

Influence of Church Politics on the Planning and Budgeting Processes in Nigerian Baptist Churches

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ABSTRACT

The understanding of some people on the word *politics* seems questionable as it affects the way and manner it is being used in different contexts like religious setting, political setting, entertainment industry among others. This may have resulted to the slang “politics is a dirty game.” This research specifically aims at discovering understanding of church members on *politics* to validate its operation in the church and to discover its influence on an important administrative function of church pastors in the local assembly which are planning and budgeting. The researcher carried out this research using both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are through open ended questionnaires administered to church pastors, church financial officers, and some church members from selected three local churches in Ogbomoso; while secondary sources include books, journals, and online materials. Based On his submissions, it is discovered that politics is in full operation in every local church, most especially in Baptist Local Churches and that its operation depends on the kind of polity adopted by the church. Hence, the influence of church politics on planning and budgeting processes in the local church could be positive and negative. Its positive and negative influences are extensively discussed in the work.

Key Words: Influence, Church Politics, Planning, Budgeting

INTRODUCTION

Politics, to some is perceived as dirty game which Christian should not participate. This assumption may have resulted in its wrong usage or nominal practices in the church, locally or universally. Politics can be said to be happening in several churches with little or no understanding on the part of the members. Irrespective of this, it is observed that the church as a spiritual corporate organization engages in planning and budgeting activities annually. Hence, the kinds of politics that is in operation in a local church may sometimes affect these activities. This informs the reason this seminar paper aims at clarifying the concept of church politics, budgeting and planning, discusses the nature of politics in a local Baptist church, and identify influence of church politics on planning and budgeting process in the local church.

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CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Church Politics

To have proper understanding of what church politics is all about, there is a need to first discuss church polity which is fundamental to understanding various politics being practiced by different church denominations. According to Adetunji (2010, 24), polity is a system of government by which a group of people choose to govern themselves or are governed. Rochford also adds that church polity refers to the government of the church (e.g. “political or politics”). It deals with issues such as how “should the church be governed”? Should the church have leaders over the church, and if so what should be their limit of authority. Thus, church polity can be said to me

a method of government adopted by a group of believers. Certain polity adopted by a particular church makes them to be distinct from other churches. It can be said that church policies define the use of authority, decision making, and economic matters. Raising critical issues with regards to church polity, Bahnsen states thus:

You will hear people say, without much reflection, that the government of the church is a relatively trivial matter, not something over which loving Christian should worry or argue about. But then on the other hand, if you take a hard look around you at what actually happens in various churches, you will notice that the most prevalent reason why people get upset and leave a congregation is not really because of doctrinal differences, but is tied in one fashion or the other to the way that congregation was governed or disciplined (or not discipline). People get fed up, disputes are not peacefully resolved, regular oversight and counseling are not pursued, congregants and discipline have been ignored.

Agreeing with the submission of Bahnsen, many crises arising in churches these days can be linked to inappropriate church governance. Scholars like Rochford James and Bahnsen, Greg L. have agreed that church polity is in three models namely episcopalianism Presbyterianism, and congregationalism. Rochford refers to it as models while Bahnsen called it pattern. Episcopal is a pattern of church government where one man governs people under him (Hierarchical model). The model takes its name from Greek *episkopos* meaning “overseer” or “bishop.” This person needs not be appointed by the people whom he governed over but by higher agency.⁴⁰⁶ Presbyterianism as a system of church government has its root from the Greek word *presbuteros* meaning “elder.” It is the rule

⁴⁰⁶ (<https://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/ecclesiology/church-polity/>).

of the church by multiple, elected elders chosen by people from among themselves, but must also be confirmed by the present governing board of the elders in the congregation or regional body of the elders. Congregationalism on the other hand is a form of church government that has to do with a system where individual member churches govern themselves. Any matter about decision making finally lies in the hands of the members who vote and most of the votes cast determine the decision.

Therefore, from the understanding gained from above discussion, church politics can be said to be practical approach or mechanism employ by local church in governing herself and her members. In an elaborate form, it encompasses various steps, actions, methods, means, dynamics of the members of the church and the church herself in practicing her church polity. Church politics deal with decision making processes employed by church members and church leaders in working toward achieving the set goal. In a simple term, politics in the church has to do with how things are being done in the church (<https://danreiland.com/how-to-break--free-from-church-politics/>).

There are several positions on whether politics is negative. In fact, politics from the real sense of it has nothing to do with negativity. But practically, the way and manner politics is handled can be so bad that people would attach negative thought whenever it is mentioned. Decision making in the church and in any other organization can be said to be political when people work hard, but sideways energy wastes time and erode progress; it's difficult to get decision because of divided interests; gossip overtakes open and honest conversations; trust is low; perspective overtakes truth; personal agendas compete with the purpose of the church; and when staff begin to look out for themselves and volunteer leaders become discouraged (<https://.danreiland.com/how-to-break-free-from-church-politics/>).

Biblically, politics has been viewed as the process of balancing competing interest in a social system as evident in New Testament passages like Acts 15:36-39 (Paul and Barnabas), Acts 21:16 (Paul, Luke and others on his last visit to Jerusalem); Acts 6 (Division among the Greek and the Hebrews). These passages validate existence of politics in the church and since Apostles themselves could not avoid it, church leadership cannot be exempted.⁴⁰⁷

From these submissions and responses of the respondents to the open-ended questionnaire administered by the researcher, Church politics can be said to be system of government through which decision-making processes are carried out through the help of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the mode of administration of a church would affect her politics. Specifically, two things are very significant to note when it comes to church politics. One, church Politics does not in any way have evil attachment since there is no organization that does not have its peculiar politics. Second, Church Polity determines the nature of the politics that would be practiced. However, one respondent has differing opinion on church politics as the response states that “It is a situation whereby some church members teamed up against church pastor which usually affect the growth of the church.” This can be said to be an erroneous understanding due to the level of exposure and possibly level of education.

Planning

Planning has been defined from different perspectives. Planning whether from educational, management, accountancy, administration, or leadership point of view is the same, but the area of application seems to be differing. It is good here to consider some examples of definitions or description given by some scholars on word planning. According to Musa (1999: 11), planning is the process of putting in order and into decisions what an organization or group believes they can do in the

⁴⁰⁷ <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2011/08/politics-in-the-church>.

future. Estep (2005: 53) also opines that “it is the process of taking a look back at where the organization came from in terms of its initial mission statement, examining the current context of its existence, and then seeking to proactively anticipate the future and making preparation to meet it.” While the first definition by Musa applies to organizations that are just evolving, the second definition is more applicable to organizations that have being in existence. Furthermore, Peterson in the words of Estep submits that planning is a conscious process by which an institution assesses its current state and the likely future condition of its environment, identifies possible future states for self, and then develops organizational strategies, policies, and procedures for selecting and getting to one or more of them.” From Akinsulire (2003: 595) perspective, planning involves setting a target (a goal) to be achieved and setting motion modalities for achieving the set target.

From the writer’s perception, planning can be said to be what everybody does consciously and unconsciously. The father and wife plan for their home and the children plan for routine day-to-day activities. Hence, planning can therefore be regarded as a process of developing strategies, procedures, policies by an individual or an organization for achieving particular corporate or personal goals/objectives. This plan could be short term (1 year), mid-term (2-4 years), and long term (5 years).

Budgeting

The word budget has been derived from French word *bougette* which means “a small boy”. It symbolizes a bag containing financial proposal (Salawu 2005: 91). Budget according to Opasina (2011, 130) is defined as quantitative plan/expectation prepared for a specific time. From Kurfi (2003: 187) point of view, budget is a plan qualified in monetary terms, prepared and approved prior to a defined period of time, usually showing planned income to be generated and/or expenditure to be incurred during that period and the capital to be employed to

attain a given objective. Budgeting therefore means a process of allocating resources toward goals by expressing the church dreams in dollars/naira (Johnson 1997, 140). Even though the church with mid-term and long-term project can equally come up with a budget with adequate knowledge of the sources of income and expected expenditure, the kind of budget this paper seeks to evaluate is one fiscal year church planning and budgeting. This type of budgeting usually shows planned income to be generated and expenditure to be incurred during the year (Opasina 2011, 130).

Callahan (1992, 1) has opined that effective church finances must cover four major areas namely: develop a strong mission budget; raise the giving of your congregation; set solid giving goals; and growing giving. It is essential to note that mission budget is the first aspect to be given consideration when it comes to effective church financing. The reason is not far-fetched from the fact that church is a legal entity which has a different identity from the founders, hence is it required for the leader in cooperation with other stakeholders to prepare budget to meet primary goal of the church. The idea of church budgeting has some biblical background, these includes:

1. Christian Stewardship as a lifestyle (Luke 12:13-21)
2. Acknowledging our source of Being (Proverbs 3:5-6)
3. Being Found Faithful (Luke 22:7-23)
4. Growing commitment to cooperative giving (2 Cor. 8:1-14)
5. Trustworthy servant (I Corinthians 4:2) (Johnson, 1997 141).

There are three major categories of budgets employed by the congregation. These are mission budget, an organizational budget, and a cost budget (Callahan 1992, 4). The mission budget is built on the major priorities of the congregation for the coming years, which includes a few key objectives. This

category of budget is said to be people-friendly because it is built on wisdom, judgment, vision, common sense, and prayer of the members. The weakness identified with it is the possibility of the congregation having too many priorities with too many objectives for each major priority (Callahan 1992, 5). For an organizational/institutional budget, it has power and value for the people who participate in the committee because it raises the major portion of the giving from among the people who are, have currently been, or look forward to being on the committee of that congregation (Callahan 1992, 7). The focus of this category of church budget is on the organizational and institutional welfare of the local church.

The third category of the church budget is said to be less compelling as it describes maintenance of the following cost from one year to the next: Space and facilities costs, denominational costs, personnel costs, and program costs. Callahan opines that this type of budget is usually drawn up by leaders who have pulled back into a conserving, holding, protecting, and preserving mentality (1992, 7). Thus, it is not a practice of effective church for it will not advance congregational understanding of giving and stewardship.

From the open ended questionnaire administered by the researcher, it was discovered that many church's plans and budgets for various activities yearly, among those programs alighted by the respondent are salary and wages, special programs of the church like singles forum, students and youth, social and welfare, evangelism etc., Departmental programs, Convention in session, Church building project, Maintenance cost, Staff development, Developmental projects, and Miscellaneous.

NATURE OF POLITICS IN LOCAL BAPTIST CHURCH

Baptist congregational form of government is a joint relationship between the convention and conference, association and the local churches. Even though local churches

have some responsible level of autonomy to perform some functions, it holds a number of allegiances to the convention at large. Since, church politics determines the kinds of politics that goes on in the church, thus, practicing true congregationalism in Baptist setting, the following are the some of the things local church may carry-out according to Osuigwe (2019, 57). Mandate of Local church Autonomy reflects in the choice of pastoral leadership through the call system, Election of church officers, association representatives, conferences representatives as the case may be, Acquiring, developing, and own property, Raising and managing fund, Engaging in business ventures, e.g., open and run schools, Participating in missions, Fulfilling the five-fold purpose of the church (teach, preach, nurture, evangelize, train), Enforcing biblical church discipline on individual members, Observing church ordinance, Planting and nurture churches, Determination of church membership (Osuigwe 2019, 57).

According to Oyeniyi (2019, 84), many denomination/churches determine their membership based on their own tradition which includes Baptism, confirmation, transfer of membership, salvation, sacrament among others. She however holds that becoming a member of the church which is the body of Christ is primarily through salvation experience. The writer agreed with the author based on the fact that other means of becoming church members may be faulty as many have pretended to be baptized, confirmed with ill motive. In addition to this, Wellborn (1955, 18) opines that in accordance to the New Testament tradition, three important factors are entry requirements for its membership, and they are confession, conversion, and commitment. Ackland (1959) also notes seven joys identified with church membership which are qualifying joy, belonging joy, worship joy, fellowship joy, serving joy, co-operating joy, and witnessing joy.

Other characteristic features of politics in local Baptist churches include independent power arrogated to a local church. The combination of Baptist Doctrine of the priesthood

of all believers and unhindered religious liberty forms the conversation on which the autonomy of the local church is built (Imasogoe 1963, 4). This doctrine means that one Baptist Church is integral existentially linked to all other Baptist churches in Christ and by virtue of this union it has covenanted to serve God together within the theological circle that described Baptist denomination as embodied in the Baptist distinctive. Imasogie (1963, 4) further stresses that Baptist churches also have administrative and structural autonomy apart from theological autonomy. The former implies that as Baptist member family, every local church has a responsibility to play out role in the corporative effort of that family for the good of the family and for the effectiveness in carrying out God's service to which the family is committed.

Validity of individual member's opinion. This is otherwise known as priesthood of all believers. Baptist plays politics of expressing their thoughts with the belief that their members equally have access to God through the Holy Spirit. Pastoral leadership is without prejudice to the doctrine of priesthood of all believers, which emphasis mutual ministry of all believers. All believers have equal right to approach God to intercede for themselves and for others. They also have opportunity to cultivate unhindered relationship with God through personal bible study and practical demonstration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Validity of majority voice over minority ones. Baptist members play politics with this understanding especially whenever they did not want a particular project or program to be executed. The members can go to the extent of reaching out to one another in order to have majority vote that will counter the proposed programs by the church committee or by pastors. Thus, majority votes carry weight in Baptist. However, everything may not be subjected to public vote based on the tactfulness of the pastors and committee in charge.

Biblical Precedence over Personal opinions. Baptist is a Bible based church. Therefore, no personal opinions can overrule whatever is against scripture. Scripture is the guidelines for many decisions that are taken in Baptist churches. Mullins (1925, 10) opines that three things that informs the position of Baptist on scripture are its sufficiency, certainty, and authoritativeness. The scripture gives enough truth for all religious purposes. Every other thing in the world, science, philosophy is not reliable but the certainty of the word of God is undeniable. Also, the scriptures speak authoritatively as does no other literature in the world. Bush and Nettles (1999: 29) in the word of Olaniyan holds that Biblical authority does not accept decrees of popes, bishop's councils or writing by whosoever as of equal authority with the scripture.

Procedure over power: In Baptist, certain procedures and guideline guides execution of project and program. Thus, one individual member can be permitted to disregard the process for personal gains. This is what is called politicking which often times refers to as using wide range of tactics to promote or leverage others in order to accomplish personal agenda or give biased support to someone else.⁴⁰⁸

In making religious leaders manage politics that come with competing interest, the following principles must be taken into consideration:

1. The Leader must practice humility and self-distrust as instructed by Apostle Paul in the 2 Timothy 2:24-26. Church politics cannot be managed by coercion and shame talk except by self-sacrificing spirit of a leader.
2. The leader must learn and exhibit empathy. Empathy makes a man to listen to the yearning and interest of others and to find a way to balance those interests in a way that unites the people rather than dividing

⁴⁰⁸ <https://www.whowillyouempower.com/criagsblog/2014/2/3/how-to-play-church-politics-win-part-1>.

them; whereas selfish individuals are only concern about their own interest and welfare (Matt. 18: 21-35).

3. The Leader must have a passion for fairness (justice). Humility and empathy bring about fair play in any organization. When members of an organization discover fair spirit in their leaders, there is ready to make willingness to trust the process.
4. The Leader must distinguish between the clear and the unclear. Church leaders must be able to delineate between what the Bible says categorically and what they think the Bible says. Many conflicting interests in the church are born out of personal or group opinions imposition on the other group. Hence, a commitment to scripture over personal opinions about scripture, and a willingness to subject personal believes to the text, is one of the best ways to manage theological politics in the church. ⁴⁰⁹

INFLUENCE OF POLITICS ON PLANNING AND BUDGETING PROCESSES IN NIGERIAN BAPTIST CHURCHES

Based on the submissions of pastors, church members, finance committee members, through open ended questionnaire administered by the researcher, it is discovered that influence of church politics on planning and budgeting processes in the local church could be positive and negative. Its positive influence includes but is not limited to the following:

It could fast tract the process of planning and budgeting. Since one of the basic functions of church leaders is planning and budgeting, politics can be said to be means by which their agenda can be driven because the people that need to be carried along would be contacted for ease of the process. Planning and budgeting entails sharing the idea and consulting with people of like minds on possible means of generating funds to sponsor

⁴⁰⁹ <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2011/08/politics-in-the-church>.

projects. Thus, positive politics would not undermine the role played by people that matters regarding the processes. When talking about people that matter, it is not people who use their influence unduly to achieve something. It is about consulting with the right personnel, officers that can offer advice and aid the process

Secondly, church politics gives church members opportunity to have their input. Since politics is about decision making, organization runs faster, fairly, free of bias when people in the organization have their input in decision making. This is evident in Baptist church under consideration. The politics in Baptist gives room for every member to be carried along with church programs and to equally have their say. However, some major decision that cannot wait for entire church ratifications can be taken by the pastor and church council. The fact that decision making in Baptist churches involve collaborative effort of the pastors and church members makes politics to be positive. This would also make larger percentage of church members to be aware of what is ongoing in the church.

Thirdly, church politics gives room for robust and all-inclusive planning. Planning done by a single person may not be detailed, sufficient, and effective. However, when several people with differs intellectual ability, spiritual abilities, financial capacities, and creative abilities come together to plan for the church, the result is expected to be excellent. Thus, politics and Baptist church allow for this kind of all-inclusive planning. Little wonder Baptist churches can be said to be leading when it comes to church Administration.

Fourthly, it creates room for varieties of ideas and means of financing the budgeted plans. Baptist system can be likened to privatize system of economy whereby the individual group works harder to gain customers through various programs and incentives. In Baptist churches, though there are conventional article of faith, each local church is given opportunity to operate independently using their God-given creativities with the sole

aim of bring souls to Christ. Also, since local Baptist churches are self-finance, the politics there allows the church to engage in various commercial activities that can increase the church finance so as to be able to run programs budgeted for.

Additionally, from the respondents to the administered open-ended questionnaire, when church politics is well handled, respondents opine that it may help the church to achieve their goals in shortest time, encourage good governance through the Holy Spirit, encourage free and fair planning and budgeting activities, facilitate accountability processes, and promote good management.

On the other hand, church politics influence on planning and budgeting processes in the local church can be negative. By this, it means that church politics could be detrimental to the growth, development, and faith of the church. Its negative influence includes but not limited to the following as identified by the respondents.

The entire planning and budgeting processes may slow down. Most especially in Baptist which allows church members to participate in decision making, this may affect planning and budgeting processes as people that must be part of the processes can decide not to be involve for one reason or the other. For example, when the church wants to take decision on how much to spend on mission, but the mission coordinator and church financial officers refuse to attend the meeting. It is obvious that such a meeting would be held until they are able to come or until the entire church decides otherwise.

Secondly, the planning and budget could be adversely discussed. Since decision making in Baptist allows for church members, committees, and other to add their input, no planning or budget can be free of alteration. Most occasions, the alterations have negative effects on the planned programs. Thus, debate over how a plan is to be executed, and how much to spend on a program can have negative effect on church life.

It therefore requires that everyone involved in planning and budgeting should look beyond sentiment.

It could lead to discouragement on the part of the leader. When decision making processes continue to be delayed, church leaders eventually find it very difficult to lead the parishioners and it may lead to discouragement, and even depression. Some church leaders out of negative politics being played by church members have resulted in resignation since their vision could not be accomplished. When church members and her leader play dirty politics, it is at the detriment of the success of the leader and the holistic development of the church.

It could breed disagreement which may eventually leads to conflict. Conflict and disagreement is normal in any relationship. In fact, they are factors that show the level of healthiness of an organization. However, they are to be properly managed for progress of individuals and for the development of organization. Unending disagreement and conflict may be as a result of unhealthy politics in the local church among the parishioners and their leaders.

The vision and the mission of the church may not be actualized. Unhealthy politics in the local church would distort the mission and vision casting process of a leader. Church members may deliberately take sides that would not support the mission and mission cast by the church leaders. Thus, bringing hurt to environmental and spiritual healthiness of the church. Even though the researcher knows that the church leaders may not have 100% support for their mission and vision, considerable number of people with positive political mindset is needed for the task to be accomplished.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has addressed issues relating to church politics and its influence on planning and budgeting processes in the local church. The writer has situated the research in Baptist denomination experience in Nigeria with open ended questionnaire administered to church pastors, finance members, and some church members. The research has concluded that politics is not strange to Christian or in church related institutions as it has to do with decision making process in the church. Hence, the research concludes that church politics should be used to advance the course of the gospel and the local church, and her leader should guide against negative church politics practices.

Upon this submission, the researcher recommends the following for the church:

1. Church must educate its members on how to play healthy politics in the church. This will correct their wrong impression on church politics.
2. Church should priorities programs that are directly related to the goal of the church.
3. Church should leverage on members' understanding on church politic to stir their heart on the need to participate in state politics.

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