001$)). The estimated odds ratio was approximately 0.08, indicating substantially lower odds of reported Sabbath-day voting among those prioritizing religious obligation. This result should be interpreted as an association within the observed subgroup, not as evidence that religious priorities cause abstention. The comparison also combines several distinct alternative positions, and the small numbers in some categories limit more detailed interpretation.

Perceptions of salvation were similarly associated with reported Sabbath-day voting. Of the 71 respondents who believed Sabbath-day voting could affect salvation and provided a valid yes-or-no response, 13 (18.3%) reported voting on the Sabbath, compared with 58 (81.7%) who did not. By contrast, among the 53 respondents who believed Sabbath-day voting would not affect salvation, 38 (71.7%) reported voting and 15 (28.3%) did not. The association was statistically significant (Fisher's exact test, ($p<.001$)). This finding suggests that perceptions of spiritual consequences were closely related to reported electoral decisions among respondents who had faced the Sabbath-day voting dilemma. It does not establish whether those perceptions preceded the decision or how respondents interpreted the relationship between voting and salvation.

Views on conditional justification were also associated with reported behavior. Among respondents who believed Sabbath-day voting could be justified under certain circumstances, 35 of 47 (74.5%) reported voting. Among those who rejected such justification, 17 of 79 (21.5%) reported voting. This association was statistically significant (Fisher's exact test, ($p<.001$)). The pattern suggests that respondents' judgments about the permissibility of voting were closely related to their reported behavior in the specific situation they had encountered.

These subgroup findings offer a more precise contribution to the TPB-informed interpretation. Attitudes toward Sabbath-day voting appear relevant to the distinction between general civic participation and participation under conditions of religious conflict. A respondent may hold a favorable attitude toward voting generally but an unfavorable attitude toward voting during the Sabbath. Similarly, an individual may recognize civic responsibility but perceive that fulfilling it on the Sabbath would violate a religious commitment.

Subjective norms may also be relevant. Respondents who perceive strong expectations from church leaders or fellow believers to refrain from Sabbath-day voting may experience a different decision-making context from those who perceive greater acceptance of conditional participation. The request for official denominational guidance in the open-ended responses illustrates the perceived importance of institutional communication. Nevertheless, the survey did not formally establish whether perceived social expectations were associated with reported behavior.

Perceived behavioral control offers a further possible explanation. Respondents may differ in whether they believe voting can be completed without interfering with worship or whether practical constraints make reconciliation impossible. One participant who considered voting potentially compatible with Sabbath observance wrote: “It's just a few minutes exercise You don't have to waste the whole day there, after divine service u can pass by and vote or better still go to the polling station earlier to vote and then go to church.” This comment reflects a practical interpretation in which the duration and timing of electoral participation are considered relevant to the decision. It contrasts with the views of respondents who regarded the activity as incompatible with Sabbath observance regardless of its duration. Such comments help illuminate possible differences in attitudes and perceived control, although they do not establish that the TPB constructs were measured or formally tested.

The findings therefore support using the TPB as an interpretive framework for understanding how religious convictions and practical circumstances may intersect with electoral decisions. They do not demonstrate that the theory's underlying relationships have been empirically validated in this sample. Future research would need to measure attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, behavioral intentions, and actual or self-reported participation as distinct variables to test those relationships more rigorously.

The Contextual Contribution of Open-Ended Responses

The open-ended responses provide important context for interpreting the quantitative associations. They reveal not only disagreement about the permissibility of Sabbath-day voting but also different understandings of civic duty, religious obligation, practical accommodation, and institutional responsibility. One respondent defended the importance of voting by linking electoral participation to the consequences of political leadership: “It's our civic duty, if we don't vote to select quality leaders other(s) will vote to select foolish leader who will make laws that will affect Adventist adversely.” This response presents voting as a means of protecting the interests of the religious community and influencing decisions that may affect its members. The comment suggests that, for at least some respondents, civic participation is not merely an individual political preference but a responsibility connected to the welfare and religious freedom of the wider community.

A contrasting perspective emphasized the need to preserve religious observance: “Let's push for early voting, else there's no way I'll exchange my Sabbath observance to joining a long queue to vote on the Sabbath.” This statement is particularly relevant to the institutional dimension of the findings. Rather than simply rejecting voting, the respondent proposes early voting as a way to reconcile electoral participation with Sabbath observance. The comment suggests that some opposition to Sabbath-day voting may concern the available arrangements rather than a rejection of democratic participation itself.

These two comments illustrate distinct but overlapping concerns. The first emphasizes the consequences of political decisions and the importance of exercising electoral influence. The second emphasizes the need for arrangements that enable participation without compromising religious conviction. Together, they demonstrate why the issue should not be reduced to a binary opposition between faith and citizenship.

The comments also suggest that the perceived conflict is partly institutional. Several respondents called for special voting arrangements or clearer communication from church leadership. One participant stated: “Adventist should be allowed to participate in the special voting” Another wrote: “The principles of the church regarding the Sabbath must be made clear to members and allow them to decide for themselves.” These comments reveal two related but distinct expectations. The first calls for a practical electoral accommodation, while the second emphasizes the need for clear religious guidance combined with individual responsibility. The responses therefore show that institutional expectations are not uniform: some respondents want a collective denominational position, while others favor clarification of principles that members can apply through personal conscience.

The quotations should be understood as illustrative evidence rather than as statistically representative of the full sample. They were selected because they demonstrate contrasting interpretations present in the dataset. Their

value lies in contextualizing the quantitative findings, showing how participants articulate their reasoning, and identifying practical concerns that can guide further research and policy discussion.

Institutional Accommodation and the Protection of Religious Conscience

The preference for alternative arrangements is further supported by the responses to the question concerning possible alternatives for Adventists who wish to vote without doing so on the Sabbath. Early voting was selected by 242 respondents (36.1%), postponement by 209 (31.2%), absentee voting by 111 (16.6%), and other options by 108 (16.1%). These results indicate considerable interest in solutions that would reduce the conflict between religious observance and electoral participation.

The findings suggest that respondents do not view the dilemma exclusively as a matter of personal conscience. Many also perceive a role for electoral institutions in providing arrangements that make participation possible without requiring citizens to compromise their religious commitments. However, the survey records preferences for possible alternatives; it does not establish that respondents are eligible for particular voting arrangements or that any proposed option is legally or administratively feasible.

In Ghana, the Electoral Commission's special-voting system provides an arrangement for eligible categories of voters whose election-related duties prevent them from voting on the general polling day. This arrangement should not be interpreted as a general entitlement available to all Sabbath-keeping citizens solely because of religious observance. Any discussion of existing procedures or proposed reforms should be grounded in applicable electoral legislation and current Electoral Commission guidelines.

The findings provide a basis for constructive dialogue between church representatives and electoral authorities. Such engagement could clarify existing voting procedures, document the practical challenges experienced by Sabbath-keeping voters, and assess whether additional accommodation is legally and administratively feasible. Options for consideration might include examining alternative voting periods or other procedures that preserve ballot secrecy, electoral security, accessibility, and equal treatment. These are policy proposals for assessment rather than arrangements that should be described as currently available without documentary verification.

The TPB provides a useful interpretive perspective on these institutional questions. If respondents believe that voting is practically incompatible with Sabbath observance, their perceived behavioral control may be limited even when they value electoral participation. Conversely, credible and accessible alternatives might increase the perceived feasibility of participation for some individuals. This remains a theoretical implication rather than a demonstrated effect of any proposed accommodation in the present study. Establishing such an effect would require further research examining how voting arrangements influence intentions and reported behavior.

Institutional accommodation should also be evaluated in relation to the rights and interests of other citizens. Any proposed measure would need to account for administrative costs, electoral integrity, equitable access, and the consistent application of eligibility criteria. The objective should be to explore reasonable ways of reducing avoidable conflicts between religious observance and democratic participation without privileging one religious' community over others.

Implications For Church Leadership

The findings suggest several implications for pastoral practice and institutional communication. First, pastoral education should address the relationship between Sabbath observance and civic responsibility through careful biblical interpretation and practical discussion. Rather than assuming that all members interpret the issue identically, church leaders should create opportunities for members to examine relevant biblical principles, discuss competing considerations, and understand the distinction between personal conviction and formally adopted denominational positions.

Second, denominational communication should be precise about the authority and scope of its statements. Where an official policy exists, it should be quoted or summarized accurately and supported by a primary source. Where the question has not been formally addressed, leaders and researchers should distinguish theological reflection

from an official ruling. This is particularly important when respondents associate Sabbath-day voting with salvation, since ambiguous or exaggerated institutional claims could intensify anxiety or misrepresent the church's doctrinal position.

Third, civic education can help members understand their electoral rights, the voting procedures available to eligible citizens, and the broader implications of political participation. Such education need not prescribe a single response to every conflict of conscience. Rather, it can equip members to make informed decisions based on their understanding of religious commitments, legal rights, and civic responsibilities. From the perspective of the TPB, clear information may be relevant to perceived behavioral control, while pastoral and community discussions may influence perceived social expectations. Whether these factors are associated with actual voting behavior remains an empirical question.

Finally, constructive engagement with electoral authorities may help identify whether practical alternatives are feasible for citizens whose religious observances conflict with election schedules. Such engagement should be based on documented experiences, legal analysis, and respect for the principle that religious freedom and democratic participation are both important dimensions of public life.

CONCLUSION

This study examined religious and civic priorities among 670 Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventists. The findings indicate that Sabbath observance remains a strongly affirmed religious commitment, with 93.1% of respondents describing it as very important. At the same time, 82.5% regarded voting and other civic duties as important. When asked how they reconciled these commitments, 57.3% prioritized religious obligation, 35.2% believed a balance could be achieved, and 4.0% prioritized civic participation. Among the 140 respondents who reported facing Sabbath-day voting, 57 said they voted and 79 said they did not. Furthermore, 68.4% agreed or strongly agreed that Sabbath-day voting could be perceived as compromising faith, while 57.2% rejected the possibility of justifying such voting under certain circumstances. These findings demonstrate that the relationship between religious obligation and democratic citizenship is characterized by strong religious conviction, considerable civic awareness, and divergent interpretations of how the two commitments should be reconciled.

The findings must be interpreted cautiously because the sample's representativeness has not been established and the survey does not demonstrate individual-level inconsistency or causation. Nevertheless, the study offers evidence that Sabbath observance and civic participation are both important to many Ghanaian Adventists. The task is not simply to choose between divine obligation and democratic citizenship, but to understand how believers interpret and negotiate these commitments in practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes three recommendations. First, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana should strengthen theological and pastoral education on Sabbath observance, civic responsibility, and the exercise of individual religious conscience. Such education should clarify the distinction between established denominational teachings and members' personal interpretations of whether voting on the Sabbath constitutes a violation of religious principles. Second, the Church should engage the Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC) in a structured dialogue to examine the legal, administrative, and practical feasibility of electoral arrangements that accommodate Sabbath-keeping voters. Rather than presuming that alternatives such as early voting, voting after sunset, or inclusion in special voting arrangements are already legally permissible or readily implementable, the dialogue should establish whether these options are compatible with Ghana's electoral laws, constitutional requirements, election timelines, ballot-security procedures, voter registration rules, and the EC's operational capacity. Any proposed accommodation should preserve the principles of universal adult suffrage, electoral fairness, ballot secrecy, and the integrity of the voting process. The Church and the EC should therefore assess existing provisions first and consider any necessary regulatory or procedural changes through the appropriate legal and administrative processes. Third, future research should investigate individual-level relationships between religious convictions, theological interpretations, demographic characteristics, and reported electoral behaviour, while also examining the experiences of Sabbath-keeping voters and the institutional feasibility of proposed

accommodations. Such research would provide a stronger empirical basis for pastoral guidance and policy dialogue without assuming that any single electoral arrangement is either legally available or universally acceptable to Adventist members.

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