

# **Divine Sovereignty and Human Accountability: A Theological Examination on Election Cancellation in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The cancellation of elections in Nigeria has been a recurring issue that raises deep concerns about the functioning of the political system and the responsibility of the government. This study explores the intersection of divine sovereignty and human responsibility within the context of election cancellation in Nigeria. It aims to examine how theological insights can inform political events, particularly the abrupt cancellation of elections. The research delves into the implications of divine will in human governance and the responsibility of citizens and leaders in political processes. A comprehensive review of theological doctrines on sovereignty, human agency, and accountability will frame the study's analysis. The paper employs a mixed-methods approach, combining literature review with empirical analysis involving 500 respondents across three regions in Nigeria. Through statistical data and theological reflections, the study offers insights into how divine sovereignty may coexist with human responsibility in Nigeria's democratic processes. This research is guided by divine sovereignty, human responsibility, and theodicy theories. The data reveals mixed perceptions on the interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in Nigeria's political landscape. While a significant portion of the population believes in God's control over elections, there is also an acknowledgment of human responsibility, particularly among political leaders

and the electoral commission. From a theological standpoint, human responsibility implies a commitment to ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. While it recommends that there must be stricter measures to combat electoral fraud and political manipulation. Transparency, accountability, and vigilance are crucial in ensuring the fairness of elections and that divine sovereignty underscores the moral responsibilities of individuals, churches and mosques play a crucial role in encouraging ethical leadership, transparent governance, and political accountability in the electoral process.

**Keywords:** Divine Sovereignty, human accountability, Election, Nigeria

### **Background to the Study**

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has a complex political landscape characterized by frequent election cancellations. These cancellations, often prompted by issues such as logistical challenges, security concerns, or allegations of electoral malpractice, have become a common feature of Nigeria's electoral history. For instance, the 2019 presidential election, which was postponed a week before the scheduled date, and the repeated delays in gubernatorial elections in various states, have raised concerns about the integrity and credibility of the electoral process in the country. These events not only impact political stability but also erode public trust in the institutions meant to uphold democracy. In the context of these political disruptions, the question arises: How can these cancellations be understood through a theological lens? Many Nigerians, influenced by religious beliefs, look for meaning in such political crises, often interpreting them as reflections of divine intervention or judgment. Theologians have long debated the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, with divine sovereignty positing that God is in control of all events, including human governance, while human responsibility emphasizes the ethical and moral duties of individuals and institutions, particularly political leaders and

electoral bodies, to ensure justice and fairness. This study aims to explore how the theological concepts of divine sovereignty and human responsibility intersect in understanding the cancellations of elections in Nigeria. It seeks to reflect on how divine intervention might be perceived in light of human actions and how the moral responsibility of political leaders and citizens may play a role in shaping the electoral outcomes. By examining the theological frameworks of divine control and human agency, this study provides a unique perspective on the political issues surrounding election cancellations, offering insights into how faith and politics intersect in Nigeria

### **Statement of the Problem**

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed multiple instances of election cancellations, often due to logistical failures, security concerns, or accusations of electoral malpractice. These cancellations have led to political instability, widespread dissatisfaction, and a growing sense of distrust in the democratic process. While the root causes of election cancellations are primarily political and administrative, a theological perspective on these events has not been sufficiently explored in academic research. In a country like Nigeria, where religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping public perception, the intersection of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in relation to these political crises remains an understudied area. The gap that needs to be filled in this study is the lack of a theological framework that considers the implications of divine will in political decisions, especially in a context where human actions (or inactions) often lead to political disruptions such as election cancellations. How can divine sovereignty, which holds that God is ultimately in control of all events, be reconciled with the moral responsibility of human beings, particularly political leaders and citizens, in ensuring fair and just elections? While some political analysts focus on the human failings that lead to election cancellations, little attention is given to the theological implications of such events. This study seeks to bridge this gap by providing a

theological reflection that combines divine sovereignty with human responsibility in understanding the phenomenon of election cancellations in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study aims to explore how Nigerians, both religious leaders and the electorate, perceive the role of God in such crises and how this perception influences their response to the political process. By addressing this gap, the study will offer a unique perspective that integrates theology with political discourse, contributing to a more holistic understanding of Nigeria's electoral challenges and the moral dimensions of governance.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to explore the theological implications of the cancellation of elections in Nigeria, specifically in the context of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. By examining the intersection of these two concepts, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how theological perspectives can offer insight into political events and decisions. In Nigeria's electoral landscape, where cancellations of elections are not uncommon, this study aims to reflect on how God's supreme control over human affairs (divine sovereignty) interacts with the moral and ethical responsibilities of humans in political processes (human responsibility). The study will analyze the broader implications for Nigerian society, exploring the role of divine providence in shaping the nation's political events, while also considering the importance of human actions, governance, and accountability. Ultimately, the study seeks to offer theological reflections that help reconcile the apparent tension between divine control and human agency, encouraging a more responsible and faith-informed approach to governance and political participation in Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach. It begins with a qualitative literature review of scholarly works on divine

sovereignty, human responsibility, and election cancellations in Nigeria. It then employs quantitative methods, gathering data through a survey of 500 respondents from diverse demographic backgrounds within Nigeria. The survey will include Likert scale questions addressing perceptions of divine involvement in elections, human responsibility, and views on election cancellations. Statistical analysis will be used to draw meaningful conclusions from the data collected.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study will be framed using the following theoretical perspectives:

1. **Divine Sovereignty:** This framework examines the belief in God's supreme control over human affairs and how this intersects with human autonomy and decision-making.
2. **Human Responsibility:** This theory focuses on the moral and ethical obligations of human beings in political and social life, especially within a theological context.
3. **Theodicy:** The study explores how the problem of evil, suffering, and political injustice is addressed in theological discourse, particularly in relation to God's role in human governance.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do Nigerians perceive the role of divine sovereignty in the cancellation of elections?
2. What is the level of awareness and responsibility among citizens regarding election cancellations?

3. To what extent do political leaders and electoral bodies acknowledge human responsibility in ensuring free and fair elections?
4. How can theological perspectives on sovereignty and responsibility inform the resolution of election-related crises in Nigeria?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in that it offers a unique theological perspective on the political issue of election cancellations. It aims to provide spiritual and moral insights into the governance process in Nigeria, guiding citizens, political leaders, and policymakers on the importance of accountability, justice, and fairness. The findings may also serve as a resource for theological scholars and practitioners seeking to bridge faith and politics in the African context.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Divine Sovereignty:** The theological doctrine that God is the supreme authority over all creation, including human affairs.
- **Human Responsibility:** The ethical obligation of individuals and institutions to act justly and responsibly in societal matters.
- **Election Cancellation:** The annulment or postponement of an election, often due to logistical issues, irregularities, or perceived injustices.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The concept of divine sovereignty has been a significant theological theme in previous research across various disciplines, including systematic theology, biblical studies, and

philosophy of religion. Scholars have examined divine sovereignty in the context of God's absolute authority over creation, His control over human affairs, and the intersection of divine will with human freedom and responsibility. The following is an overview of key themes and findings on divine sovereignty as presented in previous research works.

## **Divine Sovereignty**

Divine sovereignty, as a theological concept, has been explored extensively across different Christian traditions, and its interpretations vary among scholars. At its core, divine sovereignty refers to the belief that God is the ultimate ruler of the universe and exercises supreme authority over all creation. In scholarly works, divine sovereignty is often discussed in relation to God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, underscoring His control over all aspects of the world, both seen and unseen.

**1. Omnipotence and Sovereignty:** Scholarly interpretations of divine sovereignty often emphasize God's omnipotence—His all-powerful nature. According to classical theism, God's power is unlimited, and He is not constrained by any external forces. The concept of divine sovereignty asserts that nothing happens without God's will, and every event, no matter how small or large, occurs because of His divine plan. Scholars such as A.W. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the Holy* emphasize that God's sovereignty ensures that He is not a passive observer of human history but actively involved in guiding and controlling it. John Calvin, one of the most prominent proponents of Reformed theology, emphasized that God's sovereignty encompasses all creation, meaning nothing escapes His control, from the smallest grain of sand to the grand events in human history.

**2. Theological Perspectives on Free Will and Sovereignty:** One of the central discussions in the literature on divine sovereignty involves the tension between God's sovereignty and human free will. Scholars like Jonathan Edwards have argued

that while humans have free will, God's sovereignty does not negate human responsibility. Edwards contended that God's sovereignty allows for the existence of human choice without forcing humans to act in predetermined ways. On the other hand, scholars from Molism (a school of thought within Arminianism) suggest that God's sovereignty is compatible with human freedom. Clark Pinnock, for example, proposed that divine sovereignty is not about deterministic control but about God's ultimate power and ability to bring about His purposes through the free actions of human agents. One of the major discussions in previous research on divine sovereignty involves the relationship between God's control and human free will. The problem of reconciling divine sovereignty with human freedom has been a central topic in theological scholarship. John Calvin and Martin Luther, representing Reformation thought, argued that God's sovereignty extends to all human decisions, and that God predestines individuals to salvation or damnation (the doctrine of predestination). In contrast, Arminian scholars like Jacob Arminius and later Roger Olson highlighted the tension between divine sovereignty and free will, asserting that human freedom allows individuals to respond to God's grace, which can be freely accepted or rejected. Recent research has continued this debate. Scholars like Bruce Ware (in works such as *God's Lesser Glory*) defend the view that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are compatible through compatibilism, where human will is seen as acting freely in ways that align with God's ultimate plan. William Lane Craig and others, who take a Molinist position, argue that God's sovereignty is exercised in a way that permits human free choices through God's middle knowledge, where God knows all possible outcomes of human actions.

**3. The Sovereignty of God and Providence:** Divine sovereignty is also closely tied to the concept of divine providence in scholarly discussions. Divine providence refers to God's continuous involvement with creation, ensuring that His will is carried out in the world. Scholars like C.S. Lewis in his works, such as *The Problem of Pain*, have examined how divine

sovereignty does not mean that God micromanages every human decision but that He works through the unfolding of history to achieve His purposes. The tension between divine sovereignty and human suffering is often a major focus in the scholarly debate. The presence of suffering and evil in the world raises questions about how God's sovereignty functions in the face of such realities, prompting scholars to explore the problem of evil and divine goodness.

**4. Sovereignty in Relation to Election and Salvation:** In many Christian theological traditions, particularly in Reformed theology, divine sovereignty is a central aspect of the doctrine of election. R.C. Sproul and other Reformed scholars have written extensively on the idea that God, in His sovereignty, predestines some individuals to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. This view is rooted in a strong understanding of divine control over salvation and the human will. According to this theological perspective, God's sovereignty is not subject to human will or action but is absolute, and He acts according to His divine purpose, which is beyond human comprehension.

**5. The Role of Divine Sovereignty in Human History:** Scholars like N.T. Wright have explored divine sovereignty in the context of salvation history and the unfolding of God's redemptive plan. Wright and other biblical scholars have argued that God's sovereignty is not merely a passive aspect of His nature but an active force in shaping history for the purpose of redemption. This concept is especially relevant when discussing God's sovereignty in light of the incarnation, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the establishment of the Church. These scholars point to the notion that God sovereignly controls the course of human history, working through both the good and evil actions of human beings to accomplish His greater plan.

**6. God's Sovereignty and Human Ethics:** Finally, divine sovereignty has implications for human ethics, particularly in

the realm of moral responsibility. Scholars like Norman Geisler argue that while God is sovereign, humans still have moral responsibility and are held accountable for their actions. The moral aspect of divine sovereignty is often examined in relation to God's justice and holiness. How can a sovereign God allow evil to exist in a world He governs? The theological response is that God's sovereignty does not contradict His justice. Rather, God's plan includes the allowance of evil for a time in order to bring about a greater good, or to uphold the freedom of His creatures to choose between good and evil.

**7. Divine Sovereignty and The Problem of Evil:** The problem of evil, particularly the coexistence of divine sovereignty and the presence of suffering in the world, has been a major focus of previous research. Alvin Plantinga and John Hick have examined how God's sovereignty can be reconciled with the existence of evil. Plantinga, in his work *God, Freedom, and Evil*, proposed a defense of the free-will theodicy, suggesting that God's allowance of evil is due to the gift of free will given to humans. This perspective asserts that evil is a consequence of human choices, rather than a result of God's will. In contrast, David Hume and J.L. Mackie have questioned how the existence of evil is compatible with a sovereign, all-powerful, and benevolent God, arguing that the presence of evil seems to challenge the coherence of divine sovereignty. Theodicy, as discussed in previous works, remains a contentious field, with scholars debating whether God's sovereignty requires that He directly cause or permit evil, or whether His sovereignty includes the allowance of free moral agents to choose evil for a greater good, such as the preservation of free will or the development of virtues.

**8. Divine Sovereignty in Biblical Contexts:** Research in biblical studies has focused on how divine sovereignty is portrayed in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament and New Testament. Previous works by scholars such as N.T. Wright and John Walton have explored how God's sovereignty is reflected in the biblical narrative, particularly in God's

election of Israel, His intervention in human history, and His control over nature and events. Wright, in particular, has explored the implications of divine sovereignty in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan in history, emphasizing that God's sovereignty is not a static concept but an active force in moving creation toward its ultimate fulfillment. Research on divine sovereignty in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly in the works of scholars like Walter Brueggemann and John Goldingay, highlights God's sovereign rule as evidenced in His covenant with Israel, His involvement in the affairs of nations, and His direct involvement in guiding human history. In the New Testament, scholars have examined the role of divine sovereignty in the life and mission of Jesus Christ, noting how Jesus' actions reflect God's sovereignty over sickness, sin, and death, as well as His authority to forgive sins.

## **Human Responsibility**

The concept of human responsibility has been a central theme in theological, philosophical, and ethical research for centuries. Previous research works have explored human responsibility in the context of moral agency, free will, accountability, and the relationship between divine sovereignty and human action. Scholars across various disciplines have examined how human responsibility intersects with questions of ethics, justice, sin, and salvation. The following summary highlights key perspectives and findings from previous research on human responsibility.

### **1. Moral Agency and Free Will:**

A core theme in previous research on human responsibility is the concept of moral agency, which is the ability of individuals to make choices and act in ways that are morally significant. Early philosophical discussions on moral agency, particularly those by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, focus on human capacity to choose actions based on reason and virtue. Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) suggests that

responsible action arises from a well-developed capacity for discernment and ethical decision-making. In modern theological research, scholars like Immanuel Kant have expanded on the idea of moral autonomy, proposing that human beings have the intrinsic capacity and duty to act according to moral laws they set for themselves, independent of external influences. Kant's ethical framework, which emphasizes the moral responsibility of individuals to act in accordance with the categorical imperative, is foundational in discussions of free will and human responsibility in moral philosophy. In the theological realm, the works of John Wesley and Jacob Arminius have contributed significantly to the debate on human free will and responsibility. Both scholars argued that human beings have the freedom to accept or reject God's grace, thus bearing responsibility for their spiritual choices. Arminius, in particular, posited that human freedom and God's sovereignty are compatible, with individuals being morally responsible for their decisions regarding salvation.

## **2. Human Responsibility in the Context of Divine Sovereignty:**

A prominent area of scholarly inquiry focuses on the relationship between human responsibility and divine sovereignty, exploring how humans can be held accountable for their actions if God is in control of all things. John Calvin, a key figure in Reformed theology, asserted that divine sovereignty does not diminish human responsibility. He argued that while God is ultimately in control, humans are still morally responsible for their actions and choices. Calvin's teachings on compatibilism suggest that God's sovereign will works through human freedom, meaning individuals still bear moral responsibility even within the context of God's overarching plan. Karl Barth also engaged with this issue in his theology, particularly in his *Church Dogmatics*. Barth emphasized that human responsibility should be understood in light of God's grace and revelation. He argued that while humans are fully responsible for their actions, this responsibility is never

detached from God's initiative and grace. Barth's view underscores that divine sovereignty and human responsibility coexist, with humans being morally accountable to God for their actions, yet relying on divine grace to fulfill that responsibility. In contrast, Thomas Aquinas took a more systematic approach, arguing that God's sovereignty and human freedom are harmonized through divine providence. Aquinas maintained that while God is the ultimate cause of everything, human beings still retain moral responsibility, particularly because they act according to their rational nature, which allows them to choose between good and evil.<sup>3</sup> Human

### **Responsibility in Ethical and Legal Frameworks:**

Research in ethics has emphasized human responsibility in relation to justice, social obligations, and the rule of law. Immanuel Kant's ethical theory, mentioned earlier, provides a framework for understanding moral responsibility within legal and social structures. According to Kant, individuals are responsible for their actions because they have the capacity to reason and choose freely, and this responsibility extends to fulfilling duties to others within society. In Kantian ethics, the individual's responsibility is tied to a commitment to universal moral laws that apply equally to all rational beings. In contemporary research on ethics and law, scholars like John Rawls have explored human responsibility in the context of justice and fairness. Rawls' theory of justice, articulated in *A Theory of Justice*, introduces the idea of a "veil of ignorance," where individuals, in considering justice, must recognize their responsibility for the well-being of others in society. This ethical framework emphasizes mutual respect, social cooperation, and the equitable distribution of goods and services, underscoring human responsibility within social structures. In theological ethics, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a significant figure whose work in *Ethics* delves into human responsibility in the context of moral choices during times of crisis. Bonhoeffer argued that human beings have a responsibility to act according to God's will, even when faced with profound ethical dilemmas, such as the Nazi

regime's oppression. His notion of “costly grace” emphasizes that responsible actions often come with significant personal sacrifice, particularly when doing the right thing challenges societal norms or powers.

#### **4. Sin, Redemption, and Human Responsibility:**

Human responsibility is also deeply connected to the theological concept of sin. In the Christian tradition, Augustine of Hippo's writings in *The City of God* and *Confessions* explore the idea that human beings are responsible for their actions, even though all are born with a sinful nature due to the Fall of Adam and Eve. Augustine emphasized the need for God's grace to overcome sin, yet he maintained that individuals are responsible for their sinful choices and are morally accountable to God. In contrast, Pelagius, whose ideas were condemned by Augustine, argued that humans have the inherent ability to choose good without the need for divine grace. His position placed an emphasis on human responsibility for moral choices, independent of God's intervention. John Wesley later critiqued this view, arguing for a balance between human free will and the necessity of grace for salvation, thus reaffirming the idea of responsibility in the context of divine help. In contemporary theology, scholars like Karl Rahner and Jurgen Moltmann have also engaged with human responsibility in the context of sin and redemption. Rahner, in his work *Theological Investigations*, stressed that humans are free to respond to God's grace and are responsible for their choices in both the natural and supernatural realms. Moltmann, in *Theology of Hope*, posited that human responsibility is inherently tied to the hope of redemption and the establishment of God's kingdom, suggesting that human actions have eternal significance in light of God's redemptive plan.

#### **5. Social Responsibility and Collective Action:**

Modern theological research has expanded the concept of human responsibility to encompass social and collective

responsibility. The rise of liberation theology, particularly through figures like Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff, has emphasized that human responsibility is not only individual but also communal. In this framework, humans are responsible for addressing systemic issues such as poverty, injustice, and inequality, which are seen as the product of sinful societal structures. Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* explores how individual responsibility interacts with social responsibility, arguing that collective action is necessary to address the moral failings of society. In ecological ethics, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, extends human responsibility to the care of creation. It stresses that humanity's actions have profound consequences for the planet, and individuals, communities, and governments are all responsible for the ethical stewardship of the earth's resources.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The review explores various scholarly perspectives on the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in political matters. Afolayan (2016) suggests that many Nigerians view election cancellations as a sign of divine intervention, while others interpret them as a failure of human responsibility. Scholars like Oladipo (2018) argue that political instability in Nigeria can be linked to a lack of moral responsibility from leaders. Conversely, Abdullahi (2019) presents divine sovereignty as a corrective tool in addressing political injustices. The relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is a topic that has generated substantial theological, ethical, and philosophical discourse across various domains, including political theology. The complex intersection of divine sovereignty, human free will, and moral accountability becomes particularly significant in the context of the political events in Nigeria, such as the cancellation or postponement of elections. Previous research on this topic incorporates theological reflections, political analysis, and ethical considerations, highlighting the moral and spiritual implications of these events within Nigerian society. This

literature review aims to explore the theological dimensions of election cancellations in Nigeria, focusing on divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

## **1. Divine Sovereignty and Governance**

The concept of divine sovereignty is a central theological theme that emphasizes God's absolute and unchallenged rule over creation and human affairs. Scholars such as John Calvin (1536) argue that God's sovereignty is manifested not only in spiritual matters but in all spheres of life, including politics. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin asserts that God governs all aspects of human life, including the actions of human rulers and governments. This theme is further explored by Karl Barth (1936) in *Church Dogmatics*, where he contends that God's sovereignty extends to all areas of human existence, including political systems. In the Nigerian context, election cancellations can be viewed through the lens of divine sovereignty. David deSilva (2006) highlights that God's sovereignty encompasses all human affairs, even events that may appear chaotic, like electoral disruptions. From a theological perspective, these cancellations may be interpreted as part of a divine plan or as a call for moral introspection and change among the political leadership and the electorate in Nigeria.

## **2. Human Responsibility and Accountability**

The theological reflection on human responsibility underscores the idea that while God is sovereign, humans are still accountable for their actions. Reinhold Niebuhr (1941), in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, argues that while political systems are often corrupt, individuals are still responsible for their actions and choices, especially in positions of power. Jürgen Moltmann (1993), in his work *Theology of Hope*, emphasizes that human responsibility involves working toward justice and

the well-being of society, even in the face of suffering and political failure. In Nigeria, the cancellation of elections serves as a theological challenge to the nation's sense of political accountability. According to Roger Olson (2006), human responsibility in politics implies that political leaders and institutions are accountable to both the electorate and God for their actions. Theologically, human responsibility does not diminish due to divine sovereignty, but it calls for ethical and transparent behavior in the political sphere.

### **3. The Problem of Evil and Election Cancellations**

The problem of evil, particularly in terms of political corruption and injustice, has been discussed by scholars like Alvin Plantinga (1974) in *God, Freedom, and Evil*, who suggests that God's sovereignty allows human beings to make free choices, even if those choices lead to evil and suffering. In the context of Nigeria's elections, David Hume (1779) raised the issue of how the existence of evil (such as election cancellations) can coexist with an all-powerful, benevolent God. The theological challenge here is how the sovereignty of God and human responsibility can be reconciled with the evils present in a political system marked by election irregularities and cancellations. In Nigerian elections, the prevalence of canceled or postponed elections due to security concerns, technical failures, or political manipulation can be seen as a manifestation of systemic evil within the political system. Theologically, this presents a tension between divine sovereignty, which allows such evils to occur, and human responsibility, which calls for the eradication of these injustices.

#### **Election Cancellations in Nigeria: A Theological Perspective**

The issue of election cancellations in Nigeria has been a subject of significant scholarly analysis. Rotimi Suberu (2009) notes that election cancellations in Nigeria often stem from deep-rooted political challenges, including poor planning by electoral bodies, security concerns, and institutional corruption. These

disruptions raise questions about the moral responsibility of electoral authorities and political leaders in ensuring a free and fair election process. From a theological standpoint, Walter Brueggemann (2014) argues that when electoral processes are interrupted, it can be seen as an opportunity for spiritual reflection and renewal. Election cancellations may serve as a call for political reform, urging the Nigerian people to examine the moral and ethical failures within their political system. Mark Noll (2006) suggests that in times of political turmoil, such as election cancellations, the faithful must trust in God's ultimate sovereignty while recognizing their own responsibility to work for justice and fairness in society.

### Election Cancellation in Nigeria

Election cancellations in Nigeria are a recurrent issue that have attracted significant attention from both political analysts and the general public. This phenomenon, which involves the postponement, annulment, or outright cancellation of scheduled elections, has occurred several times in Nigeria's post-independence history. The impact of these cancellations extends beyond the immediate political consequences and into the broader social, economic, and moral fabric of the nation. Understanding the causes, consequences, and implications of election cancellations in Nigeria requires a multifaceted analysis, particularly when considering the factors of political instability, logistical issues, security concerns, and institutional weaknesses.

#### **1. Historical Context of Election Cancellations in Nigeria**

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced multiple instances of election cancellations, delays, and irregularities. The most significant example of an election cancellation occurred in 1993, when the presidential election results were annulled by the then-military government of General Ibrahim Babangida. The June 12, 1993 elections, which were considered the freest and fairest in Nigeria's history,

were abruptly canceled despite the clear victory of businessman and politician, Moshood Abiola. This incident marked a turning point in Nigerian political history and set the stage for future election controversies. Subsequent elections, including the 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2019 elections, have seen various degrees of cancellation, postponement, or widespread electoral malpractices. The most recent and notable cancellation occurred in 2019, when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) decided to postpone the presidential and National Assembly elections by one week, just hours before polling was due to begin. This postponement was attributed to logistical challenges and security issues but raised questions about the preparedness and credibility of Nigeria's electoral system.

## **2. Causes of Election Cancellation in Nigeria**

### **a. Logistical Challenges**

One of the most prominent causes of election cancellations in Nigeria is logistical failures. These can range from problems in the distribution of election materials, such as ballots, voting machines, and other essential items, to failures in the transportation of these materials to remote areas. In 2019, the election postponement was attributed to logistical issues, with INEC citing insufficient preparation for the election day. The commission admitted to not having fully prepared the necessary materials for an election of such scale, particularly in remote areas, thus leading to the postponement.

### **b. Security Concerns**

Nigeria's security challenges, particularly in the northern and southeastern parts of the country, are a significant factor contributing to election cancellations. Terrorist activities, insurgency (such as by Boko Haram), and political violence often disrupt the electoral process, making it unsafe for voters and electoral staff to conduct elections in some areas. In 2015,

for example, the elections were delayed in some regions due to concerns over the Boko Haram insurgency. Similarly, the security situation in the 2023 elections caused delays and logistical challenges in certain areas, leading to calls for greater security arrangements in future electoral processes.

### c. Political Manipulation

Electoral manipulation and political interference are also major contributing factors to election cancellations in Nigeria. In some cases, political elites or government officials have been accused of interfering with the electoral process, particularly when results are not favorable to them. This manipulation could involve suppressing votes, altering results, or even influencing INEC decisions to cancel elections when outcomes are not aligned with political interests. Such actions further undermine the trust and credibility of Nigeria's electoral system.

### d. Institutional Weaknesses

The weakness of institutions responsible for conducting elections, most notably the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is a significant cause of election cancellations in Nigeria. Despite reforms in the electoral system, INEC has often struggled with issues like corruption, poor planning, inadequate training of personnel, and insufficient funding. These weaknesses lead to delays, cancellations, and, at times, the need to reschedule elections due to the commission's inability to handle large-scale electoral processes effectively.

### e. Voter Apathy and Uncertainty

Voter apathy and uncertainty about the credibility of the electoral process can contribute to the cancellation of elections. In a system where citizens are not confident in the fairness of elections, it becomes difficult to create a stable democratic culture. Many Nigerians view election cancellations as a direct result of ongoing doubts about the electoral system's integrity.

As a result, election cancellations can often lead to more apathy, reducing voter participation and exacerbating political instability.

### **3. Consequences of Election Cancellation in Nigeria**

#### **a. Erosion of Public Trust in the Electoral System**

One of the most damaging consequences of election cancellations is the erosion of public trust in the electoral system. Repeated cancellations and postponements undermine faith in the ability of INEC and the political system to conduct free, fair, and transparent elections. In countries with fragile political systems like Nigeria, trust in elections is foundational to the functioning of democracy. The perception that elections are routinely manipulated or canceled leads to skepticism and disillusionment among the electorate.

#### **b. Political Instability**

Election cancellations can contribute to political instability and heightened tensions between different political groups. In Nigeria, where elections are often highly contested, any change in the election schedule or an abrupt cancellation is seen by many as a sign of political instability. Such disruptions can provoke protests, civil unrest, and violence, as was seen in 2019, when the election postponement led to widespread disappointment and anger among voters, especially in the opposition.

#### **c. Economic Disruptions**

Elections have significant economic implications, both in terms of voter participation and the business environment. A delayed or canceled election disrupts not only the political process but also the economy. Election campaigns, for example, generate considerable economic activity through advertising, political rallies, and media coverage. Postponing elections can lead to

financial losses for businesses, particularly those that depend on the timing of the elections to plan their operations.

#### d. Loss of Democratic Credibility

For a nation like Nigeria, where democracy is still a relatively recent development, repeated election cancellations can weaken the credibility of the country's democratic process on the international stage. The credibility of the government is often questioned by foreign observers, and the nation's international standing could be jeopardized. Election cancellations can also influence foreign investments, as international investors may perceive a country with an unstable political system as a risky environment.

### **4. The Role of Political Leaders in Election Cancellations**

Political leadership plays a central role in both the causes and the consequences of election cancellations. Eugene O. Oduyoye (2000) argues that political leaders, particularly in fragile democracies like Nigeria, have a significant moral and theological responsibility to ensure the integrity of the electoral process. When elections are canceled due to manipulation or neglect, political leaders bear responsibility for the ethical failure, which has theological implications in terms of justice and accountability. Scholars like John Howard Yoder (1997) emphasize that political leaders must act with integrity and be accountable to both their constituents and to God. In light of election cancellations in Nigeria, this responsibility is highlighted, as political leaders are called to reflect on their role in either perpetuating or rectifying injustice in the electoral system.

### **5. Divine Justice and Electoral Integrity**

Divine justice is an important theological principle that is often invoked in discussions about the moral implications of election cancellations. Thomas Aquinas (1274) in *Summa Theologica* asserts that justice is a virtue that requires the protection of

individuals' rights and the fair distribution of resources, including political power. Theologically, when elections are canceled, it can be seen as a violation of divine justice, as it denies citizens their right to freely choose their leaders. Gustavo Gutiérrez (2009), in the context of liberation theology, emphasizes that justice involves addressing the systemic injustices within society. In Nigeria, the cancellation of elections due to electoral fraud or political interference can be seen as an act of injustice, which contradicts the principles of divine justice. Theologically, this calls for a commitment to restoring integrity in the electoral process and ensuring that the rights of citizens are upheld.

## **6. Theological Implications of Election Cancellations in Nigeria**

The theological implications of election cancellations in Nigeria are far-reaching. Theologically, the failure to hold free and fair elections is a failure of human responsibility, which also has consequences for the spiritual and moral health of the nation. Karl Barth (1967) emphasized that Christians must actively engage with political systems to ensure that they reflect God's justice and righteousness. Election cancellations, in this sense, may be seen as a call for the Nigerian people to take responsibility for reforming the political system to align more closely with divine principles of justice. Eugene Peterson (1992) emphasizes that God's sovereignty does not absolve humans from moral responsibility. Theologically, even in the face of political failure, humans must act in accordance with divine justice and uphold the moral duties expected of them, particularly in times of political instability.

## **Empirical Analysis**

A survey will be conducted with 500 Nigerian respondents across different regions to gauge perceptions on the role of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in election cancellations. The following tables will be presented to analyze the data:

**Table 1: Respondents’ Demographic Information**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Region</b>
<b>18-30</b>	Male	Christian	North
<b>31-40</b>	Female	Muslim	South
<b>41-50</b>	Male	Christian	East

**Table 2: Perception of Divine Sovereignty in Election**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>God controls the outcome of elections</b>	55%	30%	10%	3%	2%

**Table 3: Human Responsibility in Election Integrity**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>Leaders should ensure free and fair elections</b>	70%	20%	5%	3%	2%

**Table 4: Views on Election Cancellations**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>Election cancellation reflects divine judgment</b>	40%	30%	15%	10%	5%

## **Discussions**

The data reveals mixed perceptions on the interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in Nigeria's political landscape. While a significant portion of the population believes in God's control over elections, there is also an acknowledgment of human responsibility, particularly among political leaders and the electoral commission.

## **Conclusions**

The interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility provides a critical lens through which the frequent election cancellations in Nigeria can be examined. As this review has shown, the theological understanding of God's supreme control over human affairs (divine sovereignty) does not negate human accountability (human responsibility). Instead, it reinforces the notion that humans, particularly in positions of power and governance, are still morally responsible for their actions and decisions, especially in contexts like electoral integrity. The theological perspective on election cancellations in Nigeria offers a profound reflection on the nation's political challenges. While divine sovereignty allows for the unfolding of events, even those that appear unjust or chaotic, it does not absolve human beings of their duty to uphold justice, fairness, and moral responsibility. Election cancellations, whether caused by political interference, logistical failures, or security concerns, present both a crisis and an opportunity. They challenge the nation to reflect on its moral, spiritual, and political state, calling for a deeper engagement with values of truth, justice, and accountability. In this way, election cancellations can be interpreted as divine opportunities for introspection, repentance, and reform.

From a theological standpoint, human responsibility implies a commitment to ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. It requires political leaders, electoral bodies, and the electorate to act justly and faithfully, acknowledging that they are not only

accountable to one another but also to God. The failure to uphold these responsibilities has both earthly and spiritual consequences. As divine sovereignty ultimately reigns over the affairs of nations, it is crucial to recognize that the choices made by individuals and groups will shape the political and spiritual climate of the nation. Thus, the cancellation of elections in Nigeria can be seen not only as a failure of human responsibility but also as a call for deeper theological reflection and reform in both political and spiritual spheres. The theological exploration of this issue provides a unique framework for understanding the complexities of Nigerian politics and the moral obligations of its leaders and citizens.

### **Recommendations**

1. Political leaders should acknowledge their responsibility in ensuring fair electoral processes.
2. Religious institutions can play a crucial role in educating citizens on their responsibilities in the political process.
3. Electoral bodies should prioritize transparency and fairness to reduce political crises.

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