



Digest
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The Catholic Hierarchy and Elections in Africa

The recent elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have shown, once more, the important role of civil society in fostering a democratic culture. But above all, the voice of the Catholic Church challenging the provisional results announced by the National Independent Electoral Commission resonated far beyond the DRC's borders. It is thus interesting to trace the general position on elections of the Catholic Church in Africa. Below are examples of some of the statements and pastoral letters of Episcopal Conferences on elections.

After the now former DRC president, Joseph Kabila, refused to organize elections after his two terms had finished, the Bishops urged him not to run for a third term: <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/11/28/congos-bishops-ask-kabila-declare-will-not-run-president/>

When elections were finally scheduled, they asked political candidates to run a campaign without violence and to shun tribalism and demagoguery: <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2018/11/01/bishop-calls-on-congo-politicians-to-run-a-campaign-devoid-of-violence/>

Last year, the Zimbabwean Bishops called upon citizens to take the first post-Mugabe elections as an opportunity to envision a new society built on democratic institutions instead of charismatic leaders: <https://spotlight.africa/2018/07/10/the-bishops-elections-are-an-opportunity-to-build-a-new-zimbabwe/>

During the 2016 elections in Zambia, the hierarchy suggested some guiding principles for fair and free elections, and educated the faithful about the right and duty to vote: <https://zambiareports.com/2016/07/18/violence-is-the-greatest-threat-to-credible-elections-catholic-bishops/>

Due to fear of fraudulent practices in registering voters in the 2016 elections, the Bishops in Ghana called upon the stakeholders to ensure fair and free elections by following the law in enlisting voters: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/ghanas-bishops-ask-country-to-work-for-fair-elections-in-2016-17513>

With a view to the upcoming elections in February, the Nigerian Bishops have invited Christian citizens to vote in order to renew the leadership in the country and to avoid selling their vote, as such a practice is similar to selling one's conscience: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/nigerian-bishops-call-for-fair-elections-warn-against-selling-votes-13749>

Before the last October's elections in Cameroon, the Bishops issued a statement emphasizing the responsibility of citizens to vote for leaders who are competent, and to avoid violence and vandalism:

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2018/09/26/cameroon-bishops-call-for-peaceful-presidential-poll-despite-countrys-turmoil/>

Kenyan Bishops were active in the 2017 elections, denouncing violence during and after elections, supporting the ruling of the Supreme Court that nullified the first round election, and calling for respect for right to vote and to abstain: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/kenyan-bishops-warn-against-election-violence-insecurity>; <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/09/20/kenya-bishops-defend-supreme-court-protests-continue-annulled-election/>; <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/7965/kenyan-bishops-urge-respect-of-individuals-rights-to-vote-or-abstain-as-country-goes-to-polls-for-election-re-run>.

Togolese Bishops asked for electoral reforms so that the planned parliamentary elections could bring about change; and they urged the country to adhere to the ECOWAS roadmap: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2018-11/togolese-bishops-decry-the-lack-of-political-reforms.html>.

Since the 2015 political crisis in Burundi, the Catholic Bishops have been active and vocal on the political situation. First, they withdrew from the organization of the election; then opposed the referendum that changed the Constitution; and are now denouncing the forced contribution to the 2020 elections: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/29/world/africa/burundis-catholic-church-pulls-support-for-elections.html>; <https://international.la-croix.com/news/referendum-not-opportune-burundi-bishops-say/7521>; <https://international.la-croix.com/news/burundian-bishops-condemn-forced-financial-contributions-for-election/7352>.

Ahead of this year's (2019) elections, the Malawian Bishops underline that undemocratic practices in political parties do not favor a democratic culture. Therefore, they provide guidelines for a good leader, inspired by the Catholic social teaching: <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/05/10/malawi-bishops-call-for-new-era-ahead-of-2019-elections/>.

During the general elections in 2014, the South African Bishops issued a pastoral letter reminding voters that "responsible citizenship is a virtue and that political participation is a moral obligation." <https://www.catholic-pe.co.za/index.php/message/75-municipal-elections-a-pastoral-letter>.

As the country was preparing for municipal and local elections in 2016, they published a pastoral letter to encourage voters to evaluate their leaders so that the vote might bring in a leadership that truly cared for the people: <https://www.catholic-pe.co.za/index.php/message/75-municipal-elections-a-pastoral-letter>.

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