



Prophecies in politics: A review of integrity, impact on voter-behaviour and good governance

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Research Project Registration:**Project Leader:** Jaco Beyers **Project Number:** 2440237**Description:**

The author is participating in the research project, 'Religion, Theology and Education', directed by Prof. Dr Jaco Beyers, Head of Department Religion Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

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Received: 17 Mar. 2023

Accepted: 17 Aug. 2023

Published: 17 Nov. 2023

How to cite this article:

Orogun, D.O., 2023, 'Prophecies in politics: A review of integrity, impact on voter-behaviour and good governance', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(2), a8685. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.8685>

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This paper examined the integrity, impact and good governance value of election prophecies (EPs) in the last 20 years in selected African countries juxtaposed with President Donald Trump's EPs in America. As a primary source, empirical research was conducted alongside a historical survey. The data collected from 519 respondents revealed that a majority believe in prophecies, but they queried the integrity, impact and value of EPs due to the inconsistency, inaccuracy, confusion and unhealthy public panics engendered. Despite the adverse effects, many adherents still subscribe to the phenomenon due to the psychological and emotional influence. Subsequently, this article critiqued the research outcome through Biblical Theology. It held that EPs remain vital in the public life of nations, but the current approach in Africa needs some review. These include: (1) the need to revisit the tasks of prophets as Hope givers, Reformers and those who speak truth to power in pre- and post-election seasons; (2) the scrutiny of EPs by the plurality of Prophets, ecumenical leaders and the public, with the four suggested evaluation indices; and (3) the need to curb the negative effect of EPs on healthy electoral processes using enacted public account policies.

Contribution: This article contributes to an interdisciplinary religious aspect of research covering Biblical theology, psephology and politics.

Keywords: prophecies; election; voter behaviour; good governance; inaccuracy; inconsistency.

Introduction

Prophets, prophecies and prophetic movements are familiar nomenclatures in the religious ecosystem. The word 'prophet' appears over 300 times in the Old Testament (OT) and 100 times in the New Testament (NT) respectively (BibleGateway Encyclopedia 2022). While there are several prophetic roles in the Bible especially by the Old Testament prophets, their prophecies are clearly different from the contemporary political predictions that remain popular in contemporary Africa. Despite the increasing popularity of election prophecies (EPs), theological and scholarly searchlights are rarely on EPs. For example, Ikem, Ubiebi and Ononogbu (2021:273) assert that in Nigeria, the impact of EPs on the electoral process has not received sufficient scholarly attention. To close the apparent gap, this article raises questions on the integrity of African EPs vis-à-vis accuracy or inaccuracy in the last 20 years, influence on voter behaviour, commensurate value on elections and good governance. Firstly, the article undertakes a few conceptual clarifications. Secondly, it presents historical and empirical evidence from 519 respondents. Thirdly, it applies OT and NT theological lenses to critique the research outcome and make recommendations.

Conceptual clarification

Prophet: An attempt has been made to describe a prophet in both the Old and New Testaments. Ahlström (2022) defines the Greek term *prophētēs* as a foreteller, one inspired and sent by God to deliver a message to individuals, communities, or nations. In a broader sense, a prophet speaks the will of a deity via visions, dreams, the casting of lots or public declaration in a liturgical ecosystem. A prophet is associated with the priest, shaman, healer, diviner and possessor of some mystical power to see the future (Ahlström 2022). Butler (1991) asserts that three terms were used in the OT to describe a prophet; Ro'eh and hozeh are interpreted as 'seer' while nabi, means 'one who is called to speak'. Thus, in the OT, prophets as God's gifts to the church are different from kings in terms of office and assignment, whereas, in the NT, there is a convergence of the three offices (king, priest and prophet) in the calling of Jesus (Jn 4:19; 12:15; Heb 2:16–18). Regardless of the difference between the OT and NT, the most important role of the prophet is teleological (purpose or essence), not about an office or rank but a function in the church and community as

Note: Special Collection: Interreligious Dialogue, sub-edited by Jaco Beyers (University of Pretoria, South Africa).

a mouthpiece (BibleGateway 2022). The NT defines prophets as pneumatikos, the spirit ones with a significant function in the early church (1 Cor 12:28–31, 14:37 and Eph 2:20). Prophets include visiting angels (Lk 1:11, 26–27), Mary and Zacharias (Lk 1:46–79), John the Baptist (Mt 3:11) and Jesus (Lk 13:33). Additionally, Butler (1991) agrees that Jesus' miracles and discernment were prophetic (Jn 4:19, Lk 4:24).

Prophecy: According to Ahlström (2022), prophecy is a divinely inspired revelation. While it is more popular in Judaism and Christianity, it is recognised across religions. In the Christian context, Aaron's speech to Pharaoh is termed prophetic (Ex 7:1). Words of prophecy are given on God's behalf (Am 3:8; Ezkl 3:4). Prophesying may be assumed as the only role of the prophets, such may be contrary to some scriptural scenarios. For example, Deborah also prophesied victory and identified the right time to attack the enemy and pronounced judgement on doubting Barak (Jdg 4:6–7, 4:9,14). Samuel did not only see the future but also led Israel through the monarchical transition and victory over the Philistines (1 Sm 3:20; 7:1, 6,15, 12:18). Elijah and Elisha prophesied, pronounced judgements and provided advice to kings. Prophets went beyond future predictions; they also challenged Israel to honour God (Butler 1991). Thus, in contemporary times, prophecies ought to be sounds of warning and critique against injustice, corruption and racism among others (see Boesak 2017:1–15). However, despite the different dimensions of prophetic expressions, this article remains within the context of EPs. This article will now look at what 519 electorates in African communities think about EPs.

Empirical evidence from electorates' perspectives

This section reveals the integrity of EPs, their impact on voter behaviour and good governance. Participants are eligible voters in southern, eastern and western Africa with A, B and C age groups. Group A represents 59.3% between the ages of 18 and 30. Groups B and C warehouse age groups of 31–50 (31.2%) and 51–70 (9.6%), respectively. Participants' responses are captured in Table 1 and discussed under three different subtitles:

- **Influence of election prophecies (Q2, 3, 6, 9 and 10):** These questions speak to the voting behaviour of electorates based on EPs. In Q2, only 11.1% disagree that prophecy influences voter behaviour as against 66% and 22.6% positions of possible influence. Q3 reveals voters' possible reluctance to pre-election orders given by the prophets but 16.1% agree to voluntarily obey prophets on the choice of electoral candidates. While 42.8% are not sure of what to do with the orders, 41.1% are; they held that electorates' political franchise should not be mortgaged under some prophetic influence. Q6 shows that while many unchurched may easily disregard EPs about 70.2% of respondents agree that adherents who seat under the prophets on weekly basis, rarely disobey

TABLE 1: Research summary.

No.	Questions title	%			Impact†	Integrity‡
		Yes	Maybe	No		
Q1	Believe in Prophecy and Prophets	80.8	11.1	8.2	VH	N/A
Q2	Prophecy's influence on voter-behaviour	66.0	22.6	11.5	H	N/A
Q3	Respondents' acceptance of prophetic voting order	16.1	42.8	41.1	VL	Negative
Q4	Politicians' pre-election faith in prophecy	32.5	47.7	19.8	L	Negative
Q5	Accuracy of election prophecies in the last 20 years§	3.3	68.1	28.6	L	Negative
Q6	Prophecy's influence on members' choice in the election	70.2	24.1	5.6	H	Positive
Q7	Politicians' response via good governance	6.8	29.4	63.8	VL	Negative
Q8	Response to prophecy as the main election criteria	3.1	5.6	91.2	VL	Negative
Q9	Religious citizens' emotional attachment to prophecy	61.1	28.8	10.1	H	N/A
Q10	Psychological impact on voters and politicians	57.3	35	7.8	H	N/A

No., number; N/A, not applicable.

†, Influence is categorised into high (H), very high (VH), low (L) and very low (VL) depending on the percentage; ‡, N/A shows the non-applicability of the question to integrity of prophecies. Negative or positive denote the application of the question to the integrity of prophecies; §, A total of 3.3% respondents claim election prophecies are Very Accurate (VA), 68.1% believe it is Partially Accurate (PA) while 28.6% claim it is Not Accurate (NAE). In summary, it means the accuracy or integrity of electoral prophecy is low (L) from the perspective of the respondents.

prophetic instructions at the poll. The question then is – why do EPs influence people? Q9 and Q10 attempt to provide answers as they reveal that prophetic utterances exert some psychological and emotional influence on subscribers. Although 92.3% agree that EPs are psychological, 89.9% claim they are emotional. Consequently, voter behaviour can be influenced.

- **Faith in election prophecies (Q1, 4, 5 and 7):** These questions address good governance via EPs. In Q1, 80.8% believed in the existence of prophets and prophecies, but they doubted the accuracy; only 3.3% of respondents in Q5 agreed with the accuracy of EPs in Africa in the last 20 years. This may answer the question as to why some politicians rarely put their faith in pre-election prophecies as evident in Q4 where only 32.5% assert that politicians trust in pre-election prophecies. More interestingly, in Q7 only 6.6% agree that politicians use EPs as vehicles to promote good governance. By deduction, when political leaders are elected, they rarely provide services to communities on the integrity of pre-election prophecies. Thus, it can be inferred that prophecies may not correlate with politicians' commitment to good governance.
- **Value, integrity and impact of election prophecies (Q8):** This question speaks to the accruing value of prophecies in African politics. It looks at electorates' responses to EPs as the main eligibility criteria for electing candidates into political offices. Sadly, only 3.1% think prophecies should be the basis for electing political leaders in African society.

Furthermore, the integrity ratio of EPs vis-à-vis negative and positive assertions is 5:1 (83.3%–16.7%). From Table 1 and Figure 1, only six questions (Q3–Q8) applied to the

integrity of EPs. It is noteworthy that the 'N.A' bar in Figure 1 represents nonapplicable questions. Thus, 'N.A' is negligible in this integrity analysis. Viewing the frequency 'Red Colour Line', the middle dot shows the cumulative percentage (83.3%) of the respondents who opined that the integrity of EPs is very low (negative), while 16.7% of respondents held that EPs have integrity. Invariably, issues around accuracy, partisanship and prophecy-driven good governance, led most respondents to believe that many EPs are not divine, but merely by the opinions of the prophets.

On the impact, Figure 2 shows that 10% of respondents agree to the high impact of EPs; 40% claim it is high (H), 30% say it is very low (VL) and 20% opine it is low (L). By deduction, the ratio of high and low impact is 5:5 (50:50%). Although the ratio underscores the impact of prophecy as a 'probability', 50% probability is non-negligible in terms of possibility. Consequently, the analysis shows that EPs can impact the election process whether high or low, probably, or possibly. Despite the lack of integrity, EPs still have some measurable influence on society.

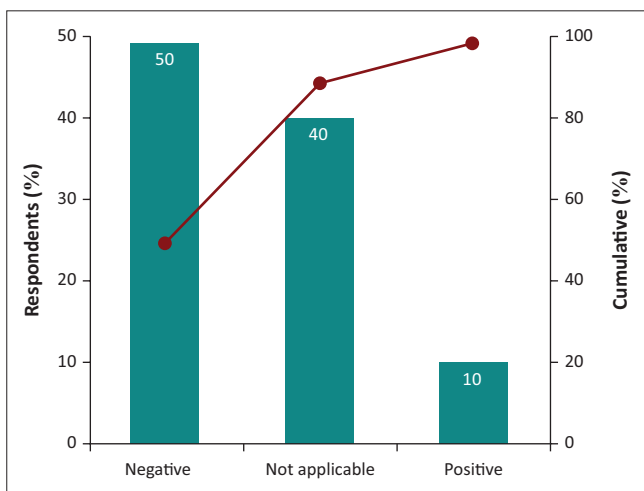
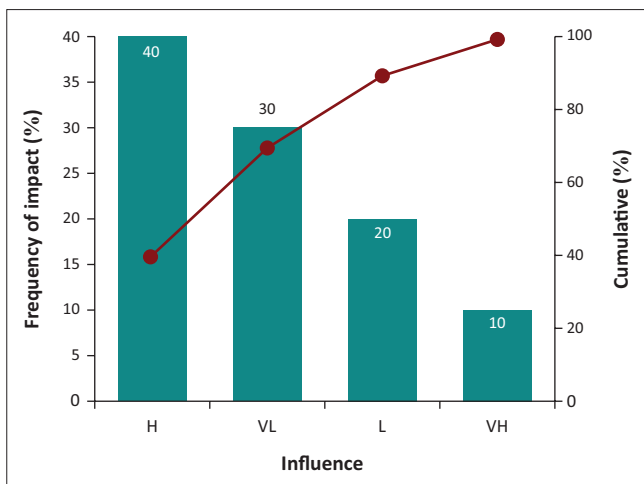


FIGURE 1: Integrity value of election prophecies from Q3-Q8.



H, high; VH, very high; L, low; VL, very low.

FIGURE 2: Impact value of election prophecies on Q1-Q10.

Historical survey of election prophecies in selected African countries in the last 20 years

This section is expected to corroborate some of the empirical evidence presented in the previous section.

The first question that comes to mind is – what is the connection between history and prophecy? Harper (1896) submits that:

Prophecy was built on history; history was the foundation of prophecy. History determines the time, form and substance of prophecy, prophecy moulds history. The times produced the prophet; the prophet produced certain historical conditions. The history was unique, supernatural; prophecy was consequently of divine origin; both human, both divine to the same extent. (pp. 128–129)

By implication, contemporary narratives of prophets and prophecies may be incomplete without historical reference. Deffinbaugh suggests that if anyone would correctly interpret and apply prophecy that is yet unfulfilled, the path that fulfilled prophecy has historically taken needs to be firstly considered (Deffinbaugh 2004). Thus, in line with Harper and Deffinbaugh's opinions, the history of the church richly presents the account of non-conventional prophets like William Wilberforce and David Livingstone who adopted Jesus' prophetic approach by working against human enslavement such that Livingstone was called 'the liberator of the Negroes' (Ayandele 1991:180). Latourette and Winter (1975:1336) assert that these men's commitment qualifies them as prophets of God. Other modern prophets include Walter Rauschenbush, Martin Luther King Jr., Gustavo Gutierrez and Rosemary Radford Ruether (see Ramsay 1986:1). The common denominator among these non-conventional prophets was the weaponisation of oratory and spiritual gifts to speak truth to power on social justice.

Conversely, in contemporary African society, the passion of some prophets seems to have shifted to politics. While prophecy is biblical, the challenges with EPs are integrity via accuracy and impact on voter behaviour. This development is not peculiar to Africa; America seems to have taken the lead. In President Trump's second-term election bid, Keener (2020) criticises the failed EPs of Pat Robertson among many others who supposedly heard from God that Trump would win. Keener notes that most EPs sided with Trump. However, Keener acknowledged that EPs could be 50/50, as he cited the opposing prophecy of Ron Cantor, a Messianic leader based in Israel, who prophesied that Biden would win because the American church had idolised Donald Trump (Keener 2020). While it has been noted that most prophecies given in favour of Trump were deleted in the new media, Buursma (2020) warns the public to beware of fake prophets and calls out some of Trump's election prophets like Sid Roth, Kevin Zadai, Kitt Kerr, Jeremiah Johnson, Keith Clement and Paula White. The bottom line here is the

inconsistency of EPs with post-election reality both in Africa, America and beyond. The following few paragraphs will discuss the history of EPs in West, East and Southern Africa.

Election prophecies in Nigeria

In 2015, Rev Father Ejike Mbaka accurately predicted the loss of President Jonathan but was inaccurate about President Buhari's loss in 2019. Earlier in 2003, Mbaka wrongly predicted Governor Chimaroke's second-term election bid (Abati 2018). Also, while Mbaka accurately predicted Governor Ihedioha's loss to Hope Uzodinma (Richard 2021), he wrongly predicted Governor Soludo's loss in the Anambra state election (Sahara Reporters 2021). Historically, Mbaka's EPs have remained inconsistent in the last 20 years. In 2016, the late Prophet TB Joshua claimed that God showed him that a woman would occupy the POTUS office. Contrarily, the election results favoured Donald Trump. BBC Africa (2016) reports that TB Joshua deleted his failed prophecies after several post-election criticisms. Consequently, Chironda (2016) asserts that the prophecy sparked controversies and division among the Zambian churches. Likewise, Chilasa (2016) asked – are these predictors like TB Joshua prophets or fraudsters? Although there could be situations where TB Joshua's prophecies were spot on, the concern is his inconsistency.

In 2018, referring to God, Pastor Adeboye states that 'this is what my Father said – the winner will be the loser and the loser will be the winner'. Accurately so, Abiola won the election, but he died in prison on 07 July 1998 (Inyang 2018). In 2022, Adeboye declared that there may be no election in 2023. He advised the public to ignore prophecies predicting the outcome of the February 2023 elections (Aborisade 2022). But the All Progressives Congress (APC) chairman made a counterstatement assuring the public that elections will hold. Contrary to Adeboye's pronouncement, presidential election was held on 25 March 2023. Furthermore, Indaboski Odumeje claims that Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) will win the 2023 presidential election (Preacherman 2022). Prophetess Joy Tony prophesied that victory belongs to a new political party or the People's Democratic Party (PDP) (Silas 2021). Johnson Suleman, referring to Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, prophesied that 'number two will become number one' (Church Times Nigeria 2020). Prophet Godwin Ikuru prophesied that Bola Tinubu of the APC would win. Earlier on Ikuru has accurately prophesied the victory of Governor Soludo in the Anambra governorship election, William Ruto in Kenya, Joe Biden in America and the loss of Governor Oyetola in Osun state (Nwokocha 2022). Sunday Adelaja, David Alamu and David Oyediran all declared that Bola Tinubu would win (Lawal 2022). Contrarily, Prophet Chukwudi and Adewale Giwa declared the victory of Atiku Abubakar of the PDP. Primate Elijah Ayodele held that victory is between LP and PDP candidates, while Shalom Akinbo declared that Peter Obi of LP will win. Overall, 13 prophecies are recorded in this paragraph: 4 in favour of APC, 3 for PDP, 4 prophecies for LP and 2 for others. The election outcome as declared by the Independent National

Electoral Commission (INEC) shows the victory of the APC. The point then is – if only 4 EPs were accurate out of 13, the integrity of most EPs is questionable. Although there are legal contentions, the current election result implies a lack of integrity and value in EPs. Irrespective of the legal battle outcome, the victory of any of the parties will still leave a gap of inconsistency in the EPs.

Election prophecies in Benin, Kenya and Zambia

Prophet Bushiri inaccurately prophesied the victory of Daniel Edah in the Benin Republic (Molobi 2021). Zambians commended prophet Joshua Iginla for predicting the victory of President Edgar Lungu in 2014 and Bushiri was hailed for the same (Olowookere 2016). Contrarily, Austin Liabunya inaccurately prophesied the victory of Hakainde Hichilema in the Zambian 2015 elections (Maravi Post Reporter 2015). Again, there are inconsistencies in the prophecies; Iginla was accurate while Liabunya and Bushiri were inaccurate and inconsistent, respectively. Furthermore, both Prophet Ayodele and Prophet Uebert Angel accurately prophesied William Ruto's victory in Kenya's 2022 presidential election (Uebert 2022, The Eagle Line 2022). Whereas Elijah Masinde's victory prophecy on Raila Odinga failed. These prophetic scenarios reveal inconsistencies in EPs.

Election prophecies in South Africa and Zimbabwe

Prophetic conversations in South Africa have been largely about the liberation struggle; however, there are a few EPs. The late prophet NJ Sithole accurately prophesied Zuma's presidential victory in 2008. He also prophesied accurately that Zuma would be imprisoned (Zulu 2021). Furthermore, John Anosike in Cape Town accurately prophesied the victory of Cyril Ramaphosa (Anosike 2018). In November 2016, Bushiri (2018) accurately prophesied the promotion of Kembo Mohadi to the office of the vice president of Zimbabwe. At the time of the prophecy, Kembo was a minister. Recently, Primate Ayodele declared that the incumbent would retain power in the 2023 election. Contrarily, Samuel Akinbodunse in South Africa prophesied the victory of Nelson Chamisa the leader of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) Party (IHarare 2023). While these prophecies caused rifts and division among Zimbabweans, Parere Kunyenzura, leader of the Zimbabwe Transformative Party (ZTP) claimed that God had ordained him to take over; neither President Mnangagwa nor Chamisa would win the 2023 election (New Zimbabwe 2022). Notably, the source and motive of Parere's prophecy as a participant in the election are questionable. It can be argued that his election prophecy was personal rather than divine. Moreover, the inconsistency in God's choice of a candidate via the declarations of the prophets raises questions about the integrity of EPs. Can God appoint three presidents to lead a nation at the same time? The inconsistency implies that one among the prophets will be accurate while others will be inaccurate.

Election prophecies in Ghana

In 2021, Prophet Nigel Gaisie of Ghana inaccurately declared vice president Yemi Osibanjo as the next Nigerian president; the vice president lost during the primary election of his party (BBC Africa 2021). Likewise, Badu Kobi inaccurately prophesied Trump's second term in 2020 and John Dramani Mahama's victory over the incumbent president (Ghanaweb 2021). Furthermore, due to the abuse of prophetic gifts in Ghana, police authority issued a directive that anyone prophesying death, creating panic and unrest against public interest will serve a jail term of 5 years (Ghanaweb 2021). The Inspector General of Police (IGP) George Akuffo Dampare declared that prophets should be careful of prophecies that can cause fear, anxiety or death. The IGP emphasises that police authority is not against prophecy but against utterances that create panic and controversies in the public space. The IGP advised that prophets must pray for wisdom to deliver the message. In Olewe's (2022) words states:

[T]he police have adopted the 27th of December as 'Prophecy Communication Compliance Day', to remind all of us to practice our faith within the confines of the law to ensure a safe, secure environment, free of anxiety generated from predictions of impending harm, danger, or death. (Olewe, 2022:n.p.)

Overall, there are fundamental questions of consistency in EPs. Can God choose different candidates at the same time? Can God set up public confusion through prophets? Apostle Paul seeks to provide an answer; 'God is not the author of confusion' (1 Cor 14:33). If God can be exonerated in the argument, it may be inferred that the prophets are the confused, not God. (cf. Osai 2022). Thus, it can be summarised, that the source and motive of the prophets informed the inconsistencies of EPs in Africa. This article will now proceed to discuss the empirical and historical evidence discussed.

Discussion

This section is divided into three subsections: the problems, critiques of the problems and recommended ways to address the problems.

The problem(s) with election prophecies

In the last two sections, evidence shows that 83.3% of the respondents opined that the integrity of EPs is very low. The ratio between low and high impacts of EPs on electorates is 50:50. While only 3.3% believe that EPs are accurate, most claim that EPs have psychological and emotional influence. Correspondingly, the historical survey reveals the inconsistency in EPs and raises questions on the motive, source and sincerity of some prophets. Ultimately, false prophecies present the messengers as false prophets posing a danger to the election process in Africa. As Rev. Father Godfrey Onah (2021) asserts:

[F]alse prophets are more dangerous than dictators because dictators can be challenged in courts of law, but prophets' words cannot be verified nor challenged in court since they claim God spoke to them. (n.p.)

This agrees with Prof. Lumumba's claim that when people (prophets) invoke the name of God, the congregation is frozen (Lumumba 2015). Consequently, historical and empirical evidence show that prophecy has a stake in African politics; it can drive political interest spiritually, emotionally and psychologically and account for the 'voter behaviour'. Additionally, politicians can leverage EPs to win the electorates' sympathy. In a symbiotic response, the prophets can be rewarded for pre-election prophecies in favour of certain candidates. Ideally, prophets can encourage the electorates to focus on any candidate with a sense of integrity, justice, equity, ethnic neutrality, rule of law and all associated fundamentals of good governance. However, where prophets cannot use their prophetic gifts to promote good governance, it is wiser to remain apolitical. In summary, the inconsistency and inaccuracy of EPs are motivated by: (1) self-interests or mistakes of the prophets, (2) emotions, psychological perceptions and cultural worldviews of the African electorates who crave spiritual interpretations in matters that require common sense and (3) greed and the desire of the political elite to grab power at all costs.

Election prophecies under Old and New Testament theological lenses

Viewing EPs theologically goes beyond a historical survey. While Harper (1896:128–129) and Deffinbaugh (2004) claim the imperativeness of a historical survey to understand prophecies, Hodge (1977:790) argues that prophecies cannot be sufficiently discussed without a survey of all the prophetic teachings in the Old and New Testaments. Although this article's scope will not allow navigation into all scriptures on EPs, an attempt will be made on a few vis-à-vis questions-and-answers procedures.

Can prophecy fail, can prophets lie and how can these be measured theologically?

Yes, prophets can prophesy lies as Jeremiah 27:16 succinctly suggests. Jeremiah was equally accused of prophesying lies in Chapter 43:2. Jeremiah may not have lied, but the scenario shows that the people are familiar with lying prophets and can challenge them. The masterpiece on prophetic lies is evident in:

[T]he prophets prophesy lies in my name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. (Jr 23:25)

It shows that prophets can use God's name to their end. Concomitantly, the narrative of the old and young prophets in 1 Kings 13:11–34 shows that a prophet can lie. It reveals obedience to God as a means of escape from prophetic errors. In other words, how prophets' words and actions align with the scriptures can be measuring tools for consistency in prophecy. Walvoord (2022) in his exposition on 2 Samuel 7:3 comments that a prophet could be wrong just as Nathan was wrong and corrected by the Lord. This shows that genuine prophets can be wrong or distracted. In the opinion of this

article, a genuine prophet may not only be measured by the consistency of prophetic accuracy but also by humility and submission to correction and repentance. Thus, prophets can lie or be wrong in delivering EPs depending on the motive, ignorance or intentional disobedience to divine instructions. However, making mistakes as in the case of Nathan does not determine whether prophets are fake or not, it is yielding to the Lord's correction or otherwise, that classifies their prophetic identity. On this background, the African prophets earlier discussed in the historical survey can be classified as either those not sent by God but only use God's name for self-interest or those truly sent by God but made mistakes due to ignorance, negligence of God's word or compromise under political pressure.

Are prophecies relevant in political leadership?

Markle provides the implication of 'Kingdom' and 'Throne' in 2 Samuel 7:16. In his words:

[I]t would seem only natural to assume that by the term throne was meant the political rule of David over Israel ... The term kingdom is probably the most difficult term to define, but it would seem quite clear to David that God was referring to his own rule over Israel in a political sense. (Markle 2018:n.p.)

In other words, political leadership has a place in biblical history. Although prophecies in the OT, especially those of David's era are not based on elections but on royalty and dynasty, notwithstanding, prophetic principles in OT are applicable in contemporary times (see Tsevat 1965:353–356). The next question then is – how are political leaders enthroned in David's dynasty and how does it connect with the role of prophets today? This article will answer this question with following two examples:

- **Prophet Nathan and Solomon's political leadership:** Nathan's prophecy ahead of Solomon's reign in 2 Samuel 7:12 indicates that prophetic declaration plays a significant role in the enthronement of political leaders in ancient Israel. He prophesied in the days of David, and it was fulfilled in the days of Solomon who ruled the United Kingdom of Israel for 40 years. Also, Solomon corroborates the fact that his political leadership was a result of Nathan's prophecy in 1 Kings 8:20.
- **Prophet Jeremiah and Jehoiachin's political leadership:** Jeremiah prophesied the vacuum in Israel's political leadership after the reign of Jehoiakim. The scenario shows the accuracy of the prophet on political leadership. According to the prophecy in Jeremiah 36:30, after Jehoiakim's reign, Jehoiachin ruled for only 3 months and 10 days before Nebuchadnezzar's coup (2 Chr 36:8–9; 2 Ki 24:8). Here again, prophetic accuracy in political leadership is evident.

The two examples above, imply that a prophetic role is not limited to the local church; it extends to the political space. Charles Allan views it more holistically as he uses the term 'universal prophethood of believers' (Charles 1896:435). Consequently, the prophetic vision of anyone who speaks for God leads to prophethood services in the home, business and

government, not just in delivering sermons in the local church. In Morgan's words, 'the prophethood leads to a vocation of holistic witness, which is not just a witness in church but in all areas of life' (Morgan 2007:96). Thus, prophecies are relevant in political leadership as well as all areas of human life.

What are the biblical tasks of prophets in the political space?

Besides foretelling the next line of leadership as seen in David's dynasty, the tasks of prophets in pre- and post-election seasons are beyond predictions. Election prophecies are not meant to showcase spiritual skills or massage the prophets' egos as kingmakers; firstly, the purpose is to bring Hope to the populace. The Basilica (2021) cited Isaiah's tasks as an example in the following words:

[P]rophet Isaiah played an important role in God's plan; He foretold the Messiah's coming and brought hope to His people during a challenging time. This promise of hope is not only for the nation of Israel but also for all of us. (n.p.)

Thus, the task of the prophet is to give hope to the public and not to create confusion, panic and political division.

Secondly, the prophets' task is to be Reformers in the political space. Such duty involves improving the social and spiritual state of the nation. As Harper (1896) succinctly puts it:

[N]o prophetic utterance was ever made that was not intended to influence the lives and thoughts of those who first heard it. The utterance was a divine means used to affect the peculiar and unique history of which it was a part. This was true not only of prophecy but also of psalmody and legislation. (p. 125)

While Psalmody speaks to the spiritual development of the people, the legislation addresses the social role of prophetic messengers in shaping the development of the nation(s). Thus, prophets need to act as reformers called to influence the socio-political sphere thereby promoting good governance.

Thirdly, the lesson from the prophethood of all believers as propounded by Charles Allan shows a higher responsibility of prophets – to speak truth to power on socio-political issues. Adams (1986:93) asserts that radical laicism was at the root of the philosophy of prophethood of all believers where the laity and ministers join hands to provide analysis, criticism and transformation for the church and society. The prophethood of all believers led to criticism of the injustices of the world and emerging innovations for the transformation of family, social, economic and political structures (Adams 1986:95). Adams added that 'the prophethood of all believers is a responsibility to cry out on suffering, poverty and other issues of injustice within society and the church' (Adams 1986:85). So far, the empirical and historical evidence in this article did not present African election prophets as Hope-givers, Reformers or prophets who speak truth to power on social issues. The three tasks above should challenge African prophets to review their pre- and post-election responsibilities.

How can the integrity and impact of prophecies be measured in the political space?

The NT delineates the limitation of prophecies; 'for we know in part and prophesy in part' (1 Cor 13:9 NIV). By implication, prophets may not likely deliver the most accurate EPs. Besides, the public and congregants alike may respond inappropriately and emotionally to prophecies (Ac 21:11–12). Thus, prophecies must be evaluated to ensure a delivery that engenders some degree of accuracy and the correct responses. As Paul puts it – 'Let two or three prophets speak [as inspired by the Holy Spirit], while the rest pay attention and weigh carefully what is said' (1 Cor 14:29 – Amplified Bible). The question then is – how can prophecies be evaluated? Firstly, the prophecy must be loyal to Christ (see 1 Cor 12:3 and Rv 19:10). Secondly, in Jesus' opinion, prophets' declarations are not enough to judge false or true prophecies; what they do including their lifestyles and moral standards, are evidence to decipher falsehood or truthfulness (see Mt 7:15–20). Thirdly, as Butler puts it 'Paul demanded orderly, Christ-honouring, and upbuilding prophecy which submits to apostolic authority' (Butler 1991; cf. Reese 2020). This speaks of prophets' submission to accountability via church ecumenical leadership and public scrutiny. In the opinion of this article, 100% accuracy is not always the only way to measure the integrity and impact of true prophecies and prophets. Prophets are not infallible. One of the highest weighing standards ought to be the submission of prophetic declarations to the authority of God's word through critical examinations by the public, a plurality of prophets and ecumenical leaders. Thus, subscribers of EPs must not be gullible; they must scrutinise and verify the source and motive. Fourthly, the integrity and impact of prophecies can be measured by compliance with the scriptures. A prophecy can be judged as false if it poses a threat to scripture's special authority (see 1 Cor 14:38–39; Tm 2 3:16 and Pt 2 1:20–21). Applying these four evaluation indices to the African EPs discussed in the historical survey section above reveals a gap. The African churches and related subscribers need to place African EPs under the lens of these four evaluation indices.

What are the implications of unfulfilled election prophecies?

The historical survey section above shows that not all EPs were fulfilled. Whether from false or mistaken predictions, there are implications of unfulfilled prophecies. Firstly, unfulfilled prophecies can weaken the faith of adherents and the populace. As evident in the empirical exercise presented earlier under 'Faith and EPs', only 3.3% of respondents in Q5 affirm the accuracy of EPs. Secondly, non-Christian critics who are prone to mocking the Christian faith may find more grounds to substantiate their criticism. Thirdly, as provided in Deuteronomy 18:22, presumptuous prophecies can frighten the listeners, and create division or panic. This is evident in the report of Owoyele (2023) regarding Zimbabwe's 2023 election. Lastly, it is possible for politicians to leverage false prophecies or contract false prophets to announce them as God's choice. This engenders abuse via the commercialisation of prophecies. With these negative implications in view, this article will now make recommendations.

Possible ways to address the challenges of election prophecies

While this article can only accommodate a few, the author does not claim to have exhausted all suggestions applicable to EPs in Africa.

Election prophets need to be apolitical: Nonpartisan approach is imperative to improve the quality of EPs in Africa. Prophets need to jettison their alliances with politicians. There is no point in speaking for God when prophets are under political influence and partnerships. To speak truth to power, Reese (2020) advises religious leaders not to get in bed with politicians.

Scrutiny of EPs by the plurality of prophets, ecumenical leaders and the public: To promote healthy election processes, African Church leaders, a plurality of prophets and the public need to review the motive and source of EPs. The four evaluation indices of Butler and Reese in the previous section are usable in this regard. African religious subscribers need to be familiar with scriptural standards of prophetic ministry and able to decipher lying prophets and challenge whatever does not seem to promote healthy elections and public safety.

Prophets need to review their responsibilities: Earlier, this article discussed the tasks of prophets as 'Reformers, Hope-givers and those who speak truth to power on social and political issues'. Prophets' pre- and post-election duties need to transcend foretelling and prayers. Femi Emmanuel's advice is imperative as he claims that political power is next to God's power. Therefore, spiritual leaders must challenge the evil constitution of oligarchies, bad policies inducing poverty, ethnic discrimination, injustices and nepotism (OgaEmma 2022). This assertion perfectly describes the tasks of prophets to address election-related socio-political challenges in Africa.

The need for public repentance when prophecies go wrong:

One good post-election response by those who inaccurately prophesied Trump's second-term victory was public repentance. The scenario agrees with prophet Nathan's repentance as discussed earlier. Duin (2021) reports that Michael Brown helped draft newly released 'prophetic standards' in America. At the heart of it was a call for those who made false prophecies to publicly apologise. The standards hold that if the prophecies were delivered publicly, a public apology is necessary and those who refused will no longer be taken seriously in the American prophetic movement. This is a good public accountability to emulate by the African election prophets. While failed EPs can affect the faith of adherents, faith can be rekindled when prophets admit their mistakes and publicly apologise.

The role of the African Government: Public account policies are needed to reduce the trauma, divisions and panic caused by prophecies. It can be done without a motive to silence prophetic voices. Should prophets subject themselves to the scrutiny of the plurality of prophets, ecumenical leaders and the populace, the government's intervention is unnecessary.

Conclusion

This article revealed that African EPs rarely have integrity but fall within probability. It further showed that prophets are not infallible. The article further encouraged caution on the path of electorates who subscribe to pre-election prophecies. The article implied that because EPs are transactions of probability, electorates, a plurality of prophets and ecumenical leaders must critically address the challenges of inaccuracy, inconsistency, divisions and panics created through the four evaluation indices as discussed under the subsection of Old and New Testament theological lenses. Hopefully, this will curb the negative impact on the faith of electorates, undue criticism from non-Christian critics, possible divisions and panics, and the commercialisation of prophecies. Lastly, the recommendations challenged African prophets to act as hope-givers, reformers and those who speak truth to power.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

D.O.O. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article is one of the outcomes of the Postdoc Research proposal approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria – T013/22.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data were collected from about 109 participants mostly in South Africa and Nigeria using the Google Survey Questionnaire. Details of the available database are at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/15LrzjfhLxZfO4gvt1IeZK0oNzrgOGDCzJEjezaUzyZ8/edit> or available from the corresponding author, D.O.O., on request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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