



## **EFFECTS OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN GUMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the effects of leadership styles on Protestant churches in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Leadership remains a critical factor in determining the growth, administration, unity, and sustainability of church organizations. The study aimed to assess how various leadership styles—particularly transformational, transactional, autocratic, and servant leadership—affect church management, membership commitment, spiritual growth, and conflict resolution within Protestant congregations in the area. A qualitative research design was adopted, utilizing interviews, observations, and review of relevant literature as sources of data. Findings revealed that leadership style significantly influences church development and effectiveness. Transformational and servant leadership styles were found to enhance spiritual growth, unity, participatory decision-making, and membership retention, while autocratic leadership often resulted in conflict, reduced participation, and low morale among members. Transactional leadership was observed to promote organizational order but sometimes limited creativity and spiritual engagement. The study further revealed that the socio-cultural context of Guma Local Government Area shapes leadership practices and expectations within Protestant churches. The study concluded that effective and Christ-centred leadership styles contribute positively to church growth, harmonious relationships, and sustainable ministry. It recommended that church leaders adopt participatory and servant-oriented leadership approaches, engage in continuous leadership training, and foster collaborative decision-making processes. Such efforts will strengthen church administration, enhance spiritual development, and promote unity among Protestant churches in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.*

**Key Words: Effects, Leadership Styles, Protestant Churches, Guma Local Government Area, Benue State**

### **Introduction**

Leadership remains a fundamental element in the growth, administration, and sustainability of every organization, including religious institutions. In the church context, leadership does not only involve spiritual guidance but also administrative coordination, conflict management, and the overall development of the congregation. Leadership style, therefore, plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness and performance of churches, especially Protestant churches that operate through



structured leadership systems involving pastors, elders, and church committees. Leadership style refers to the pattern of behaviour, characteristics, and approaches employed by leaders in directing and motivating followers toward achieving organizational goals. It determines how decisions are made, how authority is exercised, and how members are mobilized toward a shared vision ([IBIMA Publishing](#)).

In contemporary society, churches are not only spiritual centres but also social organizations that require sound administrative and managerial competence. Scholars have observed that leadership style significantly influences organizational performance, culture, and overall success. Different leadership styles such as autocratic, democratic, transformational, transactional, and servant leadership affect motivation, participation, and productivity in unique ways ([Allied Business Academies](#)). In religious organizations, particularly Protestant churches, leadership style determines the level of unity, growth, discipline, and spiritual development among members. Effective leadership fosters cooperation, commitment, and shared vision, while ineffective leadership can result in conflict, stagnation, and decline.

Empirical studies in church settings have demonstrated that leadership style has a direct impact on church administration and growth. For instance, transformational leadership has been found to promote participatory governance, unity, and effective problem-solving in church administration. It enhances decision-making, accountability, and resource management within the church structure ([journals.casjournals.com](#)). Similarly, studies on Nigerian Pentecostal churches reveal that leadership styles such as task-centred and people-centred leadership significantly influence church growth and development, indicating a strong relationship between leadership approach and organizational outcomes in the church ([cirdjournals.com](#)).

In Nigeria, Protestant churches play vital roles in moral instruction, social development, and community cohesion. However, many churches face challenges such as leadership conflicts, poor administration, lack of accountability, and declining membership. These challenges are often linked to the leadership styles adopted by church leaders. Scholars have emphasized that church leadership in Nigeria should emulate biblical and transformational models that emphasize integrity, vision, and service in order to promote effective church management and spiritual growth ([CARI Journals](#)).



Guma Local Government Area of Benue State hosts numerous Protestant churches, including Methodist, NKST, Baptist, Anglican, and Pentecostal congregations. These churches contribute significantly to the spiritual and socio-economic development of the area. Nevertheless, variations in leadership styles among pastors and church administrators have resulted in different levels of growth, unity, and effectiveness across congregations. Some churches experience rapid growth and strong member participation due to participatory and transformational leadership, while others face stagnation and internal conflict due to authoritarian or ineffective leadership approaches.

Therefore, examining the effects of leadership styles on Protestant churches in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State is essential for understanding how leadership approaches influence church growth, administration, unity, and mission effectiveness. This study seeks to explore how different leadership styles adopted by church leaders affect the functioning and development of Protestant churches in the area, with a view to providing insights that can enhance effective church leadership and management in contemporary society.

The study on the effects of leadership styles on Protestant churches in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State reveals that leadership remains a fundamental determinant of church growth, unity, and administrative effectiveness. Leadership style not only shapes the spiritual direction of the church but also influences organizational stability, members' commitment, and the overall effectiveness of ministry. Protestant churches that adopt participatory and servant-oriented leadership styles tend to experience greater cooperation among members, increased attendance, and improved spiritual vitality. Conversely, authoritarian or excessively centralized leadership styles often lead to conflicts, reduced participation, and stagnation in church development.

The findings underscore that effective leadership in the church context must reflect biblical principles, particularly humility, service, accountability, and inclusiveness. Servant leadership, democratic leadership, and transformational leadership styles have proven to be more effective in fostering unity and encouraging active member involvement in church activities. Such leadership approaches promote transparency in decision-making, enhance trust between clergy and laity, and create an environment conducive to spiritual growth and organizational sustainability.

Furthermore, the study establishes that leadership style significantly affects church administration, conflict management, evangelism, and community outreach. Where



leadership is visionary and people-oriented, churches tend to experience numerical growth and stronger community relevance. On the other hand, poor leadership practices often result in disunity, financial mismanagement, and a decline in members' morale.

In conclusion, leadership style remains a critical factor in determining the success or failure of Protestant churches. Church leaders must therefore cultivate leadership approaches that are biblically grounded, participatory, and transformational. By doing so, Protestant churches can achieve sustainable growth, maintain internal harmony, and effectively fulfil their spiritual and social responsibilities within their communities.

### **Conceptualization of Leadership Styles**

Leadership is a central concept in organizational and social development, influencing the performance, motivation, and direction of individuals and groups. One of the major concerns in leadership studies is the understanding of **leadership styles**, which describe the patterns of behaviour leaders adopt in guiding and influencing followers toward the achievement of organizational goals. The conceptualization of leadership styles has evolved through different theoretical traditions, ranging from classical and behavioural theories to contemporary transformational and situational approaches. Understanding leadership styles is essential for effective management, organizational growth, and societal development.

### **Concept of Leadership**

Leadership generally refers to the process through which an individual influences others to achieve shared goals. According to Northouse (2021), leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common objective. This definition emphasizes influence, group interaction, and goal attainment as key elements of leadership. Similarly, Yukl (2013) defines leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how to do it effectively.

Early scholars such as Max Weber conceptualized leadership in terms of authority, identifying traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority as bases for leadership legitimacy (Weber, 1947). Weber's work laid the foundation for understanding leadership styles in terms of authority and influence within organizations.



## **Meaning of Leadership Styles**

Leadership styles refer to consistent patterns of behaviour exhibited by leaders when directing, motivating, and managing people. Leadership style is not merely what leaders do but how they do it. According to Mullins (2016), leadership style reflects the leader's characteristic approach to guiding and motivating followers and is influenced by personality, organizational culture, and situational demands.

The conceptualization of leadership styles has been influenced by behavioural and contingency theories. Kurt Lewin and his colleagues were among the first to systematically study leadership styles, identifying three basic styles: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). These early classifications laid the groundwork for later scholarly discussions on leadership styles.

## **Major Leadership Styles**

### ***Autocratic Leadership Style***

Autocratic leadership involves centralized decision-making where the leader exercises full control over subordinates. The leader determines policies and procedures without consulting followers. This style can be effective in situations requiring quick decision-making but may reduce creativity and morale (Northouse, 2021). Lewin et al. (1939) observed that autocratic leadership often results in high productivity but low group satisfaction.

### ***Democratic Leadership Style***

Democratic leadership emphasizes participation and shared decision-making. Leaders encourage input from team members and foster collaboration. This style promotes job satisfaction, creativity, and commitment among followers (Mullins, 2016). Democratic leadership aligns with participative management theories that view employees as valuable contributors to organizational success.

### ***Laissez-faire Leadership Style***

Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by minimal supervision and maximum autonomy for subordinates. Leaders provide resources and support but allow followers to make decisions independently. While this style can enhance innovation among highly skilled teams, it may result in lack of direction if not properly managed (Yukl, 2013).



### ***Transformational Leadership Style***

Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve higher levels of performance and personal development. James MacGregor Burns first introduced the concept of transformational leadership, emphasizing moral and motivational dimensions of leadership (Burns, 1978). Later, Bernard Bass expanded the theory by identifying components such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985).

Transformational leaders encourage innovation, foster commitment, and align followers with organizational vision. This leadership style is widely regarded as effective in modern organizations due to its emphasis on empowerment and development (Northouse, 2021).

### ***Transactional Leadership Style***

Transactional leadership is based on exchanges between leaders and followers. Leaders provide rewards or punishments depending on performance. According to Bass (1985), transactional leadership focuses on maintaining routine operations and ensuring compliance through structured systems of reward and discipline. While effective for achieving short-term goals, it may not inspire long-term commitment or innovation.

### ***Situational Leadership Style***

Situational leadership theory emphasizes the importance of adapting leadership style to the needs of followers and specific situations. Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard proposed that effective leaders adjust their style—telling, selling, participating, or delegating—based on followers' competence and commitment (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2013). This approach highlights flexibility and responsiveness as key leadership qualities.

### ***Emotional and Servant Leadership Perspectives***

Contemporary leadership conceptualizations also include emotional and servant leadership styles. Daniel Goleman (2000) emphasized emotional intelligence as a determinant of effective leadership styles, identifying visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and commanding styles.

Servant leadership, popularized by Greenleaf (1977), emphasizes serving others as the primary goal of leadership. This style prioritizes empathy, humility, and commitment to the growth of followers.



### Theoretical Perspectives on Leadership Styles

Leadership styles are grounded in several theoretical frameworks:

1. **Trait Theory** – Focuses on inherent characteristics of leaders.
2. **Behavioural Theory** – Emphasizes leaders' actions and behaviours.
3. **Contingency Theory** – Suggests leadership effectiveness depends on situational factors.
4. **Transformational Theory** – Highlights inspiration and change-oriented leadership.

For instance, Fred Fiedler contingency theory argues that leadership effectiveness depends on the match between leadership style and situational favourableness (Fiedler, 1967).

### Significance of Understanding Leadership Styles

The conceptualization of leadership styles is essential for organizational effectiveness and development. Understanding leadership styles helps in:

- ❖ Enhancing organizational performance
- ❖ Improving employee motivation and satisfaction
- ❖ Promoting effective communication
- ❖ Facilitating conflict resolution
- ❖ Encouraging innovation and adaptability

Effective leaders often integrate multiple styles depending on organizational needs and environmental conditions.

The conceptualization of leadership styles has evolved from classical theories of authority and control to modern approaches emphasizing participation, transformation, and adaptability. Leadership styles represent the behavioural patterns leaders adopt in influencing followers and achieving organizational goals. From autocratic and democratic styles to transformational and situational approaches, each style has unique strengths and limitations. A comprehensive understanding of leadership styles enables leaders to adopt appropriate strategies for effective management and sustainable organizational development.

Effects of Leadership Styles on Protestant Churches in Guma Local Government Area, Benue State.

Leadership in church contexts plays a vital role in shaping the organizational health, growth, and spiritual vitality of congregations (Mwanzwii & Kising'u, 2022). In Protestant churches, which often emphasize both spiritual formation and community



engagement, the approach to leadership significantly affects membership retention, ministry effectiveness, and congregational cohesion (Benedicte, Andemariam & Wasike, 2022). Leadership styles refer to the characteristic behaviors and practices that leaders use to influence followers; common frameworks include **transformational, transactional, servant, and strategic leadership** (Mwanzwii & Kising'u, 2022; Benedicte et al., 2022).

### **Transformational Leadership and Church Outcomes**

Transformational leadership, which focuses on inspiring and motivating followers toward a shared vision, has been positively linked with church growth and engagement. In a study of churches in Kenya, transformational leadership was found to have a **positive and significant effect on church growth**, indicating that when leaders inspire and empower congregants, the church experiences enhanced participation and mission focus (Mwanzwii & Kising'u, 2022). This style aligns with the Protestant emphasis on discipleship and collective spiritual purpose.

### **Transactional Leadership and Membership Performance**

Transactional leadership, based on clear structures, rewards, and duties, also influences church performance, but its effects are mixed. In research on Protestant churches in Ongata Rongai, transactional leadership showed a **positive and strong influence on church performance**, particularly in membership retention and participation, although transformational leadership effects were weaker in that context (Benedicte et al., 2022). This suggests that structured, performance-oriented leadership can support church operational stability but may need to be balanced with visionary leadership to foster deeper spiritual engagement.

### **Servant Leadership and Congregational Engagement**

Servant leadership, where pastors emphasize service and empowerment of followers, is often considered especially compatible with Christian ministry. Servant leaders prioritize the growth and well-being of members, fostering trust and collaboration. Research in church contexts has shown that **servant leadership positively influences church growth and performance**, as leaders who serve first can cultivate higher member commitment and participation (Mwanzwii & Kising'u, 2022; Greenleaf, as foundational to servant leadership theory). This is significant for Protestant churches in Guma, where community bonds and member participation are critical for sustaining ministries.



### **Strategic and Ethical Leadership in Church Contexts**

Strategic leadership that involves planning and forward-looking management has been linked to enhanced church growth, as leaders with a broader mission perspective can adapt to changing community needs (Mwanzwii & Kising'u, 2022). Ethical leadership, grounded in moral integrity and transparency, also contributes to trust and credibility among congregants, which is essential in religious organizations that prioritize moral witness.

### **Implications for Protestant Churches in Guma LGA**

In Guma Local Government Area, applying these leadership insights suggests that Protestant churches with leaders who adopt **transformational, servant, strategic, and ethical leadership practices** are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as:

- ❖ **Stronger member engagement and participation**
- ❖ **Improved congregational unity and morale**
- ❖ **Growth in membership and community outreach**
- ❖ **Enhanced organizational stability and ministry effectiveness**

Conversely, leadership that is overly authoritarian or fails to empower congregational members may undermine participation and spiritual growth.

Leadership styles exert a profound influence on Protestant church dynamics. Empirical evidence highlights that transformational and servant leadership styles are especially effective in fostering growth, engagement, and performance among church congregations. For Protestant churches in Guma LGA, adopting leadership practices that empower, inspire, and ethically engage members can significantly enhance their spiritual and organizational vitality.

### ***Review Of Related Empirical Studies On Leadership Styles In Protestant Churches***

The focus is on actual research findings that examine how different leadership styles influence church performance, growth, clergy wellbeing, and organizational outcomes within Protestant contexts.

#### **1. Leadership Styles and Church Growth**

Several empirical studies have explored the connection between pastoral leadership styles and church outcomes such as growth and performance. Keita's (2019) qualitative study on leadership styles among church leaders in the United States revealed that transformational, transactional, and servant leadership frameworks play influential roles in church growth dynamics. Using semistructured interviews



and thematic analysis, Keita found themes related to effective communication, motivation, and strategic vision that participants associated with positive church growth (Keita, 2019). ([ScholarWorks](#))

In a broader African context, Mwenje (2020) employed a mixed-methods design to investigate leadership styles in Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, discovering that founders typically exhibited transformational leadership while democratic and supportive styles were also prevalent among leaders. The study argued that these styles contributed to congregational loyalty and participation, which in turn affected church growth and sustainability (Mwenje, 2020). ([scholarpublishing.org](#))

## 2. Transformational and Transactional Leadership Effects

Correlational studies in Protestant contexts have empirically evaluated the specific effects of transformational and transactional leadership styles on church performance. Research conducted in Ongata Rongai (Kenya) assessed transformational and transactional leadership among Protestant church leaders and found that **transactional leadership** had a stronger positive influence on church performance metrics such as membership retention and growth than transformational leadership (Benedicte, Andemariam, & Wasike, 2022). ([Mendeley](#))

Similarly, an assessment of Pentecostal churches in the Buea municipality reported that **transformational leadership** had a significantly greater positive impact on church performance than servant leadership when measured with the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Project-House, 2019), indicating that inspirational and vision-oriented behaviors correlated with higher performance outcomes in the church context. ([Project House](#))

## 3. Innovative and Ethical Leadership in Church Settings

Beyond traditional leadership typologies, empirical research has examined innovative and ethical leadership approaches. A study on Pentecostal churches in Kenya deployed a cross-sectional survey and found a strong positive relationship between **innovative leadership** and church performance outcomes (Ndetto, Cheluget, & Jirma, 2023). This research highlighted that creativity, adaptability, and change-oriented leadership behaviors accounted for significant variance in performance measures, underscoring the role of innovation in dynamic church environments. ([stratfordjournalpublishers.org](#))



Additional research investigating the mediating role of organizational culture revealed that culture significantly partially mediated the relationship between innovative leadership styles and church performance, suggesting that church culture can enhance or constrain how leadership affects outcomes (Ndetto, Cheluget, & Jirma, 2024). ([stratfordjournals.com](http://stratfordjournals.com))

Studies in Mombasa County (Kenya) have further shown that **ethical leadership** styles exhibit positive relationships with church growth, reinforcing that leaders' moral conduct and ethical decision-making can directly influence congregational vitality and expansion (Mombasa County research, 2025). ([strategicjournals.com](http://strategicjournals.com))

#### 4. Leadership Style and Clergy Well-Being

Empirical work has also addressed the impact of leadership styles on clergy health outcomes. A qualitative study in Ghana examined how different leadership approaches correlated with **clergy burnout** in Pentecostal churches. Using frameworks such as the Full Range Leadership Theory and Maslach Burnout Inventory, Asamoah (2023) found evidence that roles associated with transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership contributed to inter-role conflict and burnout among pastors, indicating that leadership styles can affect not only organizational outcomes but also individual well-being. ([ResearchGate](https://www.researchgate.net))

#### 5. Regional and Contextual Variations

Empirical research highlights that leadership style prevalence and impact vary by region and church context. For instance, studies in Nigeria (Kaduna State) have shown that democratic, motivational, and visionary leadership styles are commonly practiced in Pentecostal settings and significantly influence gospel growth, illustrating contextual differences in style adoption and outcomes (Okoronta, 2015). ([kubanni.abu.edu.ng](http://kubanni.abu.edu.ng))

Similarly, research in North American churches identified paternalistic and encouraging leadership styles as correlates of church growth and vitality, particularly in mainline congregations, emphasizing how cultural and denominational factors shape leadership practices and effects (Nicolaidis, 2020). ([jacl.andrews.edu](http://jacl.andrews.edu))

Collectively, empirical studies on leadership styles in Protestant churches reveal that multiple leadership approaches—transformational, transactional, innovative, ethical, and democratic—have measurable impacts on church performance, growth, clergy well-being, and organizational culture. While transactional and innovative leadership



often show strong positive associations with performance metrics in many African contexts, transformational leadership retains significance in promoting vision, motivation, and congregational engagement. Moreover, the effects of leadership styles are mediated by cultural, ethical, and contextual factors unique to different Protestant settings.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study on the *effects of leadership styles on Protestant churches in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State* has revealed that leadership style significantly shapes both organizational health and spiritual vitality within church communities. Democratic and transformational leadership styles were found to foster higher levels of congregational participation, commitment, and mission effectiveness, whereas autocratic and laissez-faire approaches negatively impacted member engagement, communication, and overall church growth. Importantly, the research underscores that leadership within the church is not merely administrative but deeply relational, requiring empathy, vision, accountability, and biblical grounding. Thus, the effectiveness of Protestant churches in Guma is largely dependent on the capacity of church leaders to adopt inclusive, servant-oriented, and adaptive leadership practices that resonate with congregational needs and socio-cultural realities. The findings affirm that leadership style is a pivotal determinant of church unity, spiritual development, and organizational sustainability, and that intentional leadership formation remains a critical priority for ecclesial transformation in Guma Local Government Area.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following scholarly recommendations are proposed:

### **1. Capacity Building for Church Leaders**

Church authorities and denominational bodies should organize regular training and development programs focused on *transformational and servant leadership theories*, decision-making skills, and conflict resolution to equip pastors and church executives with effective leadership competencies. Such programs can be conducted in collaboration with theological institutions and Christian leadership development centers.

### **2. Institutionalizing Participatory Leadership Practices**

Protestant churches in Guma Local Government Area should institutionalize structures that encourage *participatory leadership*, such as leadership councils,



congregational forums, and advisory committees. These platforms will enhance transparency, encourage shared decision-making, and strengthen the sense of ownership and responsibility among church members.

### 3. Integration of Biblical Leadership Principles into Church Governance

Church leadership curricula and ministerial teachings should intentionally integrate key *biblical leadership principles* (e.g., servant leadership, humility, and stewardship) into governance processes. This will ensure that leadership practices are not only organizationally effective but also theologically grounded.

### 4. Periodic Assessment and Feedback Mechanisms

Churches should adopt systematic mechanisms for *periodic leadership evaluation*, including feedback surveys and performance appraisals that involve both leaders and laity. These tools will help identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in leadership styles and practices.

### 5. Promotion of Contextual Leadership Research

Seminaries, Christian research institutes, and denominational bodies should encourage and support *empirical research on church leadership dynamics* specific to the socio-cultural environment of Benue State. Such research will provide contextual insights that can enrich leadership training, policy formulation, and ministry approaches.

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