

## NIGERIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM: THE AVIGNON PAPACY EXAMPLE

**Duruji Simeon Uzochukwu, N. Ph.D**

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**Nzeh Atracta, A. Ph.D**

Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Alvan Iko Federal College of  
Education Owerri, Imo state

Venduruji@ gmail.com; [atraco\\_2006@yahoo.com](mailto:atraco_2006@yahoo.com)

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.18277.47848

### **Abstract**

*The study examines the Nigerian political system : The Avignon papacy example. It sees the Nigerian political system as a problematic and crisis-ridden system that has failed to offer the nation the much expected dividends of good governance. It contends that Nigerian political system has been brazenly hijacked by few selfish and unscrupulous politicians who use the system to allocate juicy political powers and valued resources to themselves, their political allies and cronies. Their actions are antithetical to good governance practices and democratic values. There is now a colossal systematic failure on the part of the government. The study compares the Nigerian political system with the Avignon papacy which was dominated by seven popes from France between 1308 and 1378 who promoted French domination of the papacy and the entire hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church during the period. The study begins by a survey of the Nigerian political system. It goes on to have an overview of the Avignon papacy, after which it highlights it as a symbol of corruption in Catholic Church leadership in the 1300's. The study also makes a juxtaposition Nigeria political system and the Avignon papacy and finally takes a look at the church and qualitative political system in Nigeria. The study concludes by contending that the Nigerian political system is a failed one which calls for urgent overhaul and transformation. It recommends among others, an effective and sustained collaboration between the government and the church in order to ensure qualitative political system and true democracy in the country.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, political system, Avignon, papacy, democracy, good governance, leadership

### **Introduction**

Politics is one of the social phenomena that are pervasive in nature as it cuts across all aspects of human life and existence. Man has always been in constant struggle to achieve and protect certain personal interests in his relationship with others in the society by exertion of some level of influence over them. Man is, therefore, a politically conscious being. Nwobi (2018) defines politics as a process of resolving societal conflicts that arise when determining who gets what, when,

where and how? It is power struggle and conflict of interests among individuals in the society in their bid to realize their “best selves” (Appadorai, 2004) Darl (1961) cited in Nwobi (2018) conceptualizes politics as any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves to a significant extent, control, influence, power or authority.

Nigerian society today, like other societies in the globe, is a conglomeration of variant and complex human beings and a complicated network of institutions. Its political system is one ensconced in the complicated concatenation of heterogeneous federating units which make it to exhibit high fissiparous tendency as a federation. Heterogeneity and pluralism are not a curse or a challenge to any nation but blessings and catalysts to development if when harnessed by a nation’s leadership or political elites. Our past and present political elites have failed woefully as far as effective and efficient steering of the sheep of leadership of this very country is concerned. They have succeeded in bequeathing on the nation a skewed and problematic political system that has jolted her into a failed state. A good political system properly regulates and shapes decisions made by the government about duties and responsibilities of citizens also about rights and privileges. A political system is defined by the concise Oxford Dictionary of sociology (1994) as any persistent pattern of human relationship that involves, to a significant extent, power, rule and authority. It entails a collectivity of political institutions, such as government, associations (political parties) and organizations performing roles based on a set of norms and goals. The essence of a political system is to help a state to maintain recognized procedures for allocating valued resources (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org./wikipol>).

Unfortunately, Nigerian political system has been brazenly hijacked by few selfish and unscrupulous politicians who use the system to allocate juicy political powers and valued resources to themselves, their political allies and cronies. Their actions are antithetical to good governance practices and democratic values. There is now a colossal systematic failure on the part of the government. The most popular and desirable form of government in the world today is democracy, but Nigeria has not been lucky to relish a real taste of democracy and its concomitant good governance since her independence in 1960. Nigerian citizens have helplessly found themselves in the sinister hands of leaders whose policies, actions and pattern of governance have only tended toward fostering and maintaining negative political structures and practices that support and reinforce the very elements that elevate disunity, distrust, hatred, rancour,

intolerance, character assassination, tribalism and favouritism that undermine the country's unity and positive nationhood.

The nation's political arena had been suffused with a crop of inept leaders whose controversial cum apocryphal educational and literacy status have disquieted and unsettled the minds of many Nigerians who now see these leaders as models of venial and pardonable perjury, certificate forgery, double standard and holy criminality. They are known for their fair weather and cosmetic integrity but quickly resort to forgery and fraud, in time of exigency, to make up their deficiencies or to argument disqualification when merit and quality try to pose a threat to their personal interest and ambition. They challenge and rubbish the fact that the literacy and knowledge capacity of a nation's citizens is quite significant in determining the trend and level of the nation's economic and political progress, unity and cohesion (Onyeakazi & Okoroafor, 2018).

It is on record that Nigeria made a radical move to establish democratic governance in 1999, a novel effort that was stifled by the activities of her clannish and sectional leaders, with no scintilla of national interest at heart. The 1999 democratic structure failed woefully under the tormenting weight of electoral violence, electoral irregularities widespread corruption, godfatherism, ethnic politics and greed for power that held sway during and after that period. Since, 1999, the democratic space had been dominated by political elites who consistently violate fundamental principles associated with liberal democratic system, such as competitive elections, the rule of law, political freedom, freedom of press and respect for fundamental human rights (Okoi & Wara 2021).

Their approach to politics and national issues resonate those of the Avignon popes, who moved the papal Court of the Catholic Church from Rome to Avignon, southeastern France and controlled the authority of the church for seventy years (1308-1378). The Avignon Popes were known for their corrupt, selfish, lavish and extravagant life style. They sought to protect and maintain French interests instead of the interests of the Catholic Church. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine the Nigerian political system vis - a vis the Avignon papacy example.

### **A Survey of the Nigerian Political System**

Nigerian political system, since her independence on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960 has exhibited motley and mongrelized features of representative government,

military dictatorship, cosmetic democracy with no modicum of democratic principles or ideals, and government by self imposed ethnic conscious politicians. It has painted and continues to paint an unpleasant and dismal picture of a kaleidoscope of politics of wealth accumulation, winner-takes all-and loser-loses all-syndrome, highest-bidder-takes-all-syndrome, I-must-rules-them – willy-nilly-syndrome; and leadership by inept directionless, rudderless and visionless politicians who only end up destroying the nation’s political economy, bond of unity and image among the comity of nations. It may not be a misconception for one to describe the nation’s contemporary political domain as the exclusive preserve of political elites who are bereft of what Adagbabiri and Okolie (2019) refer to as the hegemony and discipline to engender socio-economic and political stability that will usher the nation into the league of developed nations. Nigeria is currently enmeshed in the sinister web of politics of self interest, ethnic politics, politics of segregation and exclusion which take her politically, socially economically and culturally backward. These types of politics breed pervasive social inequality which increases poverty rate, aggravate conflict situation such as obtained in certain parts of the middle east where high levels of unemployment resulted in frustration, mass protest against the government which climaxed in violet conflicts and sometimes terrorism (Dan – Azumi, 2018).

Nigeria political elites who are the main operators of the nation’s political system take great delight in intimidation and assassination of political opponents to have unfettered access to political power, abuse of fundamental human rights, disregard for the rule of law, Court injunctions and verdicts. They are more ardently committed to self and family development than to national development.

The problem of our nation’s political system is exacerbated by outright emasculation of the Nigerian judicial system by members of the executive arm of Government who turned judges magistrates and other members of the judiciary into pawns, artfully used to score cheap and unmerited political goals. Legal decisions more or less are based on political considerations and dictates of top politicians rather than legal interpretations and constitutional guidance. As observed by Salihu and Gholami (2018), the Nigerian judicial system has become dominated by corrupt practices which stand as the major obstacle to the fight against electoral irregularities, economic and financial crimes in the country. Judiciary is reputed globally as the last hope of the common man in matters that border on justice and equity (Ashenfelter, Eisenberg & Shwab 1995). This is no

longer true in Nigerian, given the nauseating putrefaction witnessed in the judicial system which enfeebles and undermines its potency as an accredited agent for the purveyance of justice in the nation.

Nigeria electoral process has currently been turned to a call for war and show of force, there are hardly free and fair elections in the country and this has made peaceful democratic transition of power chimerical. Electoral violence, widespread electoral irregularities, partisan electoral commission or officials, vote buying and thuggery that characterize Nigerian elections are evidence of weak democratic structure in the country. A primary feature of modern democratic practice is free and fair electoral system (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2006). It is very exasperating that democratic participation in Nigeria breeds institutional marginality and bad governance due to what Ujomu and Olatunji (2014) describe as shortfalls in pursuing the values of justice and empowerment as core democratic characteristics. There is no fair play anywhere in the nation's political system as it stands today. Democracy would have helped in this regard since it allows and promotes fair play within and among the elites and political grassroots (Barry 1981).

Nigeria political system is a fragile and ineffectual system as it has failed to help the nation cope effectively and efficiently with the contemporary complexities of governance. Corruption, poverty, insecurity, kidnapping, unemployment, infrastructural decay and inflation are of their highest peak in the recent time. The oil and gas industry have been allowed to collapse while Nigeria depend largely on importation of refined oil from abroad. The education sector is absolutely neglected as public universities have remain on strike for nearly seven months with no meaningful efforts made on the part of the federal government to settle the demands of the striking university lecturers.

The ever-escalating insurgency and agitations for elf government by some cultural and ethnic groups in the country have continued to threaten the stability and political integrity of the country as the giant of Africa. Nigerian political system, indeed calls for a complete overhaul and transformation to make it fit to serve the political needs of the nation in a rapidly globalizing age. The judiciary is being controlled and tele-guided by the executive arm of government who use them to score cheap and unmerited political goals. Legal decisions more or less are based on political consideration and bidding of the politicians who installed the judges and other members of the judicial arm of government rather than legal interpretations and constitutional guidance.

### **Avignon Papacy: An Overview**

Avignon papacy refers to Roman Catholic papacy during the period, 1308-78, when the Popes took up residence at Avignon, France, instead of at Rome primarily because of the prevailing political conditions of the time. According to Zutschi (2000), it was the period during which seven successive Popes resided in Avignon, precisely in the kingdom of Arles, part of the Holy Roman empire in France, rather than in Rome. These Popes, who were all French, resided 70years at Avignon.

During this period, one of the French born Popes named Clement V ordered the move of the papal court from Rome to Avignon in response to the increasingly fractious and turbulent political environment in Rome, which had seen his predecessors face off against king Philip IV of France. It was this French monarch (King Philip IV) that worked assiduously for the election of Pope Clement V by the Conclave (sacred college of cardinals) in 1305, because of his close relationship with him. Few years after the election of Clement V as the Pope at Rome, King Philip IV pressed him to move the papal residence to Avignon, France ([www.historyextra.com](http://www.historyextra.com)). By 1308, he moved the papal residence from Rome to Avignon, France where it remained till 1378. The French crown had significant influence over the leadership of the Catholic church beginning from the time of pope Clement V (1305-1314) to Pope Gregory xi (1370-1378).

Before the election of Clement V to the office of pope, his predecessor Pope Boniface VIII had clashed with the French crown, king Philip IV and this overheated the political environment in Rome. King Philip IV wanted to use the finances of the church to pay for his war with English, but Boniface VIII, who was from England, rejected the selfish demands of King Philip IV. The Catholic Church authority led by Pope Boniface VIII wanted to have independent voice in France but the ability to achieved that was marred by King Philip's political power. Another factor that fanned the flame of political conflict between the duo was the church's method of handling cases of criminal clergy who were accused of committing criminal acts. This was a serious matter since the church had traditionally claimed the right to discipline its own members and to try any cleric accused of a crime in a church court under the procedures of canon law. The French crown (Philip IV) saw this as a way devised by the church to cover its criminal clerics as the canon law would end up treating their heinous crimes with kid gloves. He contended that criminal clerics, who break secular law should be tried in a secular Court, but Pope Bonifcace VIII objected, claiming that

the church could not be independent if its clerics could be arrested at any time by secular officials. (Nelson, 2022).

Another factor was the argument as to whether Catholic Clergymen and church property should be taxed like everyone and everything else in France. The French crown (king Philip IV) was of the view that the church and its property should be taxed since they enjoyed the protection of the government of France. But the Catholic Pope, Boniface VIII challenged the above idea of taxing the church and its property because he felt that the power to tax is the power to destroy. This made him to quickly issue two different papal bulls in 1302. One was the "Clericos Laicos" which ordered members of the church not to pay secular taxes unless instructed to do so by the Pope. The other one was the "Unam sactam, in which he declared the supremacy of the church over the secular governments in all things. As a move against the papal authority, king Philip IV, who was enraged organized French Bishops and Arch bishops against Pope Bonifcae VIII and called a Representative Assembly, the Estates General. This made Pope Boniface VIII, who underestimated the power and political sagacity of the French monarch, a person said to be much more dangerous than the Holy Roman emperors had ever been, to threaten to excommunicate and depose King Philip IV (Nelson 2022).

King Philip IV adopted extreme measures against the Pope (Boniface VIII), schemed against him by leveling all sorts of criminal accusations against him which led to his arrest, prosecution and imprisonment ([www.vlib.us](http://www.vlib.us)). This resulted to the death of Pope Boniface VIII in 1303. His successor, Pope Benedict XI died within eight months of being elected to the papacy. A freshman and a personal friend of the French crown, king Philip IV Bertrand De Got was elected in his place in 1305 and he took the name Pope Clement V. His election to the papacy opened way for French domination of the papacy. Pope clement V. under the patronage of the French crown, king Philip IV moved the papal court from Rome to Avignon, France in 1308 and that begun the Avignon papacy ([www.encyclopedia.com/religion.avigon](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/avigon)..) . The seven Avignon Popes who successively occupied the papal office of the Catholic Church from 1308 to 1378 were all French and they include:

- i. Pope Clement V (1305-1314)
- ii. Pope John XXII (1316-1334)
- iii. Pope Benedict XII (1334-1342)
- iv. Pope Clement vi (1342-1352)

- v. Pope innocent VI (1352-1362)
- vi. Pope urban V (1362-1370)
- vii. Pope Gregory XI (1370-1378)

([enrnwikipedia.org/wiki/avi](http://enrnwikipedia.org/wiki/avi)). One hundred and eleven (111) of the one hundred and thirty four (134) cardinals were also French and they wielded strong influence in the government of the church ([www.britannica.com/event/...](http://www.britannica.com/event/...)).

### **Avignon Papacy as a symbol of corruption in Catholic church leadership in the 1300s.**

The Avignon popes exhibited corrupt leadership style in the Catholic Church through the introduction of extravagant and lavish life style for the popes while in residence in Avignon, France. During their period, which lasted 70 years, tribal politics, partiality, cronism and favouritism held sway in the church leadership, as they did all in their power to entrench French dominance in the papacy and among the bishops, archbishops and zcardinals in the Rome Catholic church papal Court situated then in Avignon, southeastern France. They ensured that one hundred and eleven (111) of the one hundred and thirty four (134) cardinals were French and they granted them unusual opportunity to wield greater power in the government of the church ([www.britannica.com/event/...](http://www.britannica.com/event/...)).

The papacy became a puppet of the French crown, king Philip IV, whose influence made the Popes to compromise the standard of leadership ethics, principles and modus operandi inherent in the catholic papal leadership style and culture. They were heavily enmeshed in temporal-secular dirty politics of France which made them more obsessed with worldly affairs than with spiritual or church well being. During that period, elections to the papacy were manipulated and skewed to favour the continual and unbroken chain of the crown's choicest Popes from France. No chance or opportunity whatsoever was given to cardinals from other parts of the globe to have access to papal power of the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Clement V sided with King Philip IV's political persecution of the knights.

As observed by Williams (1998), the fourth Avignon Pope, Clement VI, not only used his papal office to ensure French dominance of the church at all cost, but also promoted French arts, music and culture in the papal court; and decorated and furnished the cardinals and Knights of the papal court extravagantly and



copiously. He exposed them to flamboyant and pompous lifestyle that made their reputation to be dragged to the mud (Williams, 1998).

Papal authority and credibility were grossly damaged because of the inherent corrupt practices in the system and the inability of the Popes to bring an end to the 100 years of war between France and England and inability to administer sacrament to European Catholic faithfuls during the Black Death. This had a great damaging effect on their reputation since they had declared that the sacraments were necessary for salvation. The implication of this was that those who died during the period were destined to eternity in hell. The Church leadership became very greedy and insensitive to the plights of its votaries, who then resorted to the help of mysticism, stoicism national churches and secular leadership ([www.vlib.us](http://www.vlib.us)).

The burden of running the papal office in Avignon later became heavy on the Popes who cut the finances of parish priests, taxed bishops heavily and raised charges for the services of the papal court, the action, which subjected the priests and bishops to poverty and hardship. They sold justice and indulgences (documents forgiving the purchaser a certain amount of sin), and declared the church's belief in Apostolic poverty heretical (Nelson 2022).

The Avignon papacy affected the church's power and authority, made people to criticize the church and showed discontentment with its leadership during the period. This crop of church elites chose to undermine the integrity cum sanctity of the papal office because of self dealing and personal gains.

### **Nigerian Political System and the Avignon Papacy: A Juxtaposition**

Anyone who places the Nigerian political system and the Avignon papacy of the 14<sup>th</sup> century side by side today will indubitably observe an intriguingly blurry distinction between the two systems.

Observation has shown that some group of unidentifiable powerful individuals commonly referred to as the "cabals" wield enormous influence in Nigerian Government today, just as the French crown, King Philip IV did in the government of the 14<sup>th</sup> century churches led by the Avignon Popes. The cabals" play great role in the installation of various governments in Nigeria, often by rigging them into power, a practice not different from the way King Philip IV ardently supported and gallantly fought for the election of Clement V to the papal office in 1305. King Philip IV advised and mounted pressure on pope

Clement V to move the papal court from Rome to Avignon, France and the deal was fully actualized in 1308 and remained unchanged until 1378. The above relocation not only affected the church's authority and credibility but caused conflicts, rivalries and disarray in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. In the same vein, Nigerian governments were reportedly run by the dictates and manipulations of the cabals. The Senior Special Assistant to President Muhammadu Buhari on media and publicity Mr. Garba Shehu, on Channels Television 'Politics Today' said that "cabals" are respectable Nigerians that are in some advisable positions of the president. He admitted that there is nothing wrong in having "cabals" around the president Buhari in the daily running of the governments. The government of former presidents Umaru Yar' adua and Goodluck Jonathan cabinets were believed to be influenced by cabals," powerful people controlling the presidents in key decision making. Shuhu (2019) noted that one must be trusted by the president in order to be chosen to offer support (as a cabal) to him in the daily running of the government.

A sincere look at the disheartening scenario painted by our entire political system will prod one to question the rationale behind having "cabals" in our government. The cabals in the past and present governments were mere enfeeblers and spoilers of the government, whose advice and directions were meant to serve personal and selfish interests ala Philip IV of France whose alliance with the Avignon Popes was for selfish interest and primordial considerations.

One of the political agenda of the Avignon Popes was to ensure French dominance in the papacy and in the overall church hierarchy. The seven Avignon Popes were all French and out of 134 cardinals 111 of them were French, a situation that gave France religious and political advantage and influence over other nations what belonged to the Roman Catholic Church.

To achieve French dominance in the papacy, the Avignon Popes had to practice exclusionary leadership where priests, bishops and cardinals from other parts of the world were schemed out of the church hierarchy and papacy, while they paved way for smooth ride to power for French clergy new (Williams 1998).

The above political cum leadership agenda and goals of the Avignon Popes resonated with the Northern Political hegemony and dominance in Nigerian politics. The North has continued to rule and is out to maintain their political dominance by all means at their disposal. The perceived dominance of the

Northern region of Nigeria over national affairs has remained to date, a major concern of the Southern part. According to Eze (2022), all political attempts made to correct the persistent imbalance inherent in one region dominating the political space since independence have proved abortive. The power shift from the Northern hegemony to a minority geo-political zone of south – south is currently on top in the list of issues that are instigating groups and individuals against the interests of the state (Adeleke 2013). The present administration of president Muhammadu Buhari has taken Northern dominance of Nigerian politics further than what it used to be before by his fulanization of the system and by his characteristics politics of exclusion. He neglects the federal character principles in his various official appointments and does his things the way it will favour his kingsmen, the Fulani. His administration is known for widening the gap between Northern and southern parts of the country, making more visible our differences as a people (Uddin 2021).

Political elites from Northern Nigeria are known for their political scheming to foster power concentration in the north as was the case with the Avignon Popes, whose political strategy focused mainly on concentrating church authority in the hands of French popes and cardinals. During the just concluded presidential primary elections the two major political parties in Nigeria, the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) reneged on their initial agreement to zone the office of the president to the south in 2023. Northern political elites in PDP on the day of the presidential primary election, quickly reached agreement among them to step down for Atiku Abubakar in order to retain the office of president in the North. They made sure that Governor, Nyesom Wike from the southern part of the country did not win the primary election ([www.vanguardngr.com/politics](http://www.vanguardngr.com/politics)). Before the primary election, an aggrieved aspirant Mr. Cosmas Ndukwe had approached Abuja Federal Court to challenge the scheduled presidential primary on the premise that PDP was planning to act in breach of its own zoning formula (Nnochiri, 2022).

It is worthy of note that such breach of power rotation arrangement (zoning formula) depicted discordant and dysfunctional tendencies of Nigerian electoral politics which is shrouded in the preponderance of self regarding interest (Biereenu Nnabugwu 2006). The above attitude is inimical to national unity and integration and runs parallel to that of the Avignon Popes whose priority was to promote the interest of the French crown and ultimately their personal interests to the detriment of the Catholic Church and its membership. Politics in Nigeria is seen as a very lucrative business, as a result of which it is often pursued by

Northern Political Elites with Machiavellian unscrupulousness in order to retain power (Okoye & Biereenu-Nnabugwu,2004). The Northern political elites precisely Fulanis, have seen themselves as those destined to rule Nigeria and hence, exchange of governmental power must be exclusively among them, like the Avignon popes, other tribes can go to hell.

This identity politics is one of the factors that spark of agitations for self government among other tribes like the Igbo and Yoruba today. According to Kukah (2022). Nigeria is suffering today because of “Identity politics” where people respond to perceived threat by other economic or political decisions or policy decisions they feel is against them. Kukah goes further to explain thus:

What we are faced with is what the world refers to as identity politics – that is the consciousness of our worth is driven by both a perceived threat, fear and anxiety created by a circle of social, political divisions that are directed at excluding a particular group.

As the Avignon Popes introduced bad governance political selection as against generally acceptable standard of elections to the papacy, government of the minority by the minority and for the minority, which can best be described as “democracy of seven popes” for a period of seventy years (Nelson, 2022); so did Nigerian political elites make bad governance, lack of competent and credible electoral system and democracy of seven politicians (power sharing among few politicians and their allies alone) common features of Nigerian political system since her independence in 1960. Lack of competent and credible electoral system has resulted to the selection of incompetent, visionless, weak, tribalistic, ethnic conscious, greedy fraudulent and selfish political leaders who could not serve the public interest and promote good governance (Kasali, 2020) to the seat of power. Representative government and mass participation in politics through the power of ballot had not made any sense since 1960 as unpopular candidates were being imposed or foisted on the masses by the political stakeholders. Nigeria has not been able to practice true democracy, which connotes the practice whereby citizens of a state take part in the making and implementation of the decisions and policies that affect their welfare and general living standard (Idada & Omoregie, 2017). What we have today is a sham democracy, government of the minority by the minority and for the minority, and politics that does not favour all but only a few set of individuals.

Avignon Papacy showed greater interest in promoting the general well being of the Popes and the Sacred College of Cardinals than that of the Catholic priests, bishops and the entire members of the church. The Popes and Cardinals lived in affluence while the priests, bishops and church members wallowed in abject poverty, hardship and frustration. As observed by Nelson (2022), the papal capital initiated harsh economic and administrative policies to survive the 14<sup>th</sup> century general recession in Western Europe. The papacy cut the finances of parish priests, subjected bishops to heavy taxation, charged heavily for its services and sold justice and indulgences to members to improve fund. This situation caused difficult times for parish priests and bishops and members of the church but made life in the papal capital rosy and comfortable.

The Nigerian political system puts the Avignon papacy in perspective as it has created avenues for the political elites to enrich themselves and their cronies by looting the national treasury, by bad economic policies, inflation of contracts and investment by proxies within and outside the country. There are poor socio economic performance, wide spread poverty and hardship, bureaucratic inefficiency, high rate of unemployment among the youth, high external debt profile, inflation and loss of naira value in both foreign and domestic markets, high infant and material mortality, weak healthcare, collapsed education system, terrorism and armed banditry, which make life difficult and unbearable for the citizens of Nigeria. This, according to Kasali (2020), has resulted to lack of trust in the political system among the citizens especially the youth, who constitute 51% of the 84 million registered voters.

As Avignon papacy was known for its corrupt nature, so is the Nigerian political system. Corruption which, Lawal and Tobi (2006) see as any deliberate diversion of the states resources for the satisfaction of personal interest is rife both in our national life and political system. As observed by Nkwopara (2017), those entrusted with positions of authority often use such positions to acquire personal benefits, take bribes, embezzle public funds, falsify official documents and records for pecuniary benefits. Certificate forgery is now the order of the day among the so called political elites. Justice is now being sold as was the case during the Avignon papacy. Court verdicts now favour the highest bidder as the judiciary can brazenly and unscrupulously overturn the truth and the normal judicial process to favour criminals and money bag politicians, the controversial Supreme Court judgment of 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020, between Governor Emeka Ihedioha and Senator Hope Uzodimma overturned to the favour Uzodimma, the fourth runner-up in the 2019 Imo gubernational election) is a case in point. The

Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), accredited government agencies that fight corruption in Nigeria are more corrupt than those they are charging with cases of corrupt practices. They are mere tools of persecuting political enemies of the incumbent government as their loyalists are given indulgencies from all financial crimes leveled against them by reliable sources. Things have fallen apart because of corruption and the centre cannot hold anymore. Under the watch of president Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria has gone from being a failed state to a dead one (Chidozie, 2021).

### **The Church and Qualitative Political System in Nigeria**

No human society can successfully sideline the church in its striving for a stable credible and qualitative political system. What we know as British politics today owes much of its reforms and structure to the influence of the Anglican Church. The church stands out prominently today as the conscience of the unconscionable society as its constructive criticisms of the unpopular and obnoxious policies of the government help to shape the structure of Nigerian political system. It plays a key role in ensuring that the government in power remains focused on the issue of good governance and in providing an auspicious democratic ambience for the nation (Adekoya, 2018). The catholic Arch bishop of Sokoto, Matthew Hassan Kukah has on several occasions, condemned widespread corruption among politicians and government officials, poor justice delivery as a result of compromise on the part Judges, mass unemployment, politics exclusion and marginalization which threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria as a pluralistic nation (Kukah 2022). When the church keeps quiet, the society will rot and leadership will derail. The church active participation in politics in the recent times, has been very commendable as that will no doubt ensure the possibility of a good society, an accountable democracy and a transparent government. The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, under the leadership of His Emence Bishop Wale Oke, has created the Directorate of politics and Governance and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) followed suit by creating similar directorate in its church in the first quarter of 2022, as a way of impacting positively on Nigerian Political system (Abati, 2022).

The strong influence of the church over the policies of the government in Nigeria has resulted to the adoption of the convention of a Muslim and Christian ticket in joint political races, to give the people a sense of balance, access and proximity to power. The breach of this pattern in 1993 by Muslim – Muslim ticket of the Social

Democratic Party (SDP) presidential candidates Bashorun M.K.O Abiola and Alhaji Baba Gana Kinigibe, was vehemently condemned by the church. Though the duo won that election which was eventually cancelled by General Babagida, the then military head of state, similar electoral victory could not be achieved any longer in Nigeria with Muslim – Muslim presidential ticket as the church has become an active political force today (Abati, 2022).

In preparation for the 2023 general election, many church leaders have advised and sensitized their members on the need to register for and update their permanent voters cards (PVC) and urgently join any political party of their choice at the ward levels and participate actively in political activities of that party while upholding righteousness.

The catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, the Anglican Church and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria have been at the forefront of the struggle for good governance, respect for human rights and inclusive politics. Imo citizens will always remember, the retired Arch Bishop of Owerri Catholic Ecclesiastical Province, Bishop Emeritus AJV Obinna, for his fearlessness and outspokenness in condemning bad governance, social ills and political oppressions of the government in power. The heroism of Rt. Rev Peter Adebisi and Bishop Bolanle Gbonigi and his fiery sermons will not be easily forgotten, the stinging interventions of John Cardinal Onaiyekan, as well as the activism of the likes of Fr. Matthew Hassan Kukah, Fr. George Ehunsani, Fr. John Uba Ofei and Fr. George Ehunsani, Fr. John Uba Ofei and Fr. Iheanyi Enwerem, Catholic priests, who on one occasion trooped to the streets in defence of democracy, will remain ever fresh in our memories (Abati, 2022).

The church in Nigeria has continued to challenge the federal government of Nigeria over the treatment of the current security problem facing the nation with kid gloves. It encourages the government to do something urgent and proactive to address the lingering conflicts between herders and farmers in North central Nigeria, armed banditry and Boko Haram insurgency in the entire Northern part of the country; ever-increasing kidnapping cases and unknown gunmen attack in the South East and South South. The church mounts serious pressure on the leadership of All Progressive Congress (APC) to reconsider the party's Muslim – Muslim presidential ticket that has drawn greater criticisms from many Nigerian citizens.

The church is a social reformer which exerts enormous influence on both government and individuals to bring about the desired change in the society (Abati, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

The Avignon papacy, no doubt, exhibited characteristics, modus operandi and general administrative approach that were akin to those of the contemporary Nigeria political system.

Avignon papacy represented exclusionary, self-serving, corrupt practices and the hegemony of few popes (seven popes) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic Church. It was a leadership style that elevated French interests, dominance and personnel over and above the interest of the general church traditional and standard pattern of administration which saw Rome as the seat of its powers.

The root cause of the problem of the Avignon papacy and the Nigerian political system was squarely and clearly linked with quality of leadership. As the Avignon popes lacked vision for good governance, self commitment to standard maintenance and promotion of dignity of papal office, so do Nigerian Political leaders lack vision, competence and creativity required for good governance practices in a rapidly changing modern world.

Nigeria is currently referred to by many political analysts as a failed state as every geopolitical zone in the country has become vulnerable to incessant violent attacks by various terrorists groups, widespread corruption, incessant cycle of poverty, souring unemployment and high infant and maternal mortality and low level of based infrastructure. The general citizenry has lost trust in the nation's political system as seen from rising agitations and demonstrations from various quarters for self government and good governance. In fact, the present Nigerian political system calls for total overhaul and transformation.

### **Recommendations**

This paper makes the following recommendations as the way forward;

- 1) The church in Nigeria should extricate itself from whatever practice that will make it lose trust and confidence the society reposes in it as the political light bearer, the quintessence of impact-oriented leadership and the voice of the voiceless in the society.



- 2) There should be effective and sustained collaboration between the government and the church in order to ensure qualitative political system and true democracy in the country.
- 3) The church should be steadfast, fearless and consistent in advocating for true democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. It should make itself an effective political machinery and a partisan campaign platform for the election of God-fearing, visionary and competent leadership in the country.
- 4) Political leaders should not allow self-interest and other primordial considerations to influence their leadership style or take priority over the welfare of the masses.
- 5) Politics of exclusion should be avoided and condemned in its entirety both in the church and in Nigerian society in general to make greater room for inclusive governance and true democracy. Nobody should see any leadership position anytime as his own turn but rather the turn of all Nigerians. No single individual, ethnic group, religion or political party has the exclusive right to rule Nigeria, it is the right of all bonafide citizens regardless of ethnicity, state, religion, gender and political affiliation.
- 6) The body charged with the conduct of election in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should maintain political neutrality impartiality, transparency and credibility while conducting elections in the country. This will ensure the election of good and legitimate political leaders, who are true choice of the people, to seats of power.

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IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol. 8. No. 3, (2022)

ISSN: 2488- 9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online)

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Tansian University, Umunya

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