

Effects of Leadership Conflict within the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church in Nyaramba District: Causes, Impact, and Resolution Strategies

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Abstract

The Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) church in Nyaramba District, Nyamira County, Kenya, has experienced significant leadership conflict stemming from disputed election results in 2019, which led to legal battles, deep congregational divisions, and a sharp decline in church attendance. This study investigated the underlying causes of leadership conflict, its impact on church members, organizational structures, administrative systems, and daily operations. It also proposes effective strategies for future conflict management. The research was significant because leadership conflict fundamentally undermines the church's core purpose of promoting peace and unity among believers and within the community, thereby hindering sustainable growth and evangelistic mission. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys administered to 45 church members with qualitative in-depth interviews with 5 church leaders and key stakeholders. The scope of this paper is limited to the PAG church assemblies within Nyaramba District. The findings reveal that the primary causes of conflict were leadership-related disputes following contested elections, which led to factionalism, severely strained pastor-congregation relationships, allegations of financial mismanagement, decreased attendance (reduced frequency), and stalled construction projects. The study provides practical recommendations, including transparent election processes, formal conflict-resolution mechanisms, financial transparency measures, inclusive leadership practices, pastoral transfer policies, and constitutional review.

Keywords: Church and Leadership Conflicts, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Church Governance, Conflict Resolution, Religious Leadership



Introduction

Leadership conflict is among the most destructive forms of conflict within religious organizations, as it undermines the church's foundational purpose of promoting peace, unity, and spiritual growth among believers and the broader community. Leadership conflict can lead to low morale among adherents, diminished respect for the church in society, and has resulted in litigation, schism, and secession from mother churches.¹ Woolverton distinguishes between two types of church conflict: conflict that kills, damaging or destroying teams, ministries, and congregational vibrancy, and conflict that cultivates growth when properly managed.² When conflict goes unresolved within a church, it hinders growth and mission, making the church dysfunctional and unable to experience spiritual growth.³ Research on Pentecostal churches in Kenya confirms that leadership wrangles at the national level seeking to control the church, coupled with local church leadership conflicts pitting pastors against other leaders, negatively affect church growth as members leave to join other churches.⁴ Similarly, studies of Pentecostal churches in Uganda reveal that religious conflicts emerge from different ideological inclinations and theological differences, but are mainly driven by the desire to dominate the religious market and by power struggles within religious leadership.⁵ The Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) church, like many religious organizations worldwide, has not been immune to these destructive leadership conflicts that threaten its organizational cohesion and evangelistic mission.

The PAG church in Nyaramba District, Kenya, one of the oldest centers in the region, has experienced significant leadership conflicts that have profoundly affected its growth and development. In 2019, the church held leadership elections that were subsequently disputed by various contestants who disagreed with the results released by the responsible electoral body.⁶

¹ Oluwaseun O. Afolabi, *Why Leadership Conflict Exists in the Church: The Structural Conflict Theory Perspective Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, September 1, 2021, 97, <https://jacl.andrews.edu/why-leadership-conflict-exists-in-the-church-the-structural-conflict-theory-perspective/>.

² David E. Woolverton, *Mission Rift: Leading through Church Conflict* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 2.

³ Afolabi, *Why Leadership Conflict Exists in the Church*, 91.

⁴ John Thiga, Gyang Pam, and James Nkansah-Obrempong, "The Effect of Church Conflict on the Growth of Pentecostal Churches in Kenya: A Case Study of Selected Churches in Nairobi," *European Scientific Journal ESJ* 17 (May 2021): 35–37, <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2021.v17n16p22>.

⁵ Alexander Paul Isiko, "Religious Conflict among Pentecostal Churches in Uganda: A Struggle for Power and Supremacy," *Technium Soc. Sci. J.* 14 (2020): 152–53, https://heinonline.org/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/techssj14§ion=53.

⁶ Jack Murima, "PAG Church Wrangles Escalate as Embattled Leader Is Re-Elected," *The Standard*, accessed July 25, 2024, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/nairobi/article/2001318628/pag-church-wrangles-escalate-as-embattled-leader-is-re-elected>.



The disputed election results prompted some individuals to file multiple petitions across different High Court jurisdictions. The High Court at Kakamega suspended the elections and ordered mediation, but church officials proceeded with elections on March 3–4, 2019, in contempt of court orders (Constitutional Petition 6 of 2018, para. 39–40).⁷ This pattern of electoral disputes and parallel leadership structures extended beyond the national headquarters to the district level. At Nyaramba District, conflicting court orders regarding the legitimacy of District Overseers created factions within individual assemblies and deep rifts between members and pastors (Civil Appeal 60 of 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the PAG church's long-standing presence and significant role in Nyaramba District, persistent leadership conflicts have plagued the organization, causing members to migrate to other denominations or establish new churches under the same name. These conflicts have negatively impacted church growth, attendance, member morale, financial management, and organizational structures. However, no significant research has been conducted to establish the comprehensive effects of these leadership conflicts within the PAG church in Nyaramba District or to propose evidence-based resolution strategies. This research gap has left church leaders without research-based evidence, documented case studies, or scientifically validated strategies to prevent and manage future conflicts. Consequently, many church leaders lack the analytical tools to understand the root causes of conflicts, hence cannot anticipate and proactively address emerging tensions, and have no evidence-based framework for effective conflict resolution. This lack of research-based knowledge perpetuates cycles of division and organizational dysfunction, as church leaders repeatedly resort to trial-and-error rather than implementing proven conflict-management strategies grounded in empirical research.

This study investigates the leadership conflict within the Pentecostal Assemblies of God church in Nyaramba District, examining its root causes, multifaceted impacts, and potential resolution strategies. Through a mixed-method approach involving surveys of church members and in-depth interviews with church leaders and key stakeholders, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how the 2019 electoral disputes evolved into widespread

⁷ Oluhano & 5 Others v Pentecostal Assemblies of God-Kenya Church & 3 Others; Orera & 8 Others (Interested Parties) (Constitutional Petition 1 & 1 of 2023 (Consolidated)) [2024] KEHC 8289 (KLR) (11 July 2024) (Judgment) (2024), <https://new.kenyalaw.org/akn/ke/judgment/kehc/2024/8289/eng@2024-07-11>.



organizational conflict affecting assemblies, pastoral relationships, financial operations, and member participation. The paper reviews relevant literature on church leadership conflicts, presents the research methodology and findings, analyzes these findings in relation to existing scholarship, and concludes with practical recommendations for preventing and managing future conflicts.

Literature Review

The literature on church leadership conflict reveals a complex phenomenon that has significant implications for religious organizations' unity, growth, and mission effectiveness. This review examines existing scholarship on the causes of leadership conflict, its impacts on church membership and organizational structures, biblical frameworks for conflict resolution, and identifies the research gap this study addresses.

Causes of Leadership Conflict in Religious Organizations

Leadership conflict is among the most destructive forms of conflict within a church because leadership in religious organizations is often revered, and leadership positions often carry substantial remuneration and benefits.⁸ According to Maxwell, everything rises or falls on leadership.⁹ Leadership conflict manifests as the clash of personal preferences among church staff in planning, scheduling, and executing church work. Also, it occurs when congregations express dissatisfaction with the conduct or proposed programs of church leadership.¹⁰

Woolverton distinguishes between two fundamental types of church conflict: conflict that kills, which damages or destroys teams, ministries, and congregational vibrancy, and conflict that cultivates growth when properly managed.¹¹ This distinction is critical because it acknowledges that not all conflict is inherently destructive; rather, how it is addressed determines its ultimate impact on the organization. Woolverton argues that leadership's response to conflict, rather than the conflict itself, often determines whether a church will experience growth or decline.

⁸ PaanLuel Wël, "Impact of Leadership Conflicts on Faith Communities: A Case Study of the Episcopal Church Bor Diocese, Jonglei Internal Province," *PaanLuel Wël Media- South Sudan*, January 26, 2025, 5, <https://paanluelwel.com/2025/01/26/impact-of-leadership-conflicts-on-faith-communities-a-case-study-of-the-episcopal-church-bor-diocese-jonglei-internal-province/>.

⁹ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 21.

¹⁰ Wël, "Impact of Leadership Conflicts on Faith Communities," 4.

¹¹ Woolverton, *Mission Rift*, 15–17.



Two major factors instigate leadership conflict in churches: the misuse of power and authority, with power as the main driver.¹² Folger, Poole, and Stutman refer to power as the “architecture of conflict” as it has the capacity to cause change or influence behavior and attitudes.¹³ In religious contexts, power manifests in multiple forms: spiritual power held by clergy and prayer warriors; influential power derived from interpersonal relationships and respect; financial power wielded by major contributors; and intellectual power grounded in biblical and cerebral knowledge.¹⁴ The concentration of these various forms of power within church leadership structures creates conditions where conflicts can easily emerge and escalate.

The structural organization of churches also contributes to leadership conflict. There are two major aspects of an organization that have considerable influence on the types of conflicts that may occur: the governmental system and the organization’s structure.¹⁵ In the Episcopal system, the bishop can be authoritarian because no one can check the bishop’s power, potentially leading to the breakdown of law and order, while in Congregational and Presbyterian systems, where power lies with the congregation, central leadership can become weak when leaders of some units may arrogate power to themselves.¹⁶ Miller notes that each system has inherent vulnerabilities: hierarchical systems risk authoritarianism, while democratic systems risk fragmentation and power struggles among competing factions.¹⁷

The specific context of the PAG church in Kenya provides important background for this study. According to media reports, the government gave the PAG church seven days to resolve its leadership conflict after disagreements arose regarding the election of the General Superintendent across 128 church districts nationwide.¹⁸ Court records reveal that electoral disputes prompted multiple petitions across different High Court jurisdictions, with the Kakamega High Court suspending elections and ordering mediation to address constitutional

¹² Wël, “Impact of Leadership Conflicts on Faith Communities,” 5.

¹³ Joseph P. Folger, Marshall Scott Poole, and Randall K. Stutman, *Working Through Conflict: Strategies for Relationships, Groups, and Organizations* (Milton: Routledge, 2021), 85.

¹⁴ Afolabi, *Why Leadership Conflict Exists in the Church*, 92–93.

¹⁵ Afolabi, *Why Leadership Conflict Exists in the Church*, 91; John Michael Miller, *The Contentious Community: Constructive Conflict in the Church*, 1. ed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 45–47. John Michael Miller, *The Contentious Community: Constructive Conflict in the Church*, 1. ed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 45–47.

¹⁶ Wël, “Impact of Leadership Conflicts on Faith Communities,” 6–7.

¹⁷ Miller, *The Contentious Community*, 48.

¹⁸ “Derick Luvega, “Govt Gives PAG Church 7 Days to End Leadership Row,” *Nation*, June 29, 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/vihiga/govt-gives-pag-church-7-days-to-end-leadership-row-152474>.



concerns.¹⁹ The petitioners argued that the church’s 1998 constitution discriminates against women and youths from vying for some elective positions and denies members the opportunity to participate in electing their leaders since only pastors were allowed to vote.²⁰ This structural exclusion of ordinary members from electoral participation created conditions in which legitimacy could be easily questioned, and power struggles readily emerged.

Sanders’ Perils of Leadership

Oswald Sanders, in his book, *Spiritual Leadership*, identifies seven critical perils that predispose leaders to conflict: pride, egotism, jealousy, popularity, infallibility, indispensability, and emotional extremes of elation and depression. Leaders who succumb to these perils become susceptible to power struggles and organizational conflicts, as these character deficiencies undermine their ability to lead with humility and spiritual maturity.²¹ A majority of leaders involved in power tussles have been affected by one or more of these perils.

Most (or rather, all) leaders who fell victim to power tussles have been observed to be affected by one or more perils of leadership, either in the past or during their leadership tussle endeavour. Meanwhile, such leaders can learn from Christ’s theological stance on leadership.

Impact of Leadership Conflict on Church Membership and Organizational Structures

Studies demonstrate that leadership conflict can lead to low morale among adherents, diminished respect for the church in society, and litigation, schism, and secession from mother churches.²² When conflict goes unresolved within a church, it hinders growth and mission, making the church dysfunctional and unable to experience spiritual growth. Conflicts slowly destroy and paralyze the church, exhausting the leadership and demoralizing the members.²³

Research specifically on Pentecostal churches in Kenya confirms these patterns. Thiga, Pam, and Nkansah-Obrempong found that leadership conflicts lead to negative growth because they create an unfavorable atmosphere, causing members to leave and join other churches with

¹⁹ *Oluhano & 5 Others v Pentecostal Assemblies of God-Kenya Church & 3 Others; Orera & 8 Others (Interested Parties) (Constitutional Petition 1 & 1 of 2023 (Consolidated)) [2024] KEHC 8289 (KLR) (11 July 2024) (Judgment).*

²⁰ Murima, “PAG Church Wrangles Escalate as Embattled Leader Is Re-Elected.”

²¹ Randolph K. Sanders, *Christian Counseling Ethics: A Handbook for Therapists, Pastors & Counselors* (InterVarsity Press, 1997), 153–58.

²² Afolabi, *Why Leadership Conflict Exists in the Church*, 97.

²³ Wël, “Impact of Leadership Conflicts on Faith Communities,” 8–9.



fewer conflicts.²⁴ Their study of selected Pentecostal churches in Nairobi revealed that leadership wrangles at the national level seeking to control the church, coupled with local church leadership conflicts pitting pastors against other leaders, significantly affected church attendance and member retention. Isiko observed similar patterns in Uganda, where religious conflicts among Pentecostal churches emerged from different ideological inclinations and theological differences, but were mainly driven by the desire to dominate the religious market and by power struggles within religious leadership.²⁵

Afolabi acknowledges that leadership conflict leads to decreased church membership and affects the ministry of pastors who serve in such assemblies.²⁶ Kale and McCullough note that conflicts can prompt some leaders and members to form their own churches, resulting in decreased attendance in their former churches.²⁷ When conflicts involve pastors within assemblies, there is a need for transfer so that a new pastor can help resolve the conflict. This pattern of church multiplication through conflict rather than strategic evangelistic outreach represents a fundamental distortion of church growth principles.

Bosire, Onyanha, and Parsitau observe that religious conflicts can deepen disunity, resulting in no spiritual growth or development within the church.²⁸ Their research on the PAG church's role in educational development in Nyamira County provides valuable context for understanding the church's historical significance in the region, underscoring the current conflicts' detrimental impact on community welfare. Gathuki's research demonstrates that the mushrooming of new churches indicates a search for peace and resolution outside existing structures. However, this does not necessarily bring anticipated peace, suggesting that root issues are merely relocated rather than addressed.²⁹ Gathuki's case study of Christian Church International in Kiria-Ini Town revealed that church splits often replicated the same conflicts in

²⁴ Thiga, Pam, and Nkansah-Obrempong, "The Effect of Church Conflict on the Growth of Pentecostal Churches in Kenya," 35–37.

²⁵ Isiko, "Religious Conflict among Pentecostal Churches in Uganda," 152–53.

²⁶ Afolabi, "Alternative Dispute Resolution: A Tool for Managing Leadership Conflict in a Church," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 12, no. 4 (2019): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21607>.

²⁷ David W. Kale and Mel McCullough, *Managing Conflict in the Church* (Kansas City, Mo: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2003), 78–79.

²⁸ Bosire D.O., Onyanha B.K., and Parsitau S.D., *Role of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church (PAG) in the Development of Education in Nyamira County, Kenya*, 2017, 12, www.researchpublish.com.

²⁹ Daniel M. Gathuki, "Conflict in Pentecostal Churches: The Case of Christian Church International, Kiria-Ini Town, Murang'a County, Kenya" (Thesis, Kenyatta University, 2015), 87–89, <https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/14233>.



new settings, as unresolved leadership issues and governance patterns were transferred to newly formed congregations.

Conflict Resolution Strategies in Church Settings

Matthew 18:15–17 provides foundational biblical guidance for conflict resolution within the church community. Jesus instructs,

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

This passage establishes a progressive, redemptive process for addressing conflict that prioritizes reconciliation over punishment.

Sande argues that the first step, direct, private communication between conflicting parties, is foundational because it avoids the problems of triangulation and gossip that exacerbate conflicts when matters are taken to others before addressing the person directly involved.³⁰ This private meeting provides an opportunity to address misunderstandings and creates space for the other person to respond positively without public shame. The goal at this stage is restoration: “If they listen to you, you have won them over” (Matt 18:15), indicating that the purpose is to gain a brother or sister, not to win an argument or establish one’s own righteousness.

The second step involves bringing “one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses’” (Matt 18:16). Sande emphasizes that these witnesses should not be partisan supporters who “gang up” on the alleged offender, but rather persons of impeccable integrity whom both parties recognize as fair and impartial.³¹ Their function is to listen objectively, confirm facts, and facilitate reconciliation, not to serve as advocates for one side. This step reflects the Old Testament legal principle requiring two or more witnesses to establish a charge (Deut 19:15), thereby protecting against false accusations while providing accountability.

The third step escalates the matter to the church community. “If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church” (Matt 18:17). This public involvement of the congregation serves multiple purposes: it demonstrates the seriousness of unresolved sin, invites corporate wisdom and

³⁰ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 156–59.

³¹ Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 207–10.



discernment, and applies communal accountability to promote repentance. Finally, if the person refuses even the church’s intervention, they are to be treated “as a pagan or a tax collector” (Matt 18:17), which means removal from fellowship. However, Sande notes this is not a permanent rejection but rather a form of redemptive discipline aimed at bringing the person to repentance, as illustrated in Paul’s instructions regarding the immoral man in Corinth (1 Cor 5:3–5; 2 Corinthians 2:5–8).³²

A fundamental principle underlying this process is that “people are not the problem; the problem is the problem,” requiring parties to separate the person from the issue.³³ This principle prevents conflict from becoming personal attacks and maintains focus on addressing the substantive issues at stake. Church leaders should address conflict as soon as it arises to prevent it from festering and causing further division.³⁴ Wise leaders anticipate conflict and are proactive in preparing for it by preaching or teaching on it as a routine part of organizational development, creating a culture where conflict resolution is normalized rather than stigmatized.³⁵

Effective Conflict Management Strategies in Church Settings

Effective conflict management requires selecting a neutral manager who is spiritually mature and accepted by all parties involved. Many church leaders spend hundreds of hours annually addressing conflicts, but pastors can significantly reduce this by investing in training to improve their relational wisdom and peacemaking skills.³⁶ Woolverton argues that conflict competency should be considered an essential pastoral skill, on par with preaching and teaching abilities, yet most seminary curricula provide minimal training in this area.³⁷

Afolabi proposes that alternative dispute resolution can serve as a tool for managing leadership conflict in churches, emphasizing the importance of formal mechanisms beyond litigation.³⁸ He argues that the adversarial nature of court proceedings is fundamentally incompatible with Christian values of reconciliation and forgiveness, often hardening positions and making restoration more difficult. Instead, churches should develop internal mediation and

³² Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 228–30.

³³ Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 125.

³⁴ Woolverton, *Mission Rift*, 89–92.

³⁵ Russell Huizing, *Bringing Christ to the Table of Leadership: Moving Towards a Theology of Leadership*, 5, no. 2 (2011): 132–34.

³⁶ Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 35–37.

³⁷ Woolverton, *Mission Rift*, 112–15.

³⁸ Afolabi, “Alternative Dispute Resolution,” 44–45.



arbitration procedures that maintain confidentiality, preserve relationships, and seek win-win solutions rather than winner-take-all outcomes.

Miller emphasizes that effective conflict management requires understanding the unique dynamics of church conflicts, which often intertwine theological, relational, financial, and power dimensions that would remain separate in secular organizations.³⁹ Church leaders must develop the capacity to address conflicts at multiple levels, simultaneously addressing surface issues while examining underlying power structures, unspoken assumptions, and historical grievances that fuel current disputes.

Christ's Theological Stance on Leadership

In this study, Christ's theological stance is defined as the Biblical teachings on leadership as offered by Christ in the Gospels. In this section, we shall explore some of the biblical passages in which Jesus spoke directly and indirectly about leadership, and draw some implications that will serve as the Christian belief on leadership. In our exploration of Christ's teaching on leadership the three lessons we learned are that (1) a leader must be a disciple who has cultivated the attitude of being with Christ; (2) a leader is a leader because he serves the people; (3) only a man or woman who operates under the anointing of the Holy Spirit can be an effective leader.

Leaders and their Call to be with Christ

One important way Christ demonstrates his leadership model is through his choice of disciples who would continue the work he came to do on earth. Importantly, before sending the disciples to accomplish any mission for him, he ensured that the disciples spent time with him: "Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14, NKJV). The disciples needed to learn from him and become like him. It was important for them to pay attention to Christ's way of doing things, his mind, his character, and his lifestyle. Getting to know more about their Master will enable them to see their own imperfection. They have a perfect model for comparison, as they look at the life of Christ vis-à-vis their own life. Becoming like Christ helps believers overcome their sin nature, like the inner urges, compulsions, and dysfunctions of human personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown to us until we experience an emotional explosion that causes us to search for a reason

³⁹ Miller, *The Contentious Community*, 156-58.



why.⁴⁰ Seeing the perfection of Christ’s nature enables believers to know how imperfect they are as leaders. It provides believers with a solid foundation that opens their eyes to the dark side of human life. And, this is one critical way of being transformed into the image of Christ.

All of this is pointing to the fact that leaders are not made overnight. The making of a leader is a process that entails dedicated time spent with Christ and gaining practical lessons from other human leaders. A leader who has been with Christ and learned the attitude of Christ will learn to “esteem others than himself” (Phil 2: 3) and not be contending for power with anyone.

Leaders and Their Call to Service and Humility

Another remarkable quality to be learned from Christ’s teaching on leadership is service and humility. This teaching of Christ is best understood through the concept of the Sons of Zebedee in Mark 10:35–45. The two brothers presumed that leadership is about occupying a position of greatness, where they would be honoured and served by everyone. However, Christ brought them to a different perspective on leadership. Christ taught that true leadership requires servanthood: “whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:43–45).

Just as Christ, who is God, did not see equality with God as something to cling to (Phil 2:6), so too Christian leaders must use their position to serve. Leadership is about humility. As Edmund puts it, “humility or meekness is love’s mood. It is love’s prevailing attitude, spirit, and disposition. The humble person is free from pride or arrogance. He submits himself to others and is helpful and courteous. The humble person does not consider himself to be self-sufficient. And yet he recognises his own gifts, resources and achievement.”⁴¹ A Christ-like leader values humble service to the people he leads. He knows that leadership is about responsibility and serving the people of God at all costs.

What, then, should the Christian leader who wants to exert influence among his followers do? First, he must realise that a price has to be paid. It is really about giving oneself. It means we are more conscious of our *responsibility* as believers than our *rights*. Far too many pastors and leaders today are more concerned about their personal rights and achievements than about their

⁴⁰ Gary McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*, Rev. ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 28.

⁴¹ John Edmund Haggai, *Lead on ! Leadership That Endures in a Changing World* (S.I: Kobrey, 1986), 59.



responsibilities to God and to their people. They are more interested in what they can gain than what they can give.⁴² If leadership is approached with a sense of humble service, there will be no need to fight for it. Hence, contention for power is a lack of leadership understanding. Christ's theological stance on leadership indicates that leadership is nothing to fight for.

Research Gap

Despite the extensive literature on church conflict more generally, there is a notable lack of empirical research on the causes of conflict in congregations. More specifically, while studies have examined leadership conflicts in various denominations across Kenya and Africa, no systematic research has been conducted on the effects of leadership conflict within the PAG church in Nyaramba District. Thiga, Pam, and Nkansah-Obrempong's study focused on selected Pentecostal churches in Nairobi. At the same time, Gathuki's research examined Christian Church International in Murang'a County, leaving the PAG experience in rural districts like Nyaramba unexplored. Isiko's research addressed Ugandan Pentecostal contexts, which differ significantly from the Kenyan context in terms of church-state relations, denominational structures, and cultural factors.

This study investigated church conflict in the Nyaramba District, examining the immediate causes and impacts of the 2019 electoral disputes and proposing contextually relevant resolution strategies. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on urban Pentecostal churches, this research addresses the unique dynamics of leadership conflict in a rural district with deep historical roots and strong community integration. Furthermore, while existing scholarship has theorized about the relationship between pastoral tenure and conflict escalation, this study provides quantitative evidence documenting this correlation. Further, this research contributes to understanding how national-level leadership conflicts cascade through organizational hierarchies to affect district and local assembly operations, a phenomenon that the current literature inadequately addresses.

Summary of Literature Review

In summary, the literature reveals three critical dimensions of church leadership conflict. First, conflicts arise from structural factors, including power concentration, discriminatory constitutions, and governance systems that create vulnerabilities for authoritarian control or

⁴² Larry J. Michael, *Spurgeon on Leadership: Key Insights for Christian Leaders from the Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel Publications, 2003), 154–55.



factional fragmentation. Second, these conflicts devastate church membership, organizational effectiveness, and mission fulfillment, creating unfavorable atmospheres that drive church members to seek peace elsewhere, though merely relocating often fails to address root issues. Third, biblical frameworks, particularly Matthew 18:15–17, offer redemptive processes that prioritize reconciliation, but these require institutional commitment, skilled leadership, and the cultural normalization of conflict competency.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide an understanding of leadership conflict within the PAG church in Nyaramba District. The mixed-method approach was selected because it allows for triangulation of data, enabling the researcher to capture both the breadth of experiences through numerical data and the depth of insights through narrative accounts.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling, which involves the deliberate selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest, to select participants with direct knowledge and experience of the leadership conflict within the PAG church.⁴³ Participants were selected based on: (1) active membership in the PAG church in Nyaramba District during the 2019 election period, (2) direct involvement or observation of the leadership conflict, and (3) willingness to participate in the study. The study involved 50 participants: 45 church members for surveys and 5 key informants (pastors, District Overseers, and stakeholders) for in-depth interviews.

Data Collection Methods

Three primary methods of data collection were employed. First, structured questionnaires were distributed to 45 church members to gather quantitative data on their experiences and perceptions of the leadership conflict. The surveys used Likert scales and open-ended questions covering conflict causes, attendance, morale, finances, and pastoral relationships. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 church leaders and key stakeholders. The interviews provided

⁴³ Lawrence A. Palinkas et al., “Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research,” *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42, no. 5 (September 2015): 533, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>.



rich insights into the conflict’s causes, decision-making processes, and efforts to resolve it. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes.

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, central tendency). Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis: interviews were transcribed, coded, and grouped into themes (leadership disputes, strained relationships, financial distrust, declining morale, breakaway churches). Direct quotations from respondents (pseudonymized to protect confidentiality) were selected to illustrate the identified themes. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing survey and interview findings to identify areas of convergence and divergence.

Findings of the Study

The findings are presented according to the three research objectives: (1) investigating the underlying causes of the leadership conflict within the PAG church in Nyaramba District, (2) examining the multifaceted impact of the conflict on church members, organizational structures, and administrative operations, and (3) analyzing attempted conflict resolution mechanisms and identifying barriers that prevented effective resolution.

Primary Causes of Leadership Conflict

The research findings indicate that the primary causes of the conflict within the PAG church in Nyaramba District were leadership-related, specifically stemming from disputed electoral processes and subsequent power struggles. Table 1 presents the distribution of identified conflict causes as reported by survey respondents.

Table 1: Primary Causes of Leadership Conflict (N=45)

Cause of Conflict	Percentage
Disputed election results	84.4%
Power struggles and factionalism	77.8%
Personal interests over church mission	73.3%
Lack of transparency in leadership	68.9%
Financial mismanagement allegations	62.2%
Constitutional inconsistencies	55.6%

Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple causes

The election results led to immediate disagreements and the formation of opposing groups within the leadership, driven by personal interests and realignments. Interview data corroborated these



survey findings. R01, a church member, observed: “Friends disagreed within the church, igniting old wounds that were assumed to be healed over the years.” The conflict also manifested through strained relationships between pastors and their congregations. R02 reported: “Some pastors started abusing church members within their assemblies, leading to disagreements.” Issues of financial mismanagement arose, prompting members to demand transparency, which, when those close to leadership felt targeted, exacerbated the conflict.

All interview respondents (n=5) noted that pastors serving for over 5 years experienced excessive familiarity and loss of moral authority—churches with pastors serving 5–15 years predominantly experienced splits.

Effects on Church Members’ Daily Activities, Attendance, and Morale

The leadership conflict had profound effects on church members’ participation, attendance patterns, and overall morale. Table 2 summarizes the reported impacts on member engagement.

Table 2: Impact of Conflict on Member Participation and Attendance (N=45)

Impact Area	Members Affected	Percentage
Experienced decreased morale	41	91.1%
Decreased financial contributions	35	77.8%
Reduced frequency of attendance	32	71.1%
Stopped attending church services	18	40.0%
Joined newly formed PAG churches	15	33.3%
Left to join other denominations	12	26.7%

The disunity led to a noticeable decline in church attendance and overall morale. R01 reported: “This led to some members not attending the church for some days, and some members had to procure a parcel of land where they started new churches.” This period witnessed a proliferation of new churches, leading to reduced numbers in the older assemblies. Those who remained experienced a significant drop in morale, while those who moved to new churches did not find the anticipated peace, as conflicts persisted. Respondents noted a general lack of motivation to attend any assemblies, and the persistent conflict left many members disillusioned.

R03 highlighted that some members redirected their tithes and offerings to other pastors: “Some members started submitting their tithes and offerings to pastors in other churches, leading to a sense of alienation within their assemblies.” This financial redirection directly affected members’ sense of belonging and commitment.



Impact on Organizational and Administrative Structures

The leadership conflict severely disrupted the church’s organizational and administrative functions. Table 3 presents the organizational impacts identified through the study.

Table 3: Impact on Organizational and Administrative Structures (N=45)

Organizational Impact	Respondents Reporting	Percentage
Halted construction projects	27	60.0%
Disrupted financial operations	38	84.4%
Breakdown in communication channels	40	88.9%
Formation of parallel leadership structures	22	48.9%
Loss of denominational unity	42	93.3%
Decreased administrative effectiveness	36	80.0%

The financial redirection of tithes and offerings had substantial organizational consequences. Construction projects were halted as members ceased contributing towards them, reflecting broader disengagement from church activities. The conflict created parallel administrative structures as different factions attempted to assert their authority, leading to confusion about legitimate leadership, disrupted communication channels, and ineffective decision-making. The parties involved were unwilling to resolve the issues, which exposed the church to external criticism.

Table 4 shows the relationship between pastor tenure and the likelihood of assembly-level conflict and church splits.

Table 4: Pastor Tenure and Assembly Conflict Patterns

Pastor Tenure in an Assembly	Assemblies Studied	Experienced Splits	Percentage
Less than 5 years	8	1	12.5%
5-10 years	12	7	58.3%
11-15 years	6	5	83.3%
More than 15 years	4	3	75.0%

As shown in Table 4, assemblies in which pastors had served for 5 years or more were significantly more likely to experience church splits during the conflict period. This finding supports the interview data suggesting that prolonged pastoral tenure contributed to the intensity and personal nature of conflicts at the assembly level.



Discussion

Significance of Leadership-Related Causes and Electoral Disputes

The findings reveal that 84.4% of respondents identified disputed election results as the primary cause of conflict within the PAG church (Table 1), with power struggles and factionalism affecting 77.8% of participants. This finding aligns significantly with previous scholarly work on church conflict. The current study's findings confirm Maxwell's assertion that "everything rises from and falls on leadership," demonstrating how national-level electoral disputes cascaded down to affect district and assembly operations.⁴⁴

Impact on Member Participation

The study's finding that 91.1% of members experienced decreased morale and 71.1% reduced their attendance frequency (Table 2) provides empirical validation of previous theoretical work on the consequences of church conflict. The current study extends this understanding by quantifying the extent of impact: 40% of respondents completely stopped attending services, while 26.7% left to join other denominations, and 33.3% joined newly formed PAG churches. This fragmentation pattern corroborates Thiga, Pam, and Nkansah-Obrempong's findings that leadership conflicts lead to negative growth by creating an unfavorable atmosphere.

Financial and Organizational Disruption

The study's finding that 77.8% of members decreased their financial contributions and 84.4% reported disrupted financial operations (Tables 2 and 3) provides new empirical evidence for the economic consequences of church conflict. This financial redirection had cascading effects, with 60% of respondents reporting that construction projects had been halted. This finding extends Afolabi's observation that leadership conflict affects the ministry of pastors, demonstrating that its impact extends beyond membership numbers to include tangible developmental setbacks.

The finding that 93.3% of respondents reported loss of denominational unity and 88.9% experienced breakdown in communication channels (Table 3) provides empirical support for Bosire, Onyanacha, and Parsitau's (n.d.) assertion that religious conflicts lead to greater disunity, preventing spiritual growth and development within the church. The current study demonstrates that this disunity manifests in concrete organizational dysfunction, including the formation of

⁴⁴ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*.



parallel leadership structures (48.9% of respondents) and decreased administrative effectiveness (80% of respondents).

Pastoral Tenure and Conflict Escalation

One of the most significant findings is the strong correlation between pastoral tenure and the likelihood of assembly-level conflict and church splits (Table 4). Assemblies with pastors serving less than 5 years experienced splits in only 12.5% of cases, while those with pastors serving 11–15 years experienced splits in 83.3% of cases. This finding makes a novel contribution to the literature on church conflict, as previous research has not systematically examined the relationship between pastoral tenure and conflict intensity. This finding has important implications for Kale and McCullough’s recommendation that, where conflicts involve pastors, transfer is needed. The current study suggests that such transfers should be proactive rather than reactive.

Failure of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

The study’s finding that parties were unwilling to engage in conflict-resolution efforts validates concerns in the literature about the lack of effective conflict management in religious organizations. Despite Matthew 18 guidance on direct communication between parties in conflict, the study reveals that opposing factions chose litigation and parallel structures rather than dialogue and reconciliation. The PAG conflict became deeply personalized, contradicting the fundamental principle that “people are not the problem; the problem is the problem.” The resort to litigation rather than alternative dispute resolution contradicts Afolabi’s proposition. It demonstrates the limitations of adversarial legal approaches in addressing conflicts that are fundamentally relational and spiritual.

Theological Interpretation: Character Formation and Conflict Prevention

The study’s findings gain deeper significance when interpreted through Christ’s preventive leadership model. The data reveal not merely organizational dysfunction but spiritual and character deficiencies among leaders that created conditions for conflict.

Discipleship Deficit and Pastoral Tenure

The strong correlation between pastoral tenure and conflict escalation (Table 4) illuminates the critical importance of ongoing discipleship. Assemblies with pastors serving 11–15 years experienced splits in 83.3% of cases, compared to only 12.5% in assemblies with pastors serving



less than 5 years. This pattern suggests that prolonged tenure without continued transformation in Christ's image leads to the character issues identified in the theological framework: pride, egotism, indispensability, and loss of servant focus.

When pastors cease being disciples who “esteem others better than themselves” (Phil 2:3), they become susceptible to the perils of leadership.⁴⁵ Interview data reveal that pastors “became involved in controversial community issues” and experienced “loss of moral authority” after extended tenure, suggesting that leaders who stopped pursuing transformation through sustained time in Christ's presence. The finding that “excessive familiarity” contributed to conflict aligns with the theological understanding that leaders must continually renew their call to discipleship rather than rely on accumulated positional authority.

Servant Leadership Absence and Power Struggles

The study's finding that disputed election results (84.4%) and power struggles (77.8%) were the primary causes of conflict demonstrates the absence of a servant-leadership mentality. When leadership is understood as an opportunity for humble service rather than a position of prestige, there is no cause to contend for it. The fact that leaders resorted to litigation, defied court orders, and established parallel structures reveals they viewed leadership as rights to be defended rather than responsibilities to be fulfilled.

Christ's teaching that “whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:43) evidently did not operate in leaders' understanding. The conflict manifested precisely because leaders were “more concerned about their personal rights and attainments than their responsibilities before God to their people”.⁴⁶ Had leaders approached their roles with the humility Haggai describes, “free from pride or arrogance, submitting to others, helpful and courteous,”⁴⁷ the electoral disputes would not have escalated into organizational fragmentation.

Spirit Empowerment Deficit and Resolution Failure

The complete failure of multiple conflict-resolution mechanisms (court litigation, government mediation, internal church mediation) demonstrates reliance on human strength rather than on

⁴⁵ Sanders, *Christian Counseling Ethics*, 153–58.

⁴⁶ Larry J. Michael, *Spurgeon on Leadership: Key Insights for Christian Leaders from the Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2003), 154–55.

⁴⁷ John Edmund Haggai, *Hang On!: Leadership That Endures in a Changing World*, 1st UK, ed (Milton Keynes, Heathmont, Vic.: Word Pub.; Word Books Australia, 1987), 59.



Holy Spirit empowerment. When leaders operate in their own power rather than divine anointing, they resort to adversarial approaches that escalate conflicts. The finding that parties demonstrated “unwillingness to engage in genuine reconciliation” reflects the absence of Spirit-enabled transformation.

The Spirit’s anointing produces charismatic leaders who lead without coercion, communicate with clarity that brings understanding rather than division, and demonstrate creativity in problem-solving rather than resorting to litigation.⁴⁸ The adversarial legal approaches employed in this conflict stand in stark contrast to Spirit-empowered leadership that would prioritize reconciliation, seek win-win solutions, and maintain focus on the church’s mission rather than individual rights.

Integration: The Dark Side Manifested

McIntosh and Rima’s concept of leadership’s “dark side,” the dysfunctional personality traits developed through earlier years that remain unexamined until crisis, provides interpretive power for understanding this conflict.⁴⁹ The study documents the manifestation of unexamined character issues: pride (refusal to acknowledge electoral defeat), egotism (insistence on individual claims to leadership), jealousy (bitterness toward those who won positions), indispensability (refusal to transfer authority), and elation/depression extremes (the emotional intensity driving prolonged litigation).

These character deficiencies were not addressed through preventive discipleship, servant leadership formation, or Spirit-dependent ministry. Had the PAG church invested in comprehensive leadership formation in line with Christ’s model, the 2019 electoral disputes might have been navigated without organizational fragmentation. Leaders formed through sustained Christ-focused discipleship, committed to servant-hearted approaches, and operating in Holy Spirit power would have possessed the character resources to accept outcomes graciously, seek reconciliation actively, and prioritize the church’s unity over personal ambitions.

This theological interpretation does not excuse organizational failures; discriminatory constitutions, lack of transparency, and inadequate conflict-resolution frameworks, which remain significant structural problems requiring attention. However, it reveals that beneath

⁴⁸ Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, trans. James Greig (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 19.

⁴⁹ Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*, Rev. ed (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2007), 28.



organizational dysfunction lie spiritual and character deficiencies that must be addressed for lasting transformation. Structural reforms without character formation will prove insufficient, as leaders with unexamined dark sides will find new ways to generate conflict regardless of improved systems.

Implications

This study investigated the leadership conflict within the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) church in Nyaramba District, examining its underlying causes, impacts on church members and organizational structures, and implications for conflict resolution. Through a mixed-method approach involving surveys of church members and in-depth interviews with church leaders and key stakeholders, the research provides empirical evidence of the multifaceted nature and devastating consequences of leadership conflict in religious settings.

The literature review established that leadership conflict in religious organizations emerges from multiple intersecting factors. Power and authority misuse serve as primary drivers, as Folger, Poole, and Stutman conceptualize power as the “architecture of conflict” with the capacity to influence behavior and attitudes. Church governmental structures, whether Episcopal, Congregational, or Presbyterian, create inherent vulnerabilities to either authoritarian control or factional fragmentation. The review revealed that leadership conflicts devastate church membership, organizational effectiveness, and mission fulfillment, creating unfavorable atmospheres that drive members to seek alternatives. Matthew 18:15–17 provides a biblical framework emphasizing progressive, redemptive conflict resolution through direct communication, the involvement of witnesses, and church discipline when necessary. However, the literature gap regarding empirical research on the PAG church in Nyaramba District necessitated this investigation to provide a contextualized understanding and evidence-based resolution strategies.

The study’s findings reveal that leadership-related factors, particularly disputed election results, were the primary catalysts of organizational conflict. The 2019 leadership election created a legitimacy crisis, as only a portion of church districts participated, and some continued despite court orders suspending the process. This electoral dispute, compounded by power struggles, a lack of transparency, constitutional inconsistencies, and allegations of financial mismanagement, has fractured the church along factional lines.



The impact on church members was profound and multifaceted. The overwhelming majority of members experienced decreased morale, with substantial numbers reducing attendance frequency or ceasing participation entirely. A significant exodus occurred as members left to join other denominations or established newly formed PAG churches, though conflicts often persisted in these new settings. Financial contributions declined sharply, with some members redirecting tithes to pastors in other churches, thereby directly affecting their sense of belonging and the organization's financial stability.

Organizational and administrative structures experienced severe disruption. Loss of denominational unity, communication breakdown, and disrupted financial operations characterized the institutional impact. Construction projects halted as member engagement and contributions declined. The formation of parallel leadership structures competing for authority created confusion about legitimate governance and undermined administrative effectiveness. These organizational impacts demonstrate that religious conflicts not only prevent spiritual growth but also paralyze institutional development and mission effectiveness.

The study documented the complete failure of multiple conflict resolution mechanisms. Court litigation, government mediation, internal church mediation, and dialogue attempts all proved largely ineffective. Parties demonstrated unwillingness to engage in genuine reconciliation, instead prioritizing victory over resolution. The absence of established conflict-resolution frameworks within the PAG church structure, combined with the lack of neutral mediators acceptable to both factions, led leaders to default to adversarial approaches that escalated rather than resolved conflicts. This failure demonstrates that without institutional capacity for conflict resolution and spiritual maturity to separate persons from problems, religious conflicts become increasingly destructive and resistant to resolution.

The discussion contextualized findings within existing scholarship, demonstrating how this research validates and extends theoretical understanding of church leadership conflicts. The study's quantification of conflict impacts provides empirical validation for theoretical assertions about the devastating consequences of unresolved organizational disputes. The identification of pastoral tenure as a critical factor in conflict escalation represents a novel contribution, suggesting proactive transfer policies rather than reactive approaches. The documentation of failures in the resolution mechanism illustrates how adversarial legal approaches are



fundamentally incompatible with reconciliation-focused Christian values, supporting arguments for alternative dispute resolution frameworks grounded in biblical principles.

The implications extend beyond the PAG church in Nyaramba District to Pentecostal churches across Kenya and Africa. The research demonstrates how national-level leadership conflicts cascade through organizational hierarchies, devastating district and assembly operations while fragmenting communities that should serve as sources of unity and peace. Structural deficiencies such as discriminatory constitutions excluding women, youth, and ordinary members from participatory governance create conditions where legitimacy can be easily questioned, and power struggles readily emerge. Churches with hierarchical systems that concentrate power without adequate accountability mechanisms are particularly vulnerable when legitimacy is contested.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the leadership conflict within the PAG church in Nyaramba District represents a cautionary tale of how electoral disputes, power struggles, and organizational dysfunction can undermine a church's unity, growth, and mission. The conflict has caused immeasurable damage to member morale, congregational cohesion, financial stability, and organizational effectiveness. Most tragically, it has compromised the church's witness in the community and hindered its ability to fulfill its fundamental purpose of promoting peace, reconciliation, and spiritual transformation. The research demonstrates that effective conflict prevention requires transparent electoral procedures, inclusive constitutional frameworks, established mediation mechanisms, proactive pastoral transfer policies, and institutional commitment to biblical principles of conflict resolution. Without these structural and cultural changes, Pentecostal churches risk repeating destructive patterns that fragment rather than unify Christian communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The church should revise its electoral procedures to ensure transparency, inclusivity, and fairness. All stakeholders, including ordinary members, women, and youth, should have the right to participate in leadership elections.



2. The PAG church should develop and institutionalize formal conflict resolution frameworks that include mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation processes rooted in biblical principles.
3. To build trust and prevent allegations of mismanagement, the church should implement transparent financial management systems with regular independent audits.
4. Leadership development programs should emphasize spiritual maturity, conflict management skills, and participatory decision-making that considers the views and interests of all members.
5. Given the strong correlation between prolonged pastoral tenure and assembly-level conflicts, the PAG church should implement proactive policies for pastoral rotation. Pastors should serve in assemblies for a maximum of four to six years before being transferred.
6. A constitutional review committee should be formed to align the church's 1998 constitution with the 2010 Kenyan constitution and contemporary governance standards, and to address discriminatory provisions that exclude women and youth from leadership positions.
7. The PAG church should implement a holistic leadership formation program based on Christ's three-dimensional model, addressing the character and spiritual deficiencies revealed by this study:

This formation program should be mandatory for all District Overseers, pastors, and aspiring leaders, with completion required before installation in office and annual renewal required for continuation in ministry. By proactively addressing character and spiritual formation, the church will prevent many conflicts that would otherwise require reactive resolution mechanisms.

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