Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.8 No.1 March, 2025; p.g. 133 – 146; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

SOLUTION TO ELECTORAL CRISES IN NIGERIA: THE EARLY CHURCH MODEL, A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PANACEA

GOKA MUELE MPIGI, Ph.D
08033385845 07017819999
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7077-2057
gokampigi@aksu.edu.ng goka.mpigi@ust.edu.ng
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Humanities
Rivers State University
Nkpolu Oroworukwo, Nigeria
&
JACKSON ETIOWO ASUQUO
07088176672
gracejackson4christ@gmail.com
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Humanities
Rivers State University
Nkpolu Oroworukwo, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The electoral processes in Nigeria have consistently been undermined by perceived interference by government agencies, resulting into various post-election crises the nation has experienced over time.. These crises, rooted in systemic issues such as ethnic divisions, corruption, weak electoral institutions, and socio-economic inequality, have persisted from the post-independence elections of 1964 to the recent 2023 general elections. Traditional solutions, including electoral reforms and legal frameworks, have proven inadequate in addressing these crises. This paper explores the potential of the early church model as a socio-religious panacea for Nigeria's electoral challenges. Drawing insights from the leadership, conflict resolution mechanisms, and socio-religious principles of the early church, such as equity, justice, and accountability, the study examines how these principles can be applied in Nigeria's electoral process. The research adopts the historical method, which unveils the facts and available data on the Nigerian political and electoral antecedents. The conflict transformation, social contract and moral-ethical leadership theories are employed to create a better understanding of phenomena of the study. Furthermore, the paper identifies practical strategies inspired by the early church model, such as fostering ethical leadership, promoting inclusive dialogue, and integrating socio-religious values into electoral processes. Findings indicate the absence of the integration of socio-religious values into electoral processes such as equity, justice, accountability and transparency which would make way for credible, transparent and peaceful election in Nigeria. This research recommends the need to strengthen the electoral institutions, promote ethical leadership, integrate socio-religious values, enhance civic education, ensure human capacity development, encourage inclusive dialogue, implementation of electoral

reform laws and foster unity through interfaith collaboration in Nigeria, by advocating a holistic approach that combines socio-religious principles with institutional reforms.

Keywords: Solution, Electoral Crises, Early Church Model, Socio-religious Panacea, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Electoral crises in Nigeria remain a persistent challenge that undermines peaceful democratic progress, political stability, and national cum socio-religious unity. Since independence in 1960, the nation has experienced numerous contentious elections characterized by violence, irregularities, and deep-seated distrust in the electoral process. These crises not only jeopardize the legitimacy of elected governments but also exacerbate socio-economic, political, socio—religious instability. For a country as diverse as Nigeria, with over 250 ethnic groups and multiple religious affiliations, electoral crises amplify existing divisions and impede national development (Diamond, 1988). The First Republic (1960–1966) was plagued by political conflicts stemming from regional rivalries and ethnic tensions. The 1964 general elections, for instance, saw widespread allegations of electoral malpractice, voter suppression, and intimidation, leading to violent destruction of lives and properties and confrontations between political parties. This crisis was a major precursor to the military coup of January 1966 and the subsequent Nigerian Civil War (Dudley, 1982). In the Second Republic (1979–1983), the electoral process again became a tool for manipulation by the ruling class. The 1983 elections were marred by extensive rigging, vote-buying, and violent destruction of lives and property culminating in another military intervention. According to Diamond (1988), these elections were "neither free nor fair" and highlighted the failure of electoral institutions to ensure credibility and transparency.

The return to democracy in 1999 ushered in new hopes for a stable democratic system. However, electoral crises persisted, with notable examples including the 2007 and 2011 general elections leading to widespread destruction of lives and properties mostly in the Northern Nigeria. The 2007 elections, widely criticized by both local and international observers, were described by the European Union Election Observation Mission as the "worst they had seen anywhere in the world" due to widespread fraud and violence (European Union, 2007). Similarly, the post-election violence of 2011 resulted in the deaths of over 800 people, primarily in the northern part of the country (Human Rights Watch, 2011).The 2019 elections, while an improvement in some areas, continued to exhibit significant flaws such as widespread vote buying, violence, voter suppression, logistical challenges, and general accusations of rigging. These issues further eroded public trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and highlighted systemic weaknesses in Nigeria's electoral framework (Nwankwo, 2020). The roots of these crises are multifaceted, including systemic corruption, ethnic and religious divisions, weak electoral institutions, and socio-economic inequalities. For instance, the 1964 general elections, Nigeria's first post-independence electoral exercise, were marred by voter suppression, violence, and allegations of widespread fraud. These issues set a precedent for subsequent electoral challenges, such as the heavily manipulated 1983 elections and the controversial 2007 general elections, which were described by observers as deeply flawed (Dudley, 1982; European Union, 2007). Efforts to

address Nigeria's electoral challenges have largely focused on institutional reforms, such as the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and amendments to the Electoral Act. While these measures have brought some improvements, they have failed to address the underlying socio-religious, ethnic, socio-cultural dimensions of the crises. As a result, there is a growing recognition of the need for innovative approaches that combine institutional strengthening with religious, moral and ethical frameworks (Kukah,1996).

This paper introduces the early church model as a socio-religious panacea to Nigeria's electoral crises. The early church, as described in the New Testament, exemplified principles of equity, justice, inclusivity and accountability in its governance and conflict resolution mechanisms. For example, Acts 6:1-7 illustrates how the early church addressed internal disputes through inclusive dialogue and fair distribution of resources, while Acts 15:1-29 demonstrates the use of collective decision-making to resolve doctrinal disagreements. These principles offer valuable insights for addressing the structural, ethnic and socio cultural challenges that underpin Nigeria's electoral crises. By integrating the socio-religious values of the early church into Nigeria's electoral processes, this study aims to propose practical strategies for fostering transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance to reduce the electoral quagmire in Nigeria's political system. The paper also critically examines the challenges and limitations of applying the early church model in a contemporary, pluralistic society like Nigeria, considering factors such as political cum religious resistance and cultural diversity.

However, the early church model offers a holistic framework that addresses both the systemic and socio-cultural dimensions of Nigeria's electoral crises. By combining institutional reforms with religious, moral and ethical principles, this approach has the potential to foster sustainable democratic governance and national cohesion in Nigeria and beyond. The persistent nature of electoral crises in Nigeria has undermined the country's democratic development and stability. Electoral violence, manipulation, and systemic irregularities have led to the loss of lives, destruction of property, and widespread disillusionment with governance. Conventional approaches, such as electoral reforms and judicial interventions, have achieved limited success due to entrenched structural and cultural issues and impediments. There is a gap in addressing the socio-cultural dimensions of electoral crises, particularly the moral and ethical failures that underpin them. Nigeria's leadership problem affects its development because there is an intrinsic link between good governance and development (Mpigi, 2021). The paper examines the early church's model of leadership, justice, equity, honesty and community-driven conflict resolution to propose a socio-religious framework as a potential solution. How can principles from the early church be applied to mitigate electoral crises in Nigeria? What role can socio-religious values play in fostering equity, justice, transparency and accountability in electoral processes?

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is grounded in key conflict resolution theories:

Conflict Transformation Theory

Developed by John Paul Lederach in 1997, this theory emphasizes addressing the root causes of conflict by transforming relationships, structures, and systems. Applying this to Nigeria's electoral crises involves fostering trust, equity, transparency and accountability through socio-religious principles.

Social Contract Theory

Originating from philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, this theory in 1651 asserts that societal stability depends on a mutual agreement between the governed and the government. The Early Church Model can inspire a renewed social contract where leaders prioritize justice and community welfare.

Moral-Ethical Leadership

This framework highlights the importance of ethical decision-making in leadership. The early church's emphasis on servant leadership and accountability serves as a guide for resolving Nigeria's electoral challenges.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ELECTORAL CRISES IN NIGERIA

General Overview of Major Electoral Crises

Electoral crises in Nigeria have often been attributed to systemic failures, including poor governance, corruption, and societal divisions along ethnic and religious liens. These challenges undermine democracy, erode public trust in institutions, and destabilize the nation (Ozondu & Egbunike, 2023; Amadi-Nche & Nwoko, 2023). Addressing these issues requires not only political and legal reforms but also ethical and moral leadership, which the church has historically provided in Nigeria.

Federal Election Crises of 1964

One crisis that shook the foundation of Nigeria and threatened the unity of the county was the crisis that arose from the general election of 1964. The federal election witnessed the formation of alliances by both the major and minor political parties. For instance, factions of A.G. and NCNC together with the Northern progressive front made up of NEPU-Northern Element Progressive United, Middle Belt Congress, joined together to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) under the leadership of Dr M.I. Okpara on June 3, 1964. On August 20 1964, the NPC, NNDR the Mid-Western Democratic Front (MDF) and the Dynamic Party formed by the Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) under the leadership of the Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello. As the electioneering campaign commenced all sorts of crude and obnoxious methods were employed as campaign strategies. UPGA candidates complained of their inability to file nomination papers in the Northern and Western Regions controlled by the NPC and NNDP. Electoral officers were reported to be absent when UPGA candidates wanted to file their nomination papers. A delegation of UPGA met with the president protesting their grievances and that if not redressed, they would boycott the election. President Nnamdi Azikiwe requested the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, to postpone the election. However, the request was rejected by the prime minister. The election still held on December 30, 1964. Members of the UPGA in different parts of the country boycotted the election. Elections took place in Northern and

Western Regions, some parts of Mid-West and Lagos, but it did not take place at all in the Eastern Regions.

The outcome of the election was favourable to the NNA. The president declared on January 1, 1965, that he` found it awkward to exercise his constitutional duty of calling on the winning party leader to form a new government. There was a deadlock and for three days there was no government at the federal level. This forced some prominent Nigerians like the chief Justice of the federation to intervene. At last, the president invited the out-going Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, a member of NNA who promised to form a broad-based government. The government was made up of members of NCNC but no single member of the Action' Group was included in the cabinet.

General Election Crisis of 1979

The 1979 general elections were unique because they took place under the newly introduced federal system of government. The elections that ushered in Nigeria second republic after 13 solid years of the military government. Before the elections. the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) headed by Chief Michael Aril had registered five political parties out of about 52 political associations that emerged when the ban on political associations was lifted. The registered political parties were, National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigeria People's Party (NPP). Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) and People's Redemption Party (PRP). The chairman of NPN was Chief A.M.A. Akinloye while Alhaji Shehu Shagari was its presidential candidate. Chief Obafemi Awolowo was the national leader and the presidential candidate of UPN. The chairman of NPN was Chief Adeniran Ogunsanya and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was the presidential candidate. Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri and Mallam Amino Kano were the leaders and presidential candidates of GNPP and PRP respectively. Five different elections took place between July 7. and August 18, 1979. on different five Saturdays. For the senate, July 7, House of Representatives July 14, State Assemblies July 21, Governorship July 28 and presidential August 11, 1979.

In the election Into the senate, out of a total of 95. NPN won 36 seats, UPN 29, NPP 16. GNPP 8 and PRP 7. The most controversial election of all the elections was the presidential election. The controversy arose as a result of the fact that none of the candidates was able to win 252 in two-thirds of the federation. Alhaji Shehu Shagari who was eventually declared the winner won 25% of the votes cast in 12 states of the federation. The mathematical riddle that arose was what should be 12, 2/3 of 19. The NPN formula of 12, 2/3 was accepted by FEDECO and Alhaji Shehu Shagari was declared the winner. Chief Awolowo who came second took the case to the Presidential Election Tribunal, headed by Justice B.O. Kazeem and later to the Supreme Court presided over by the then Chief Justice of the federation Justice Atanda Williams and all declared that the election of Alhaji shehu Shagari was in order.

General Elections of 1983

At the end of President Shehu Shagari's first term in office for four (4) years, another election was conducted. This was to usher in the third republic. The 1983 general election

was to be conducted by the civilian government in place. In 1979, five registered political parties participated in that election, but this time an additional one had been added to the already existing five. The election commission (FEDECO) before the election, registered Nigeria Advanced party formed by Mr Tunji Braithwaite, bringing the total number of parties for the elections to six. All the five political parties that contested the 1979 elections did not make much changes in the candidates fielded for the 1983 elections. The arrangement for this general election by the government-controlled electoral body, FEDECO, under the chairmanship of Justice Owe whiskey, took a different shape from what it was in 1979. This time the presidential election was to come up first, followed by the governorship. senatorial. House of Representatives and finally state Legislative assemblies. It was argued that this new arrangement was mainly to favour the party in power. Alhaji Shehu Shagari was declared the winner after the August 6 presidential elections. Massive rigging, falsification of election figures were alleged in many centres. Similarly, the NPN controlled states now increased from 7 to 10 states. The party in government was accused of having masterminded the act of rigging, possibly to remain in government. There were reports of rioting, looting, arson, violent demonstration in some areas etc. The outcome of this ugly scene was the military intervention of December 31, 1983.

General Elections of 1993

The constitution of the third republic was drafted in 1989 as Babangida promised to terminate military rule by 1990, a date which was subsequently pushed forward to 1993. IBB lifted the ban on political activity in the spring of 1989, and his government established two political parties (NRC) National Republican Convention and (SDP) Social Democratic Party. The presidential election which was contested by Alhaji Tofa who represented NRC and Moshood Abiola who represent SDP was held and the results were already pouring in, with the late Moshood Abiola of the SDP in the lead, when the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) annulled the entire exercise. The announcement came via a hurriedly written statement read out to State House Correspondents by Nduka Irabo, Press Secretary to the Chief of General Staff and Second in command, Vice Admiral Augustus Aikhomu. Thereafter, IBB annulled the election on June 23, 1993 but eventually bowed to pressures from office on August, 23, 1993.

The announcement threw the country into a state of disbelief, anger, anarchy and confusion. There were indications that over 90 percent of the votes had been counted, with Abiola clearly in the lead. He was therefore the acclaimed winner of the poll by his supporters. The public pressure forced Babangida out of power in 1993 but not before he had instituted an Interim National Government (ING) with former UAC chairman, Ernest Shonekan, as head and serving member of the AFRC, Gen. Sani Abacha as member. Abacha was soon to send Shonekan packing from Aso Rock, assuming power as military leader. Thus, the elaborate transition programme crashed like a pack of cards. Abiola's attempt to force Abacha to recognize his electoral victory and mandate led to his imprisonment by the Abacha regime. Thus, the country was back again to the military rule until 1999 when it was returned to democratic government following Obasanjo's victory at the 1999 general elections.

1999 General Election (Transition to Democracy)

After years of military rule, Nigeria transitioned to civilian governance in 1999 with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as president. This election marked the end of military dictatorship, with the military handing over power to a democratically elected government. Olusegun Obasanjo (People's Democratic Party, PDP) and Olu Falae (Alliance for Democracy, AD). Obasanjo won the presidency with a significant margin, receiving about 62% of the vote. His election marked the start of the Fourth Republic.

2003 General Election

The 2003 elections were contested amidst some criticisms of Obasanjo's government, but they were seen as an opportunity for the PDP to retain power. Olusegun Obasanjo (PDP) and Muhammadu Buhari (All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP). Obasanjo won a second term in office, securing around 61% of the vote. There were allegations of election fraud, but the elections were deemed generally credible by international observers. The 2003 elections reinforced the political dominance of the PDP and were marked by increased voter participation and continued political instability.

2007 General Election

This election was significant as it marked the first peaceful transfer of power between civilian governments in Nigeria's history. However, it was marred by allegations of widespread electoral fraud and violence. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (PDP), Muhammadu Buhari (ANPP), and Atiku Abubakar (Action Congress, AC). Umaru Musa Yar'Adua won the presidency, receiving about 70% of the vote, despite widespread accusations of electoral malpractice. The election results were challenged by the opposition but upheld by the courts. Yar'Adua's election was seen as a positive step for democracy, even though the legitimacy of the process was questioned. Yar'Adua's administration faced challenges due to his failing health, leading to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan stepping in as Acting President in 2010.

2011 General Election

The 2011 elections were seen as a critical moment for Nigeria's democracy, particularly after the death of Yar'Adua in 2010. Goodluck Jonathan, who had become Acting President, ran for a full term. Goodluck Jonathan (PDP), Muhammadu Buhari (Congress for Progressive Change, CPC), and Nuhu Ribadu (Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN). Jonathan won the presidency with 59% of the vote in a relatively peaceful election. The election was hailed as a significant improvement over previous ones in terms of credibility and transparency, with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) making strides in ensuring free and fair voting. Jonathan's victory marked a consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, but challenges of corruption, security, and economic management persisted.

2015 General Election

The 2015 elections were highly anticipated, as they represented a contest between the ruling PDP and the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC), which had merged several opposition parties. Goodluck Jonathan (PDP) and Muhammadu Buhari (APC). Muhammadu Buhari won the presidency in a historic election, defeating incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan. Buhari secured 53% of the vote, while Jonathan received 45%. This marked the first

time an incumbent president lost an election in Nigeria's history. Buhari's victory was significant not only because of the peaceful transition of power but also because it marked a shift away from the dominance of the PDP after 16 years in power. The election was widely regarded as free and fair, though there were still reports of logistical issues and localized violence (Onapajo, Usman 2015).

2019 General Election

The 2019 elections were held amidst continued economic challenges, security concerns (especially Boko Haram insurgency and farmer-herder conflicts), and accusations of corruption in the administration. Muhammadu Buhari (APC) and Atiku Abubakar (PDP). Buhari was re-elected for a second term, winning with 56% of the vote, while Atiku Abubakar garnered 41%. The election was contested, and the PDP challenged the results in court, but the election was upheld by the Nigerian Supreme Court. Buhari's re-election solidified the APC's political influence, although it also faced criticism for alleged irregularities, especially around the late arrival of election materials and voter suppression. The 2019 elections were marked by increased tension and violence in some areas. Despite improvements in electoral technology and processes, the 2019 elections were plagued by logistical challenges, voter suppression, and violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) postponed the elections just hours before the polls were set to open, citing logistical difficulties. Accusations of vote-buying, military interference, and result tampering were widespread. Additionally, incidents of violence led to the loss of lives and property in various parts of Nigeria. Observers noted that while the elections represented progress in some areas, systemic issues such as weak institutions and political interference persisted (Nwankwo, 2020).

The General Election of 2023

The 2023 General Election in Nigeria was a significant event in the country's democratic journey, marking the 7th presidential election since the return to civilian rule in 1999. The election was held on February 25, 2023, to elect the President and National Assembly members (Senators and House of Representatives), followed by the gubernatorial elections in several states. The Presidential Candidates were; Bola Ahmed Tinubu (All Progressives Congress, APC), Atiku Abubakar (People's Democratic Party, PDP), Peter Obi (Labour Party), Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso (New Nigeria Peoples Party, NNPP).

Bola Tinubu emerged as the winner, securing around 8.79 million votes (36.61% of the total votes), Atiku Abubakar came second with 6.98 million votes (29.08%), Peter Obi, who gained significant support, especially from young voters, finished third with 6.1 million votes (25.4%). The Electoral Commission (INEC) declared Tinubu the winner, and he was subsequently sworn in as the President of Nigeria on May 29, 2023.

Figures of Lives Lost to Electoral Violence in Nigeria Since Independence:

S/NO	YEAR	DEATH RECORDED
1	1964-65	200
2	1993	100
3	1999	80
4	2003	100
5	2007	300
6	2011	800 (Mostly Youth Corpers – (NYSC) members
7	2013	13
8	2015	100
9	2019	150

Source: HRW, ICG,CD, Africa Watch

SOME NAMES OF NIGERIANS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES TO ELECTORAL CRISES IN NIGERIA

Abiola, M.K.O, Dr. Akunyili, Salome Abah, Marshal Harry, Bola Ige, Ogbonnaya Uche, Theodore Agwatu, Barnabas Igwe and wife, Abigail Amaka Igwe, Festus Okotie-Eboh, Odunayo Olagbaju, Funsho Williams and Babatunde Elegbede. (**Source:** HRW, ICG,CD, Africa Watch)

Root Causes of Electoral Crises

The persistent nature of electoral crises in Nigeria is rooted in a combination of political, social, educational and economic factors (Diamond, 1988, Ogundiya, 2010).

THE EARLY CHURCH MODEL

Overview of the Early Church's Leadership and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

The early church, as depicted in biblical and early Christian history, functioned as a cohesive and inclusive community despite facing significant internal and external challenges. Leadership was characterized by servant leadership, shared responsibility, and a focus on collective well-being. Disputes and conflicts, often arising from resource allocation, cultural differences, and doctrinal disagreements, were resolved through dialogue, consultation, and adherence to moral principles. For example, in Acts 6:1-7, the early church addressed complaints from Hellenistic Jews about unequal distribution of food compared to Hebraic Jews. The apostles responded by appointing seven deacons to oversee the distribution, ensuring fairness and reducing tensions. This approach highlights the church's ability to adapt its structures and processes to resolve conflicts effectively.

The key Socio-Religious Principles identified as sensitive areas which can help Nigeria achieve credible, transparent and peaceful election are; Equity/fairness, Faithfulness/honesty, Integrity/transparency, truth/sincerity, justice, consistency/commitment, accountability, boldness/courage, knowledge and literacy.

CASE STUDIES FROM BIBLICO- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29)

The council addressed a critical doctrinal dispute about whether Gentile converts needed to follow Jewish laws. The resolution process involved open discussion, respect for diverse opinions, and a collective decision prioritizing unity and inclusivity.

2. Paul's Instructions on Church Discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

Paul emphasized the importance of addressing moral failures within the church community to maintain its integrity. The process balanced correction with the opportunity for repentance and restoration.

These examples demonstrate how the early church navigated conflicts through principled leadership and collective responsibility, offering a framework for addressing modern societal challenges like electoral crises.

Application of the Early Church Model to Nigeria's electoral crises

The practical insights identified and strategies inspired by the early church model are; inclusive leadership, conflict resolution mechanisms, listening ear and attention to the masses, ethical leadership development, genuine concern and love for the Nigeria.

Integration of Socio-Religious Values in Electoral Processes

The integration of the following socio-religious values into the Nigerian electoral system will of necessity enhance a coherent and peaceful elections.

Equity - Implement policies that ensure equitable access to voting rights and resources across all regions and groups. Strengthen institutions like INEC to guarantee impartiality in electoral administration.

Justice - Establish and guarantee independent electoral tribunals to address grievances transparently and promptly. Enforce laws against electoral malpractices, including vote-buying and intimidation without fear or favour.

Accountability - Promote civic education that emphasizes the moral responsibility of both leaders and citizens in upholding democratic values. Encourage faith-based organizations to play an active role in monitoring elections and advocating for ethical practices.

Policy Recommendations

The following policy and strategic recommendations (if implemented) can help Nigeria overcome electoral crises.

Electoral Reforms - Introduce legislation to enhance transparency and accountability in electoral processes. Strengthen penalties for electoral offenses to deter misconduct.

Community Engagement - Foster dialogue between political leaders, religious organizations, and civil society to build trust and unity. Promote voter education campaigns that emphasize ethical participation in elections.

Leadership Development - Establish programmes to train future leaders in servant leadership principles inspired by the early church model. Integrate moral and ethical education into political training institutions.

Challenges and Limitations

Potential barriers to implementing the early church model in modern Nigerian electoral system can be considered as:

Cultural Differences - Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape presents a challenge to adopting a uniform socio-religious approach. Some communities may resist practices perceived as aligned with a particular faith tradition.

Ardent Religious Interest - Politicians and religious observers with ardent religious interest will oppose other faith

Political Resistance - Entrenched political interests may oppose reforms that threaten their power and privileges. Corruption and a lack of political will can hinder the implementation of accountability and transparency measures.

Practical Limitations

Nigeria is known to be a secular state and the underlisted factors are seen to exhibit potential practical limitations to achieving the desired political and electoral goals.

Secular-State Framework - Nigeria's constitution upholds secularism, which may limit the integration of explicitly religious principles into governance.

Resource Constraints-Implementing widespread electoral reforms and community engagement programmes requires significant financial and institutional resources.

Mistrust of Religious Institutions.

Past involvement of some religious organizations in partisan politics may undermine their credibility in promoting socio-religious solutions. Despite these challenges, the principles of equity, justice, and accountability from the early church model provide a robust foundation for addressing Nigeria's electoral crises. Strategic adaptation and collaboration among stakeholders can help overcome these barriers and promote sustainable democratic practices.

CONCLUSION

Electoral crises have consistently undermined Nigeria's democratic development, resulting in political instability, social unrest, and economic stagnation. Since independence in 1960, violence and myriad irregularities have persistently marred the process of electing the country's leaders. Nigerian politicians have become habituated to fraud corruption, intimidation, and violence, as if they consider these the necessary weapons of political winners (Mpigi, 2021). Despite various institutional reforms and interventions, these crises persist, highlighting the need for a more holistic approach to addressing the problem (Ozondu & Egbunike, 2023). The early church model offers a socio-religious framework that combines

moral and ethical principles with practical strategies for governance and conflict resolution. The early church, as documented in the New Testament, operated on the principles of equity, justice, accountability, and inclusivity. These principles were effectively applied to address disputes and maintain unity within a diverse community. For instance, the resolution of resource distribution conflicts in Acts 6:1-7 demonstrates the importance of inclusivity and fairness in decision-making, while the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-29 showcases a collaborative and transparent approach to conflict resolution.

Applying these principles to Nigeria's electoral crises can provide transformative solutions. Integrating equity, justice, and accountability into electoral governance can help rebuild trust in institutions, reduce electoral violence, and promote inclusive participation. Moreover, fostering ethical leadership and interfaith collaboration can address the socio-cultural dimensions of electoral disputes, creating a more cohesive and resilient political system. While the application of the early church model to modern Nigeria is not without challenges, such as cultural diversity, political and religious resistance, these barriers are not insurmountable. Through deliberate efforts to incorporate socio-religious values into electoral processes, alongside institutional reforms, Nigeria can move toward a more transparent, just, and inclusive democracy. Conclusively, Nigeria's electoral crises require innovative, multi-dimensional solutions that address both systemic flaws and socio-cultural dynamics. The early church model provides a valuable template for promoting peace, unity, and good governance. By adopting these principles, Nigeria has the opportunity to foster sustainable democracy and achieve national cohesion, creating a foundation for long-term stability and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address Nigeria's electoral crises effectively, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

Strengthen Electoral Institutions -Increase the independence and capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct independently free, fair, and transparent elections void of interruption and interference. Implement robust responsible and discipline mechanisms to monitor and prevent electoral malpractices, such as vote-buying, voter suppression, ballot box snatching and falsification of election results

Promote Ethical Leadership - Introduce leadership training programmes inspired by the principles of the early church, focusing on servant leadership, accountability, and justice. Encourage political parties to prioritize candidates with a track record of integrity and ethical behaviour. The need to consider a system of government called Tupocracy (Amaowoh 2021) based purely on the selection of men/women (leaders) with integrity.

Integrate Socio-Religious Values - Collaborate with faith-based organizations to educate citizens on the importance of equity, justice, transparency and accountability in electoral processes. Develop community-led initiatives to mediate electoral disputes, leveraging the conflict resolution mechanisms of the early church.

Enhance Civic Education - Conduct voter education campaigns that emphasize the moral and civic responsibilities of both voters and candidates, and also ensure the knowgeability and literacy of the contestant in situ. Use schools, religious centers, and media platforms to foster a culture of non-violence and active participation in democracy.

Ensure Human Capacity Development - This human capacity development should begin from the grass root.

Encourage Inclusive Dialogue - Establish dialogue platforms where political leaders, religious organizations, and civil society groups can collaboratively address electoral challenges. Ensure representation of marginalized groups, including women, youth, and ethnic minorities, in electoral decision-making processes. Reduce cost of electioneering (purchase of forms and campaigns) to the barest minimum to encourage inclusivity. Encourage the citizenry to sponsor and support candidates during elections and campaigns so that the winners will have less funds to pay back/refund.

Reform Electoral Laws - Enforce stringent penalties for electoral offenses to deter misconduct and promote accountability. Ensure judicial independence to allow the courts/the jurists autonomy to give just verdict and restore the confidence of the people.

Simplify legal procedures for contesting electoral results to ensure timely and fair resolution of disputes.

Foster Unity through Interfaith Collaboration - Promote interfaith initiatives that emphasize common values such as justice, peace, and equity, helping to reduce ethnic and religious polarization in politics. By adopting the early church model and its socio-religious principles, Nigeria can address the root causes of its electoral crises and foster a more inclusive, just, and accountable democratic system. While challenges such as political resistance and cultural diversity exist, collaborative efforts among political, religious, and civil society stakeholders can overcome these barriers, ensuring a peaceful and prosperous future for Nigeria.

References

Amadi-Nche, G. & Nwoko, C. (2023). Religious ethics and the promotion of social justice: the church's role in Nigeria's democracy. *African Journal of Social Values* 14(3), 102-111.

Diamond, L. (1988). Class, Ethnicity, and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic. Syracuse University Press.

Dudley, B. J. (1982). An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics. Macmillan Press.

European Union Election Observation Mission. (2007). Final Report on the 2007 General Elections in Nigeria. Retrieved from www.eueom-nigeria.org.

Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). Acts 6:1-7, Acts 15:1-29, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

https://www.voaafrica.com/amp/dead-in-nigeria-election-violence-eu/7013268.html

https://humanglemedia.com/nigeria-deadly-history-of-electoral-violence-in-five-charts.

Human Rights Watch. (2011). Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800. Retrieved from www.hrw.org.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2022). Electoral Act 2022. Retrieved from www.inecnigeria.org.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). (2019). Nigeria Elections: Key Challenges and Progress. Retrieved from www.ifes.org.

Keneth, C.E, Ozoemenam, M.U. Martin, A. N. (2010) Injury and Violence. *Journal of Injury and Violence Res*. 2(2): 61-65

Kukah, M.H., & Falola, T. (1996). Religious militancy and self-assertion: Islam and politics in Nigeria. Northwestern University Press.

Lederach, P. (1997). *Building peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies.* United States Institute of Peace Press.

Mpigi, G.M. (2021). The pathway to Electoral credibility in Nigeria: The role of Christianity. *Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies,* 8(1).

National Democratic Institute (NDI). (2011). Nigeria Election Watch. Retrieved from www.ndi.org.

Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2018). Demographics and the Dynamics of Electoral Participation in Nigeria.

Nwankwo, C. (2020). "Electoral Governance in Nigeria: Progress and Persistent Challenges." *African Journal of Political Science,* 9(2), 102–115.

Ogundiya, I. S. (2010). "Democracy and Good Governance: Nigeria's Dilemma." African *Journal of Political Science and International Relations,* 4(6), 201–208.

Okafor, E. E. (2015). "Electoral Violence in Nigeria: The Role of Socioeconomic Inequalities." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* 33(1), 96–112.

Onapajo, H., & Usman, A. (2015). Religion and politics in Nigeria: The strengthening of religious cleavages in Nigerian political history. *Journal of African Elections,* 14(2), 24-25.

Onuoha, F. C., & Ezirim, G. E. (2010). "Election-Related Violence in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends." *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 10(1), 41–60.

Ozundu, A., & Egbunike, P. (2023). The church and leadership crises: Addressing voter disenfranchisement and political alienation: *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 17(2), 12-17.