Institutional Governance and Religious Mobility: Understanding Member Migration in Traditional Churches of Dar es Salaam

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Abstract
Religious mobility in urban Tanzania is often discussed through spiritual experience and socioeconomic aspiration, while the relationship between everyday church governance and decisions to remain, leave or return requires closer examination. This study explored that relationship in eight selected Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican congregations in Dar es Salaam. Guided by Hirschman's Exit–Voice–Loyalty framework and Institutional Theory, it employed a qualitative case study design. Data collected between April and July 2025 comprised 32 in-depth interviews, six focus group discussions, document review and non-participant observation. Thematic analysis identified four interconnected dimensions: transparency and accountability, participation and inclusivity, pastoral responsiveness, and spiritual expectations. Participants associated delayed financial explanations, restricted opportunities to question decisions, and the exclusion of women and youth with weakened trust. Some described Pentecostal and revivalist congregations as offering greater recognition and accessible care. Others valued traditional churches' sacramental continuity, while returnees linked renewed affiliation to disappointment with financial demands and leadership practices elsewhere. These accounts indicate that mobility involved continuing evaluations of institutional credibility rather than a uniform movement away from traditional Christianity. The study extends the analysis of exit and loyalty by treating return as a possible renegotiation of belonging. It identifies financial dialogue, meaningful participation and responsive pastoral arrangements as practical priorities, while recognizing differences within denominations and the limits of retrospective qualitative evidence.

Keywords: *Institutional governance; religious mobility; exit–voice–loyalty; institutional legitimacy; African Christianity; Dar es Salaam.*

INTRODUCTION

Religious belonging in Dar es Salaam is negotiated within a diverse Christian environment in which historically established denominations coexist with Pentecostal, charismatic and revivalist congregations. The Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and the Anglican Church of Tanzania (ACT) remain important settings for worship, social relationships and institutional service. Alongside them, other congregations offer distinctive forms of prayer, testimony, pastoral attention and participation. Movement between these settings raises questions about how believers evaluate the institutions through which they practice their faith. African Pentecostal scholarship has established the importance of spiritual experience and the relationship between religious practice and changing social circumstances (Kalu, 2008; Meyer, 2004). This study examines the organizational encounters through which those concerns also become questions of governance.

The research problem concerns the relationship between institutional authority and congregational belonging. Churches may possess recognized leadership structures and longstanding religious legitimacy while some members experience restricted access to information, limited influence over decisions or inadequate pastoral attention. In such circumstances, continued religious commitment does not necessarily secure continued membership in a particular congregation. A believer may remain Christian while leaving a church perceived as unresponsive, or return to an earlier denomination after disappointment elsewhere. The problem is therefore not simply that churches compete for members. It is that the arrangements intended to organize collective religious life may be experienced by some members as weakening their standing within that community.

Previous scholarship offers important but incomplete answers to this problem. Work on African Pentecostalism explains the appeal of religious experience, healing and the interpretation of material insecurity (Gifford, 2015; Kalu, 2008). Dilger's (2007) Dar es Salaam study locates Pentecostal community and care within the difficulties of everyday social life. More recent African work examines church financial controls, leadership concentration and succession (Tagwirei, 2023, 2024; Tetteh et

al., 2021). These contributions show that governance is already a recognised concern. What remains insufficiently explained for the congregations examined here is how members connect particular governance encounters to the different possibilities of remaining, expressing dissatisfaction, changing affiliation and returning.

The gap is thus a specific relationship requiring empirical explanation, rather than an assertion that church governance has never been studied. Financial accountability research asks how religious resources are controlled; leadership research considers authority and institutional continuity; studies of religious change examine spiritual practice and affiliation. Bringing these discussions together makes it possible to ask how an unexplained contribution, an inaccessible pastor or an unsuccessful attempt to participate becomes consequential for belonging. Comparing leaders, current members and former members also makes visible disagreements over whether a governance arrangement is legitimate, exclusionary or simply difficult to operate under existing institutional conditions.

Governance can receive less explicit attention when spiritual and administrative matters are treated as separate domains. Such a distinction may obscure how decisions about appointments, budgets or meeting participation acquire religious meaning. Members may understand an unanswered request for help as a failure of pastoral responsibility, or exclusion from deliberation as evidence that their contribution is valued less than their donations. Conversely, a stable institutional structure may support confidence in teaching and pastoral judgement. This study therefore treats governance as part of lived religious membership without reducing faith to satisfaction with administrative services. Theological commitments retain their own significance, including when they sustain *loyalty* despite institutional frustration.

The study focuses on eight purposively selected congregations associated with the three traditional denominations in Dar es Salaam. It examines accounts of movement within the city's Christian environment, including departures towards Pentecostal and revivalist churches and subsequent returns. The original empirical concern is retained: how transparency, accountability, participation, inclusivity and leadership responsiveness enter members' evaluations of their churches. The study does not estimate denominational growth, calculate migration rates or adjudicate the truth of religious teachings. Its contribution is a contextual explanation of how

governance and spiritual expectations intersect in participants' accounts of affiliation.

Research objective and questions

The overall objective was to examine how institutional governance shapes members' experiences and accounts of religious mobility in selected Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican congregations in Dar es Salaam. Four questions organize the inquiry. First, how do members and leaders experience transparency and accountability, and how do these experiences enter decisions to remain or leave? Second, how do opportunities for participation, especially among women and youth, influence *voice* and belonging? Third, how does pastoral responsiveness shape assessments of institutional care? Fourth, how do governance experiences interact with spiritual expectations in accounts of migration and return?

These questions connect organizational practices to members' interpretations without presuming that any single practice produces *exit*. They also allow *loyalty* to be examined as an active, sometimes ambivalent relationship. The practical significance lies in identifying the encounters through which churches can make accountability and participation meaningful to members. The theoretical significance lies in connecting organizational responses to dissatisfaction with the institutional conditions under which those responses become available, credible or difficult to pursue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Governance and accountability in religious organizations

Institutional governance refers here to the formal arrangements and everyday practices through which authority is exercised, decisions are made, resources are managed and leaders answer for their actions. Transparency concerns access to relevant information and intelligible explanations; accountability includes the opportunity to question decisions and obtain a response. Participation concerns involvement in deliberation and institutional action, while inclusivity asks whose involvement is recognized. Pastoral responsiveness concerns how leaders and church structures receive and address members' spiritual and social concerns. These dimensions' overlap, but they are not interchangeable. Publishing figures, for example, does not necessarily create an opportunity to challenge their interpretation.

Institutional Theory provides a basis for distinguishing formal structures from the practices through which members encounter them. Scott (2014) explains institutions through regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements. Rules allocate responsibilities, norms define appropriate conduct, and shared assumptions make particular forms of authority appear natural. In churches, these elements may support continuity and mutual obligation while also making certain decisions difficult to question. Meyer and Rowan (1977) draw attention to potential separation between formal organizational structures and everyday activity. Applied cautiously, this perspective directs attention to whether a council or reporting rule enables participation in practice, rather than assuming that its existence demonstrates effective accountability.

Tetteh et al. (2021), drawing on qualitative interviews with church officials in Ghana, found that accountability arrangements and internal controls could coexist with shortcomings in their application. Their study is relevant because it distinguishes the presence of a control from its operation. Its emphasis is primarily on the management of church funds. The present inquiry extends the question towards membership by examining how congregants interpret access to explanations and opportunities to question decisions. This is a difference in analytical focus, not evidence that Ghanaian findings can be transferred directly to Tanzania.

An institutional perspective also guards against equating hierarchy with misconduct. Authority may be centralized for theological, organizational or historical reasons, and a hierarchical church may maintain effective reporting and consultation. Equally, an apparently informal congregation may concentrate control in one leader. Suchman's (1995) analysis of legitimacy helps clarify why members' judgements matter: legitimacy involves the perceived appropriateness of organizational conduct within a socially constituted system of meanings. A procedure accepted by senior officials may therefore be evaluated differently by congregants who experience its consequences. Understanding religious mobility requires attention to both the arrangement and the audience judging it.

Religious mobility and African Pentecostalism

Religious mobility is used in this article to describe reported movement in congregational or denominational affiliation, including departure, entry and return. It is distinguished from geographical migration and from a single visit to another church. Visits, prayer meetings and exposure to

alternative worship may nevertheless form part of the context in which affiliation is reconsidered. The categories "current member" and "former member" identify positions at the time of the study; they do not by themselves describe a person's complete religious history. A current member may have left and returned, while a former member may retain attachments to earlier teachings or relationships.

Meyer (2004) examines the expansion of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity through changing forms of religious mediation and experience. Kalu (2008) places African Pentecostalism within a wider historical and cultural account. These perspectives challenge explanations that treat believers as passive recipients of institutional messages. Gifford (2015) raises questions about Christianity's relationship with development and modernity, including the consequences of religious understandings of material life. Read together, these works establish that spiritual practice, social aspiration and institutional form need to be studied in relation to one another. They do not justify assuming that all Pentecostal churches share one governance style or one approach to prosperity.

Dilger's (2007) research in a neo-Pentecostal church in Dar es Salaam is especially relevant to the relationship between care and religious attachment. It shows the importance of locating religious practice within community relationships and experiences of insecurity. For the present study, its contribution is to make pastoral care analytically consequential rather than treating it as a secondary benefit of membership. However, a study centred on a Pentecostal community does not by itself explain how people compare that care with previous experiences in Catholic, Lutheran or Anglican settings. Such comparisons require accounts of earlier affiliation, the circumstances of movement and the expectations taken into a new congregation.

Recent work complicates any simple contrast between restrictive traditional churches and participatory Pentecostal alternatives. Tagwirei's (2023) discussion of African Pentecostal leadership and succession identifies problems of concentrated authority and the development of future leaders. His Southern African analysis, based on literature and participant observation, also questions leadership arrangements that gather multiple ministries around one dominant figure (Tagwirei, 2024). These studies provide a useful counterpoint to favourable accounts of Pentecostal participation. They suggest that opportunities to preach,

testify or receive personal attention should be distinguished from influence over appointments, resources and institutional oversight.
International measures of religious switching require similar conceptual care. Pew Research Center's (2025) cross-national report compares childhood and adult identification across broad religious categories. It explicitly excludes movement between Christian denominations from its main measure. It therefore cannot substantiate the prevalence of Catholic-to-Pentecostal or Lutheran-to-revivalist movement in Dar es Salaam. Its relevance is methodological: conclusions depend on how affiliation and movement are defined. The present qualitative inquiry attends to changes within Christianity that may remain invisible when membership is measured only through broad religious categories.

Participation and the interpretation of institutional belonging
Participation has both organizational and experiential dimensions. Members may hold committee positions without influencing outcomes, or feel recognized through everyday involvement without holding formal office. Women and youth may contribute substantial labour to worship and fellowship while having limited access to resource decisions. Conversely, being invited to lead prayer may produce a meaningful sense of recognition even where authority over finances remains concentrated. Analysis must therefore distinguish forms of participation and ask which form participants themselves considered important when explaining *loyalty* or departure.

The literature also cautions against treating dissatisfaction as sufficient evidence of an intention to leave. Religious identity may be connected to doctrine, sacraments, family histories and durable relationships. A member who questions financial decisions may remain because these attachments matter more, or because *voice* is understood as a responsibility within the church. Hirschman (1970) provides a way to examine such possibilities, while institutional approaches explain why some concerns are easier to express than others. This combination makes it possible to recognise both individual judgement and the rules, expectations and dependencies that shape it.

Across these debates, three questions remain central to this study. How do members interpret the difference between formal provision and everyday experience? How do these interpretations vary across leaders, ordinary congregants and people with histories of movement? Under what circumstances does a valued alternative become disappointing, making

return imaginable? The contribution of the Dar es Salaam case lies in examining these questions together within the selected congregations, while keeping comparisons tied to the evidence available.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Exit voice and loyalty

Hirschman's (1970) framework explains responses to perceived organizational deterioration through the relationship between *exit*, *voice* and *loyalty*. *Exit* entails withdrawing from an organization; *voice* involves attempts to express dissatisfaction and influence its conduct. *Loyalty* can delay *exit* and sustain efforts to improve an organization, although continued membership should not automatically be interpreted as satisfaction. In this study, *exit* refers to reported changes of church affiliation, *voice* to opportunities or attempts to question institutional decisions, and *loyalty* to attachments that help sustain or renew belonging. These concepts are used as interpretive resources rather than mutually exclusive categories imposed on participants. A person may remain while criticizing leaders, attend another church while retaining doctrinal attachment, or leave after concluding that requests for change are unlikely to receive a response. The framework also directs attention to distinctions between the existence of a channel and confidence that using it will matter. An annual meeting may formally permit questions yet be experienced as offering little practical influence. Such an arrangement would require analysis of the quality of *voice* rather than a simple count of opportunities to speak.

Return is treated as a further trajectory requiring explanation. It may express renewed appreciation of an earlier institution, disappointment with an alternative or continuing attachments that survived departure. The study does not assume that return proves the original institution has changed. Instead, it examines how evaluations of governance and spiritual expectations are revised through experience. This use of the framework allows *loyalty* to be considered across a person's religious trajectory without claiming that Hirschman's original model already explains every form of religious movement.

Institutional rules practices and legitimacy

Institutional Theory explains the organizational conditions surrounding these responses. Scott's (2014) regulative dimension directs attention to reporting procedures, councils and rules governing appointments. The normative dimension concerns expectations of stewardship, respect,

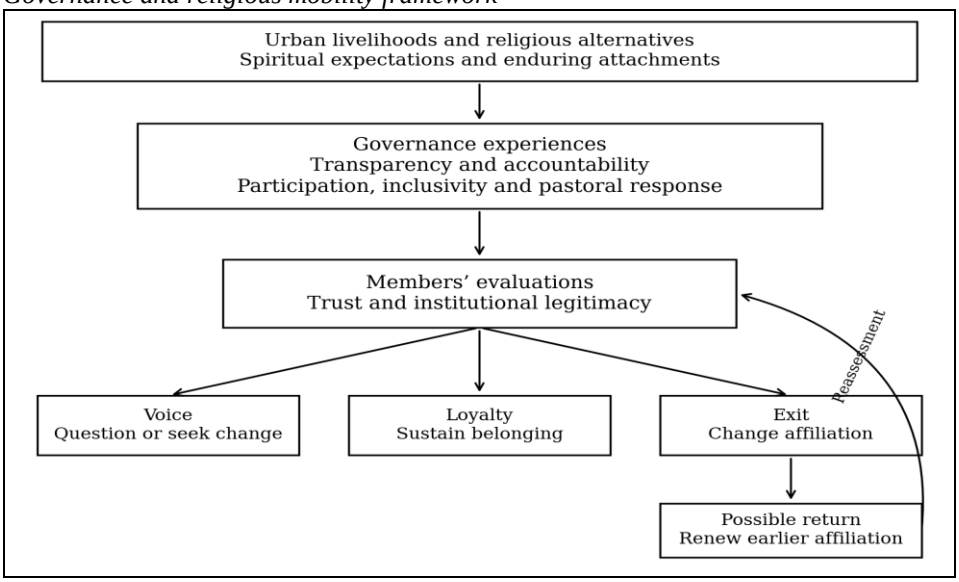
service and appropriate leadership. The cultural-cognitive dimension concerns taken-for-granted assumptions about who may speak, lead or question authority. These dimensions help explain why a member's request for information can encounter resistance even where leaders endorse accountability in principle.

The distinction between formal structures and everyday practice is also relevant (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). A written commitment to inclusion may coexist with restricted influence, while an inherited structure may work more responsively than its reputation suggests. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) draw attention to pressures that shape organizational similarity within a field. Their argument is used here to sensitize analysis to institutional expectations and possible pressures for adaptation; the data do not establish that churches have adopted particular practices through an observed process of isomorphism. Legitimacy is examined through members' judgements of institutional conduct, with attention to the different audiences to whom leaders may feel accountable (Suchman, 1995).

Conceptual relationships

Figure 1 presents the analytical relationships guiding the study. Transparency, accountability, participation, inclusivity and pastoral responsiveness are parallel, interacting dimensions of governance. They are not sequential stages in which one must precede the next. Members interpret these practices through expectations about faith, care, fairness and authority. Their evaluations of trust and institutional legitimacy may support *voice*, sustained belonging, *exit* or return, while spiritual commitments and available alternatives shape the possibilities under consideration.

Figure 1:
Governance and religious mobility framework



Source. Author's conceptual synthesis of Hirschman (1970), Institutional Theory and the study's analytical focus. Arrows indicate interpretive relationships, not tested effects.

The arrows indicate proposed interpretive relationships, not statistically tested causal effects. The return pathway emphasises that experience in another congregation can alter a member's evaluation of earlier affiliation. Context surrounds the entire process: urban livelihoods, relationships and exposure to alternative congregations may affect both expectations and opportunities. The framework therefore keeps governance central while allowing it to interact with theological attachment and social circumstances. It also avoids defining successful governance solely through retention, since continued membership may coexist with unresolved dissatisfaction and members retain the right to change affiliation.

METHODOLOGY

Study area and case boundaries

The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's principal commercial urban centre. Its relevance lies in the coexistence of established denominations and Pentecostal, charismatic and revivalist congregations within a setting of diverse livelihoods and religious opportunities. Churches provide spaces for worship, pastoral support and social relationships, making the city suitable for examining how institutional experiences enter decisions about belonging. Selection of the

city supports a contextual investigation; it does not make Dar es Salaam statistically representative of Tanzania or of African urban Christianity.

Eight Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican parishes or congregations were purposively selected. The reported selection considerations were their historical significance, engagement with diocesan governance and location within an urban environment offering religious alternatives. Together, these considerations connected the sites to the question of how established institutions respond to member expectations. Including several congregations permitted attention to variation within the broader case and reduced dependence on the circumstances of a single parish. The number eight represents the bounded field setting reported for this inquiry, rather than a calculated minimum for representing the three denominations.

The study-site account identifies Ilala, Kinondoni and Temeke, while some participant locations also refer to Ubungo and other neighbourhoods. These location descriptors cannot be treated as a verified administrative allocation of the eight congregations. The unit of analysis is the relationship between governance experience and religious mobility within the selected congregational setting, not a comparison of municipal populations. Specific parish and neighbourhood identifiers are omitted from quotations to reduce deductive identification. This preserves denominational and mobility information needed for interpretation while limiting unnecessary disclosure.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative case study design was used to examine governance and religious mobility in their institutional and social context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This design was appropriate because the inquiry concerned how participants interpreted authority, participation and care, and how those interpretations entered their accounts of remaining, leaving or returning. It allowed organisational provisions to be considered alongside experiences of their operation, rather than assuming that rules alone explained religious affiliation.

The analysis has an interpretive orientation: participants' accounts are treated as situated understandings of institutional experience. Statements about secrecy, exclusion, spiritual power or exploitation are therefore evidence of perceptions and judgements. They do not independently establish financial wrongdoing, denominational policy or the efficacy of

religious practices. Including leaders as well as ordinary and former members allowed institutional explanations and critical accounts to be considered together. The comparison is analytical, examining similarities and contrasts, without estimating the prevalence of any position.

Sampling and participant profile

Purposive sampling identified participants with relevant experience of church governance and membership. Selection considered involvement in church activities, leadership responsibilities, length of membership and knowledge of congregational arrangements. Denominational affiliation provided a basis for seeking variation across Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican settings. Snowball recruitment subsequently helped reach former members whose experiences were less accessible through parish structures (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Patton, 2015). Referral recruitment extended access but could also reproduce existing networks and favour people willing to discuss their experiences.

The interview sample comprised 32 participants: 17 women and 15 men aged 21–68 years. Twenty-one were current members of the selected churches and eleven were former members. Participants included clergy, elders, catechists, council members, youth leaders, women's fellowship representatives and ordinary congregants. Six focus group discussions (FGDs), each involving six to eight participants, added accounts of shared experiences and congregational expectations. Table 1 brings together the reported profile without repeating it within the research-design section.

Table 1:
Reported participant and fieldwork profile

Characteristic	Reported information
Selected congregations	8 Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican congregations
In-depth interviews	32 participants
Gender of interview participants	17 women; 15 men
Age of interview participants	21–68 years
Current and former membership	21 current members; 11 former members
Participant roles	Clergy, lay leaders, catechists, council and fellowship representatives, ordinary and former members
Focus group discussions	6 groups, with 6–8 participants in each
Fieldwork period	April–July 2025

Note. *Interview and FGD counts must not be added as unique persons. Participation overlap, denominational allocation and the classification of returnees require confirmation.*

The 32 interviews and six FGDs provide complementary forms of material rather than a single combined sample count. Exact overlap between interview and FGD participation is not reported, so the total number of unique participants cannot be established from these figures. Current membership also does not necessarily indicate uninterrupted membership: returnees may belong within that category. The reported denominational coverage is retained, but equal or proportional allocation is not claimed because denomination-specific counts are unavailable. The strategy is consequently described as purposive selection with denominational variation and snowball recruitment, rather than probability stratification.

The sample's rationale rests on the focused question, participants' relevant experience, variation in membership status and the depth afforded by interviews lasting 45–90 minutes. These features are consistent with assessing qualitative adequacy through information power rather than a universal numerical threshold (Malterud et al., 2016). The six discussions offered additional settings for examining how concerns were collectively expressed. They are not assumed to have supplied two groups per denomination, since the precise allocation is not established in the reported record.

Data collection and analysis proceeded concurrently. The original account reports that collection ended at thematic saturation, but it does not identify the interview or discussion at which this judgement was made or provide a stopping log. The sample is therefore not presented as demonstrably exhausting possible meanings. Its adequacy is assessed more cautiously through the range and depth of the available accounts. This distinction matters because reflexive approaches to thematic analysis do not treat themes as finite entities that can simply be discovered in full (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Data collection

Data were collected between April and July 2025 through in-depth interviews, FGDs, document review and non-participant observation. Interviews were the primary source of individual accounts and used a semi-structured schedule. Their substantive focus encompassed access to financial information, leadership decisions, participation, pastoral encounters, spiritual expectations and histories of affiliation. Leaders' accounts addressed institutional responsibilities and constraints, while current and former members described their experiences and evaluations

of congregational life. Semi-structured interviewing permitted exploration of matters participants considered consequential while retaining the study's governance focus.

FGDs involved youth, women's fellowships, mixed congregational groups and people with migration experience. Discussions provided opportunities to examine collective meanings attached to recognition, exclusion and care. The account describes groups organized within denominational settings, alongside discussions involving migrated members. Group material is interpreted as situated interaction rather than evidence that every participant endorsed every statement. A quotation attributed to an FGD is treated as a contribution recorded in that discussion, not automatically as a unanimous group conclusion.

Interviews and discussions were conducted in Kiswahili or English according to participants' preferences. With consent, they were audio-recorded and transcribed; Kiswahili material was translated where needed for English reporting. Translation entails interpretation, especially where terms convey spiritual experience or relational obligations. The English quotations present selected extracts from the study record. Published descriptors omit exact dates and local parish identifiers while retaining information relevant to the analysis.

Document review covered church constitutions or governance documents, synod reports, parish council minutes, pastoral letters and strategic plans. These sources were used to examine formal authority, reporting arrangements and stated commitments to inclusion and outreach. Their analytical relevance lay in comparison with participants' experiences. Table 2 identifies the document categories and the limits of their description. It distinguishes a document's potential purpose from a demonstrated finding; a formal commitment does not show that a practice occurred, and a missing entry in a minute book does not necessarily show that it never occurred.

Table 2:
Documentary sources described in the study record

Document category	Scope reported	Analytical purpose
Constitutions and governance documents	Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican structures	Locate authority and formal participation
Strategic plans	ELCT plan identified as covering 2022–2026	Examine planning and leadership arrangements
Parish council minutes	Reporting and deliberation in selected parishes	Compare recorded practice with member accounts
Synod reports	Includes Anglican material on inclusion	Examine commitments to participation
Pastoral letters and guidance	Letters dated 2022–2024 and TEC communication guidance described	Examine inclusion and pastoral outreach

Note. *Exact titles, archive references, selection procedures and numbers of documents were not supplied. These categories describe reported field materials and do not constitute a verified document inventory.*

Non-participant observation took place during worship services, parish meetings and selected church activities, with attention to leadership interaction, communication and member participation. Field notes were incorporated into the analysis. However, event-level descriptions, observation counts and dated extracts are not available in the present account. Observation is therefore treated as a contextual source rather than independent verification of interview allegations. Where a theme lacks identifiable observational support, its evidential basis remains the interviews, discussions and reported documentary summaries.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis followed the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, coding, developing themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and writing the analysis. The reported procedure involved reading transcripts and field materials, identifying relevant meanings and organizing patterns concerning governance and affiliation. Its interpretive character is consistent with the later clarification of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Themes are treated as analytical constructions developed through engagement with the material, rather than categories whose validity depends on numerical coding agreement.

The original analytical description combines coding drawn from participants' accounts with interpretation informed by *exit*, *voice*, *loyalty* and institutional arrangements. This provides the basis for a data-led reading with theory-informed interpretation. The framework helps ask what a complaint means for institutional legitimacy or possible *exit*, while the accounts retain the capacity to complicate it. For example, a preference for sacramental stability can sustain membership despite dissatisfaction, and return can follow disappointment elsewhere without a documented improvement in the original church.

Comparisons considered denomination, institutional role and current or former membership. The presentation brings related voices together, identifies differences and examines counterexamples before developing an interpretation. It integrates documentary summaries within relevant themes and separates participants' claims from the researcher's explanatory propositions. The thematic summaries and comparative table synthesizes the accounts presented, with particular attention to variation and the limits of the evidence.

Four substantive themes organize the findings: transparency and accountability; participation and inclusivity; leadership responsiveness and pastoral care; and divergent spiritual expectations. Return migration is then examined as a trajectory crossing these themes. Coding software, coder numbers and a detailed coding archive are not identified in the supplied record and are not retrospectively asserted. Open, axial and selective coding are likewise not added as procedural labels, since the stated approach is thematic analysis rather than grounded theory.

Trustworthiness and reflexivity

Credibility was supported in the reported design by including leaders, ordinary members and people with migration experience, and by comparing interviews and discussions with institutional material. The presentation preserves accounts that challenge a uniform narrative, including appreciation of traditional pastoral care and dissatisfaction with some Pentecostal practices. Triangulation is used to examine convergence and disagreement, rather than to assume that multiple sources necessarily establish one uncontested account. These practices are considered in relation to credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The study record describes continued reflection on coding and interpretation. The present analysis makes its principal interpretive risk explicit: a focus on governance can encourage the researcher to read every movement as evidence of organizational failure. Attention to doctrine, sacramental attachment and contrasting experiences reduces that risk. Another risk is accepting a migrant's retrospective comparison as an objective ranking of churches. Maintaining the distinction between reported experience and institutional fact is therefore essential to the analytical approach.

A fuller assessment of positionality would require information about the researcher's religious affiliations, relationships with participating churches and route of access. These details are not established in the available account. Nor does it document formal member checking, independent peer debriefing or a separately maintained reflexive journal. Such procedures are not claimed simply because they are commonly recommended. Transferability instead rests on a sufficiently clear account of the setting, participant categories, evidence and interpretive limits to enable readers to judge relevance elsewhere.

Ethical considerations

Participants were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary participation and their right to withdraw without adverse consequences. Consent was obtained for participation and recording. The reported safeguards included removing personal identifiers, restricting access to research materials to the researcher and securing recordings and transcripts. Because financial criticism, leadership disputes and religious departure can affect relationships within churches, confidentiality is central to the reporting of these findings.

Quotation descriptors retain only broad information relevant to interpretation, such as gender, denomination, leadership role or movement trajectory. Exact ages, interview dates and parish locations are omitted where their combination could facilitate identification. Quotations report participants' perceptions; they do not establish wrongdoing by identifiable individuals or institutions. FGD participation also places limits on confidentiality because participants hear one another's contributions. The account therefore cannot promise that researcher-controlled anonymization removes every interpersonal risk associated with group discussion.

Methodological limitations

The evidence comes from selected Christian congregations in an urban setting and supports contextual, analytical interpretation. It does not represent all congregations in Dar es Salaam, rural Tanzania or other faith communities. Purposive and referral recruitment may have favoured active members, accessible leaders and people with particularly clear accounts of dissatisfaction. Members who quietly withdrew, retained multiple affiliations or were unwilling to criticize authority may be less visible.

Retrospective accounts can organize complex histories around an especially memorable incident, and social desirability may encourage leaders to defend institutions or migrants to justify departure. The study cannot isolate governance from family relationships, relocation, livelihoods or other unmeasured circumstances. Differences between denominations must also be read alongside variation in local leadership, congregational resources and individual expectations. The design does not establish the prevalence of governance problems or causal effects on retention.

Finally, denomination-specific sample counts, interview–FGD overlap and detailed document and observation inventories remain insufficiently reported. These constraints limit the depth of systematic cross-congregational comparison and the independent assessment of triangulation. Return narratives demonstrate the possibility of renewed affiliation; they do not establish a population-wide cycle or its frequency. These limitations qualify the reach of the analysis while leaving its central contribution intact: an account of how participants made sense of governance in explaining religious belonging and movement.

FINDINGS

The findings concern participants' reported encounters with governance and the meanings they attached to church membership. The four themes in Table 3 are interrelated: an unanswered financial question can be experienced simultaneously as insufficient accountability, exclusion from participation and a lack of responsiveness. They are separated analytically to show what each adds to the explanation of religious mobility. Return migration is subsequently considered across the themes. Quotations illustrate accounts already present in the study record and do not indicate the numerical distribution of views.

Table 3:
Themes and their analytical relationships

Theme	Central experience reported	Interpretive relationship
Transparency and accountability	Restricted information or insufficient explanation	Credibility of voice and answerability
Participation and inclusivity	Support roles without sufficient influence	Recognition, institutional norms and belonging
Pastoral responsiveness	Differences in access, attention and preferred care	Practical response and perceived legitimacy
Spiritual expectations	Experiential worship, giving and sacramental continuity	Religious meaning in evaluations of affiliation
Return across themes	Disappointment elsewhere and renewed appreciation	Exit followed by reassessment and possible loyalty

Note. *Themes summarize reported accounts; they are not prevalence estimates or demonstrated causal effects.*

Transparency and accountability in church governance

Participants' concerns about transparency centred on the relationship between contributing resources and receiving explanations. Several accounts described decisions being communicated after they had been taken, financial statements being difficult to question, or information remaining concentrated among a small group of leaders. The issue was consequently broader than whether churches produced accounts. Members evaluated whether they could understand decisions, ask questions and obtain a meaningful response. This distinction linked financial administration to their perceived standing in the congregation.

> *"In my parish, financial reports are rarely shared with ordinary members. Decisions on how money is used are made by a few leaders, and sometimes even parish council members are not fully informed." — Male Roman Catholic member, IDI.*

> *"We sometimes receive financial statements, but they come after long delays and without detailed explanations. Leaders present figures quickly, and members have little chance to ask questions." — Male Anglican member, IDI.*

Read together, these accounts identify two different experiences: limited access to information and disclosure without sufficient opportunity for explanation. They should not be collapsed into the claim that no reporting

occurred. The Anglican account acknowledges a reporting practice but questions its usefulness, while the Catholic account describes information as restricted. In both, the governance concern involves an incomplete relationship between giving and answerability. Members' suspicion arose through the way decisions were encountered, although the accounts do not verify misuse of funds.

The Lutheran material extends transparency beyond finance. A participant described pastoral transfers announced without consultation as evidence that the congregation's perspective carried little weight. This concern differs from financial reporting but shares a question about the legitimacy of decisions made elsewhere. The data do not establish whether consultation was required under the applicable rules. They show that at least some members expected communication or involvement beyond what they experienced. The comparison therefore concerns expectations of authority as well as the formal location of decision-making.

Leaders' accounts complicate an interpretation based only on deliberate secrecy. A Catholic priest situated disclosure within obligations to diocesan authorities:

> *"As priests, we are accountable to the diocese, and sometimes the instructions we follow restrict how much we can share with parishioners." —Roman Catholic priest, IDI.*

An Anglican elder likewise reported difficulty answering members' financial questions because information was held at higher levels. These accounts reveal a possible tension between accountability upwards through an institutional hierarchy and answerability to congregants. They do not demonstrate that diocesan requirements prohibit transparency across the denominations. Rather, they show how local leaders explained limits on their own room to act. Institutional position mattered: ordinary members experienced an unanswered question, while intermediaries sometimes described insufficient access to the information needed to answer it.

The documentary review summary reported financial discussions within parish meetings, including accounts considered annually in some Catholic settings. This is consistent with the existence of formal reporting alongside dissatisfaction with its timing or accessibility. Annual consideration alone does not establish non-compliance, since the

governing requirements and complete records are not supplied. The analytical point is the possible distance between a formally recognised reporting occasion and congregants' expectations of continuing explanation. The documentary material supports examining that distance; it does not independently substantiate every criticism.

A former Catholic member described a new Pentecostal congregation as more open about budgets and questions. That comparison connected governance directly to her explanation of departure. However, later return narratives associated dissatisfaction in Pentecostal settings with pressure to give and concerns about resource use. The evidence therefore supports a relational interpretation: members judged particular congregations against their expectations and available alternatives. It does not support a general ranking in which one church tradition is invariably more accountable.

Through the *Exit–Voice–Loyalty* lens, restricted access to explanations can reduce confidence in *voice* before a person actually leaves. Institutionally, members and leaders may recognise different audiences for accountability. The theme's contribution is to connect those audiences: legitimacy depends partly on whether obligations to higher authorities translate into practices that ordinary congregants can understand and question. *Exit* becomes one possible response when that connection appears weak, but the evidence also leaves room for continued membership, criticism and attempts at reform.

Participation and inclusivity in governance

Participation concerned recognition as a contributor to church life and influence over decisions affecting it. The accounts distinguished being invited to support activities from being involved in setting priorities. Women and youth were described as active in worship, choirs and fellowships, yet some felt their contributions did not translate into decision-making influence. The resulting frustration was organizational and relational: members questioned whether their institutions recognized their capacities beyond the roles already assigned to them.

> *"We have no chance to question or contribute. That makes us feel like passengers, not participants, in our own church community." — Male Anglican lay member, IDI.*

> *"In the Pentecostal church, I was immediately asked to join committees and even lead prayers. That gave me a sense of recognition." — Female member who moved from Lutheran to Pentecostal affiliation, IDI.*

The Anglican account expresses exclusion from deliberation; the former Lutheran member links participation in a new setting to recognition. Their accounts suggest that the experience of being heard and trusted can become part of spiritual belonging. Committee membership and prayer leadership are nevertheless different forms of involvement. The evidence does not establish that either automatically conveys authority over finance or senior appointments. It shows that participants experienced these opportunities as meaningful when comparing their churches.

Gender and generation made these distinctions more visible. One migrated participant described youth contributions as confined to choirs and women as excluded from parish councils. That statement is evidence of her experience and evaluation, not proof of a universal denominational prohibition. Another account, from a Catholic elder, recognized demands for wider involvement while emphasizing the difficulty of changing inherited roles:

> *"We know young people want more recognition, but tradition does not allow us to alter roles quickly." —Roman Catholic elder, IDI.*

The elder's explanation locates the tension in the pace and legitimacy of change. For members seeking immediate recognition, gradual adjustment could appear unresponsive; for leaders, continuity could be understood as a responsibility. Institutional Theory helps interpret this disagreement through norms about appropriate authority and the assumptions that make established roles appear necessary. The material does not require tradition to be treated as uniformly exclusionary. It raises the question of which practices are protected in its name and whose participation can be accommodated within them.

FGD contributions also connected participation to shared evaluations of congregational life. A youth discussion compared restricted roles in traditional settings with the visibility of women and young people in other services. An adult Anglican discussion linked openness about spending to belonging. These contributions suggest that institutional comparisons circulated through congregational relationships. They cannot establish that all group members subsequently migrated, and an account of a relative's church remains indirect evidence about that congregation.

The documentary summary described Anglican synod material encouraging youth and women's involvement, alongside pastoral

statements acknowledging obstacles to implementation. Read alongside the interviews, these summaries point to a distinction between endorsing inclusion and making influence available in everyday practice. The existence of formal encouragement also complicates the view that exclusion reflects an uncontested institutional position. Implementation may be shaped by local leadership and informal expectations, although the precise relationship requires fuller documentation than the present record provides.

Across denominations, the common issue was whether members could move from supporting activities to contributing to institutional judgement. The contrasts within the material concern how exclusion was explained: decisions reserved to leaders, inherited roles, or limited access to deliberation. In Hirschman's terms, meaningful participation can support *voice* and give members reasons to remain engaged. Its absence can make another congregation attractive, particularly when that congregation recognizes abilities quickly. These are interpretive pathways evident in participants' accounts, rather than measured effects of participation on retention.

Leadership responsiveness and pastoral care

Pastoral responsiveness was evaluated through access, attention and follow-up during difficulties. Several participants respected the authority of traditional clergy while describing practical barriers to contact. Their criticism did not necessarily reject formal pastoral systems. It questioned whether those systems responded when help was needed. For participants facing illness, unemployment or family conflict, the timing and personal character of a response could become evidence that the church recognized them as members worthy of care.

> *"If you want to see him, you wait for weeks. In the Pentecostal church I joined, the pastor gave me his phone number and prayed with me the same day I asked." — Female member who moved from Catholic to Pentecostal affiliation, IDI.*

> *"Our Lutheran pastor is kind, but he follows strict schedules. If you miss his office hours, you wait another week." — Male member who moved from Lutheran to revivalist affiliation, IDI.*

The second account is significant because it separates a favourable judgement of the pastor from dissatisfaction with access. The member did not describe the leader as uncaring in character; he described a schedule that did not meet his expectations. This distinction suggests that

responsiveness can depend on the organization of care as well as an individual leader's intentions. The first account places value on direct contact and an immediate response. Neither establishes a representative difference between Catholic, Lutheran and Pentecostal pastoral provision, but both identify the encounters through which comparisons became meaningful.

An Anglican migrant similarly linked support after losing employment to attachment to a new congregation:

> *"In the Pentecostal church, the pastor and members prayed with me daily and encouraged me. That support kept me going." — Male member who moved from Anglican to Pentecostal affiliation, IDI.*

Here, the relevant relationship included other members as well as the pastor. The account broadens responsiveness beyond leadership availability to the congregation's capacity to accompany someone through difficulty. It also shows why pastoral experience cannot be separated neatly into spiritual and material categories. Prayer and encouragement were valued within a crisis of livelihood, even though the quotation does not establish that the congregation provided employment or financial assistance.

A contrasting Catholic account valued structured guidance and religious continuity:

> *"Our Catholic priest may not visit homes often, but when you meet him in confession or guidance sessions, the advice is grounded and steady. I prefer this approach because it feels serious and less emotional than what I see in revival churches." — Female Roman Catholic member, IDI.*

This counterexample prevents immediacy from becoming the only criterion of good pastoral care. Members differed in what made care trustworthy. Some prioritized quick contact and repeated attention; others valued deliberation, sacramental practice and perceived steadiness. Continued affiliation could therefore express a positive preference for an established pastoral form rather than merely an inability to leave. The analytical task is to explain which aspects of care participants valued and how those preferences interacted with their institutional experiences.

The documentary review summary referred to church guidance encouraging communication and pastoral outreach, including digital

communication. However, the source documents and a systematic implementation record are not provided. These summaries indicate that responsiveness was recognised as an institutional concern, while the interviews show how some members judged its everyday delivery. The conclusions remain grounded primarily in these accounts, since identifiable observational evidence of access, home visits or counselling practices is unavailable here.

Pastoral responsiveness linked *voice* to a practical expectation of being answered. A member could speak about a difficulty yet still experience the institution as unresponsive if no action followed. Institutionally, formal schedules and role arrangements may support orderly care while creating barriers in urgent circumstances. The findings do not show that informality always resolves these problems: accessible leadership may be valued without providing accountable or sustainable care. They show that members used pastoral encounters to judge whether institutional authority was exercised in a manner that recognized their lives.

Divergent beliefs and spiritual expectations

Spiritual expectations remained central to the accounts of mobility. Participants described different preferences concerning the Holy Spirit, healing, prayer, prosperity and sacramental continuity. These preferences could reinforce governance evaluations but were not reducible to them. A person might value participatory worship without seeking decision-making authority, or remain committed to a denomination's teachings despite dissatisfaction with its leaders. Maintaining this distinction preserves the religious meaning of participants' accounts and avoids turning every spiritual preference into an administrative complaint.

> *"When I visited a Pentecostal church, I felt the Spirit moving in me. People cried, spoke in tongues, and testified of God's power." — Male member who moved from Lutheran to Pentecostal affiliation, IDI.*

> *"I felt God was closer there than in my parish, where everything is routine and predictable." — Female member who moved from Catholic to revivalist affiliation, IDI.*

These accounts describe embodied and emotional experiences through which alternative worship became attractive. Their significance lies in the participants' interpretation of divine closeness, not in an objective assessment that one denomination possesses greater spiritual power. They also concern particular encounters: attending a revival service and interpreting it favourably is not identical to establishing a permanent

change of membership. The reported migration descriptors provide context, while the quotations illuminate the experience that participants associated with movement.

Healing narratives similarly connected worship to personal crisis. A former Catholic member described prayer during her child's illness and interpreted subsequent improvement as reinforcing attachment to a Pentecostal church. Another participant contrasted expectations of miracles across Anglican and Pentecostal settings. These are accounts of religious meaning; the study does not evaluate medical causation or the truth of miracle claims. Analytically, they show how perceived responsiveness can include an expectation that a congregation's spiritual practices address suffering in an immediate and personal way.

Prosperity teaching introduced a further relationship between religious giving and anticipated change in everyday circumstances. A former Anglican member explained the appeal of a teaching that connected giving to success:

> *"In my Anglican church, offerings were just routine, without teaching on how they change your life. I felt giving in Pentecostal churches was meaningful." — Male member who moved from Anglican to revivalist affiliation, IDI.*

Other accounts similarly described offerings as connected to hope for opportunities and improvement. The evidence concerns participants' expectations and their interpretation of teaching. It does not demonstrate that giving produced material prosperity or that all Pentecostal congregations taught the same relationship. Nor does it establish that traditional denominations failed to address material life. What mattered in these accounts was the perceived explicitness of the connection between religious action and hoped-for change?

Countervailing accounts questioned that connection. An Anglican elder expressed concern about promises attached to sacrificial giving:

> *"The message that you will get rich by giving sacrifices can mislead poor people. Some leaders take advantage of them." — Female Anglican elder, IDI.*

A Lutheran elder voiced a related preference for teaching regarded as grounded in scripture. These criticisms represent situated theological and moral judgements, rather than verified findings about particular leaders'

intentions. They show that teachings attractive to some participants could reinforce others' *loyalty* to traditional churches. The same religious offer could be interpreted as hopeful, demanding or untrustworthy, depending on expectations and experience.

The governance connection becomes clearest where spiritual claims authorize demands for money or shape who can question a leader. The relevant question is then how authority is justified and made answerable, rather than whether a doctrine is true. Conversely, attachment to sacramental continuity can sustain *loyalty* despite governance complaints. This theme therefore qualifies a governance-only explanation: participants evaluated churches through interacting organisational and spiritual considerations, and the weight given to each differed across their accounts.

Return migration and renewed evaluations of belonging

Two reported interview accounts illustrate return after involvement in Pentecostal settings. They provide a counterpoint to the outward movements described elsewhere, without establishing how common return was in the sample or population. Both connected renewed affiliation to disappointment with expectations formed in an alternative church. Their accounts also indicate that earlier denominational belonging remained available as a reference point against which subsequent experiences were assessed.

> *"I was in a Pentecostal church for three years, but every week it was about giving money for blessings. When nothing changed in my life, I felt cheated. I returned to the Lutheran church where faith is steady and teachings are consistent." — Male member who returned from Pentecostal to Lutheran affiliation, IDI.*

> *"I went back to my Catholic parish where leaders live simply, and I can worship without pressure to give beyond my means." — Female member who returned from Pentecostal to Catholic affiliation, IDI.*

The first narrative links return to unfulfilled expectations and a renewed valuation of consistency. The second situates return within a comparison of financial pressure and perceived leadership conduct. Neither establishes that the original congregation had reformed during the person's absence. Return may reflect a change in the member's evaluation of available alternatives, an enduring attachment to earlier forms of

worship, or both. This distinction matters because restored membership is not equivalent to resolved governance problems.

These accounts also complicate the claim that Pentecostal churches offer uniformly superior accountability. The attributes described positively by outward migrants were not universal experiences. At the same time, returnees' favourable assessments of Catholic or Lutheran settings should not erase the dissatisfaction reported by other members of those traditions. Mobility appears in the material as a continuing relationship between expectation and institutional experience. *Exit* can be followed by renewed *loyalty*, while *loyalty* may retain critical awareness rather than becoming unconditional approval.

Comparison across denominations and participant positions

Table 4 summarizes contrasts present in the reported accounts. It compares themes across denominations without implying equal sample sizes or national denominational characteristics. The evidence is stronger for identifying the forms of concern expressed than for ranking their intensity or prevalence. Differences within a denomination, including between leaders, migrants and continuing members, remain integral to the interpretation.

Table 4:
Comparison of accounts across the three denominations

Issue	Roman Catholic accounts	Lutheran accounts	Anglican accounts
Information and authority	Restricted financial information; priest cited diocesan obligations	Concerns about consultation over pastoral transfers	Delayed explanations; elder lacked information
Participation	Elder described inherited roles and slow change	Migrant valued committee and prayer roles elsewhere	Lay member described exclusion from decisions
Pastoral care	Delayed access contrasted with appreciation of structured guidance	Kindness acknowledged alongside restrictive schedules	Migrant valued personal support after job loss
Spiritual attachment and return	Returnee valued reduced financial pressure	Returnee valued teaching consistency	Elder questioned prosperity promises

***Note**. Comparisons concern the accounts presented, not all members or official denominational policies. The available extracts do not establish the prevalence of differences.*

Three observations follow from this comparison. First, concerns about information and participation appeared across the three traditions, but through different reported encounters. Second, leaders' explanations sometimes emphasized institutional obligations while members emphasized access and recognition. Third, favourable accounts of traditional care and return migration challenge any uniformly negative depiction of established churches. The analytical contribution lies in these relationships between position and interpretation. The available material supports comparison of accounts, while a systematic comparison of congregational performance would require fuller site profiles, consistent documentary evidence and a verified distribution of participants.

DISCUSSION

Accountability and the credibility of voice

The findings suggest that governance enters religious belonging through the credibility of institutional response. Disclosure mattered when members could understand and question decisions, while participation mattered when it conveyed recognition or influence. This refines the application of Hirschman (1970): a formally available channel does not necessarily constitute effective *voice*. Members' expectations concern whether speaking can produce an answer, reconsideration or explanation. Where those expectations weaken, *exit* may become more plausible, although doctrinal attachment and other relationships can sustain membership.

The distinction between formal provision and practical operation is consistent with Tetteh et al.'s (2021) Ghanaian finding that controls can exist while accountability remains compromised in their application. The present material adds a membership dimension: congregants may evaluate reporting through whether it makes leaders answerable to them. This comparison suggests a shared analytical problem across different settings, while differences in research purpose and institutional context prevent a direct equation of the two studies.

Institutional Theory helps explain why these difficulties might persist. Local leaders may work within overlapping obligations to senior authorities and congregants. Procedures can satisfy one audience while

appearing inadequate to another. Meyer and Rowan's (1977) distinction between formal structure and practice illuminates this possibility, while Scott (2014) directs attention to the rules and norms that shape action. The priest's account suggests such tension, but the study does not establish its prevalence or verify the restrictions attributed to diocesan requirements. The explanation remains a proposition grounded in the reported encounter.

Participation beyond visible involvement

The evidence also suggests a distinction between visible involvement in worship and influence over organizational decisions. Being invited to lead prayers may create meaningful recognition without changing who controls a budget. This matters when interpreting favourable descriptions of Pentecostal participation. Tagwirei's (2023) analysis of leadership succession cautions that recognition of emerging leaders does not necessarily entail a transfer of authority. His later work on concentrated megachurch leadership offers a contrasting institutional pattern to the participatory alternatives described by some Dar es Salaam migrants (Tagwirei, 2024).

That contrast is analytically useful. It challenges a generalisation about Pentecostal openness while leaving participants' favourable experiences intact. Congregations can differ, and members can evaluate different dimensions of participation. Within the traditional churches, the presence of institutional language encouraging inclusion likewise suggests that restrictive experiences need not reflect the entire formal position of a denomination. The problem may concern how rules are enacted and whose contribution receives weight. Combining Hirschman with Institutional Theory makes both the desire for *voice* and the conditions limiting it visible.

Pastoral care and spiritual expectations

The pastoral material connects authority to members' experience of being recognized in difficult circumstances. It is compatible with Dilger's (2007) emphasis on the importance of religious community and care in Dar es Salaam. This study's comparative contribution is to show how participants used experiences of access and attention to evaluate affiliation, while others preferred structured guidance and sacramental continuity. These counterexamples qualify an explanation based on the appeal of immediacy alone.

African Pentecostal scholarship makes spiritual experience and material aspiration central to understanding religious practice (Gifford, 2015; Kalu, 2008; Meyer, 2004). The present findings support keeping those concerns in view, but they also show how expectations become questions of answerability when claims about blessings are associated with financial demands. Governance and theology intersect here without becoming identical. A member's concern can involve the content of teaching, the use of authority to advance it, or the institutional response when anticipated outcomes fail to materialize.

Return and the renegotiation of legitimacy

Return migration is the clearest qualification to a one-directional explanation of church switching. The reported returnees evaluated earlier institutions differently after experiences elsewhere. Their accounts suggest that *exit* need not eliminate all prior attachments and that renewed membership need not demonstrate institutional reform. *Loyalty* can be retained, reassessed or restored across a trajectory of movement. This extends the application of Hirschman's framework to religious contexts while remaining grounded in a small number of retrospective accounts.

For Institutional Theory, the contribution concerns the audience and temporal character of legitimacy. The same church can appear restrictive in one comparison and reassuring in another. Suchman's (1995) account of socially constituted legitimacy helps explain this variability without making institutional practices irrelevant. Members evaluate conduct through expectations that can themselves change. The present study therefore proposes that governance influences mobility through situated judgements of credibility, rather than through a stable denominational property that produces the same response among all members.

Theoretical contribution and scope

The two frameworks are complementary at different analytical levels. *Exit–Voice–Loyalty* identifies possible responses to dissatisfaction; Institutional Theory explains how authority, roles and taken-for-granted expectations shape the space for those responses. Their combination directs attention to the credibility of *voice*, the distinction between recognition and decision-making influence, and the possibility of renewed legitimacy after *exit*. These propositions clarify what governance contributes to the explanation of religious mobility beyond a list of organizational shortcomings.

They also identify questions the evidence cannot settle. The study does not show whether transparent reporting reduces departures, whether accessible pastoral care increases retention, or whether particular institutional structures account for differences between denominations. Such claims would require comparative longitudinal evidence. Its contribution is to identify plausible relationships in participants' accounts and specify the conditions that subsequent research should investigate. The conceptual framework consequently functions as an interpretive model for further inquiry, not a validated prediction of religious movement.

CONCLUSION

This study locates institutional governance within the everyday processes through which members evaluate religious belonging in selected traditional churches of Dar es Salaam. Participants connected access to explanations, opportunities for influence and pastoral attention to trust, while spiritual expectations and attachment to established forms of worship shaped how those experiences were judged. The significance of governance lies in these relationships between institutional conduct and members' interpretations.

The study contributes a contextual application of *Exit–Voice–Loyalty* and Institutional Theory in which *voice* depends on credible response and *loyalty* can be renegotiated after departure. Return accounts qualify an assumption of irreversible movement towards Pentecostal alternatives. Practically, the findings support attention to answerability, meaningful participation and accessible care within churches own institutional arrangements. Future longitudinal and comparative work should examine how these relationships develop across congregations and over time, with fuller documentation of both mobility histories and governance practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial reporting and dialogue

Complaints about delayed or unexplained financial information support establishing a predictable reporting schedule accompanied by opportunities for questions. Parish finance committees and relevant diocesan authorities should agree on intelligible summaries of income, expenditure and major decisions, together with a process for answering members' concerns. The intended outcome is more credible answerability. Evaluation should consider whether questions receive

understandable responses, rather than treating the distribution of figures as sufficient evidence of transparency.

Meaningful participation of women youth and lay members
Accounts of restricted participation support reviewing both representation and influence. Parish councils and denominational authorities should examine how women and youth gain access to deliberation, propose agenda items and receive feedback on proposals, within applicable church arrangements. Participation should be assessed through actual opportunities to contribute to decisions as well as membership of committees. Such review could strengthen recognition and ownership without assuming that every worship role must carry identical administrative authority.

Accessible and sustainable pastoral care
Reported difficulties obtaining timely attention support clearer routes for requesting pastoral help and arrangements for follow-up. Clergy and authorized lay pastoral teams could combine scheduled guidance with ways of responding to urgent concerns, using communication channels appropriate to members' circumstances. This recommendation responds to access barriers while retaining the structured care valued by other participants. Its intended outcome is dependable attention; workload, competence and confidentiality should inform how responsibilities are shared.

Accountability across religious traditions
Returnees' accounts support extending scrutiny of financial demands and leadership conduct to Pentecostal and revivalist settings as well as traditional churches. Leaders and oversight bodies should provide clear explanations of contributions and accessible procedures for raising concerns about pressure to give. Ecumenical dialogue could support the exchange of practical accountability arrangements. These proposals concern governance and member welfare; the study does not establish a basis for prescribing the content of religious doctrine.

Research and public engagement
Researchers should follow members' histories over time to distinguish visits, overlapping involvement, sustained *exit* and return. Future comparison should document congregational characteristics, participant allocation, decision-making practices and the implementation of formal rules. Rural settings and a wider range of religious communities would

help assess transferability. Where churches and public institutions collaborate in education, health or community development, governance dialogue can focus on the shared activity and its accountability requirements. The present evidence does not justify broad state intervention in internal religious belief or affiliation.

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