

## Poor Governance System in Nigeria: Can It Be Remedied Using the Yoruba Indigenous Governance Model?

**Adeleke Adegbami**

Department of Public Administration, Olabisi Onabanjo University,  
Nigeria

### **Abstract.**

*The failure of successive governments to implement necessary measures to address numerous challenges facing the country has led to doubts about the capacity of the modern government system to solve Nigeria's basic problems. Therefore, this study examines the factors that contribute to the poor governance system, why successive Nigerian political leaders continue to perpetuate it, and how Yoruba's indigenous governance model can be used to address these issues. The data for this study are qualitative and sourced from secondary materials, including government official documents, official publications from international institutions and organizations, journals, newspapers, and online sources, analyzed through content analysis. The study applies Omoluabi's Integrity Theory to interpret the findings. Omoluabi embodies a well-mannered, intelligent, and dignified personality. Consequently, there is a connection between good governance and Omoluabi's qualities, many of which are absent in successive Nigerian political leaders; they also lack problem-solving skills, leading to lax governance and its negative effects on Nigeria and its people. Yoruba indigenous governance approaches, such as the traditional judicial model of "serious oath-taking," the prompt and appropriate sanctioning of offenders, the Yoruba checks and balances system, and security models, are essential for rebuilding Nigeria's democratic governance foundation. The study concludes that Nigeria will not achieve a well-ordered society or good governance unless the Yoruba indigenous governance model is adopted and politicians and leaders embrace the attributes of Omoluabi.*

**Keywords:** Poor Governance; Indigenous Governance; Omoluabi; Reconstruction; Integrity;

## INTRODUCTION

The laxity in governance shown by successive Nigerian political leaders is evident in their steadily decreasing ability to address issues like hunger, anger, frustration, poverty, unemployment, and insecurity, among other problems faced by their citizens, leaving one to wonder. Additionally, their failure to implement necessary measures to address these challenges causes people to doubt the capacity of the modern government system to solve the basic problems of the people more than ever. The way most political leaders rise to power may have contributed to this. The corrupt and illegal methods of gaining power, combined with the unpreparedness of political candidates seeking office, are damaging the country's governance. In many cases in Nigeria's political history, politicians have reached positions of authority through power rotation, shifting, and arrangement, creating opportunities for incompetent individuals to hold power. Similarly, this group of politicians employs all available tactics, including vote buying, bribing electoral officials, coercion and intimidation of voters, and violence, to secure public office.

This process, according to Adegbami & Makinde deprived voters of making free choices; brought unpopular candidates to power; impelled the emergence of clueless politicians of low or no integrity into public offices; and rubbished the legitimacy of the whole electoral process (Adegbami & Olajide, 2018).

Along these lines, the compromise of any of the electoral processes impedes quality democratic practices and quality governance, and as such, constitutes an obstruction to democratic norms, vis-à-vis creating a lack of trust in the political system and political apathy. This is corroborated by Kasali (2020), who states that compromising the electoral process has continued to create disenchantment amongst the electorate, especially the youth, who always constitute the majority of the voting population.

The laxity of political leaders and other public officials has continued to hinder development. These so-called leaders are not influenced by the waves of progress happening around the world, especially in developed countries, despite their frequent visits to some of these nations. While Nigerian political leaders can imitate some governance systems from around the globe, they cannot replicate their patterns of progress and development due to their lax attitude. Therefore, instead of remaining stuck in a poor governance system characterized by corruption, mismanagement of resources, and poor service delivery, among other issues, there is a need to develop a proper governance and administrative system that prioritizes the advancement, overall welfare, and well-being of citizens.

Whereas, in the pre-colonial period, the Yoruba nation had a well-organized and structured governance and administrative system (Adegbami & Nofiu, 2013). The Yorubas had equally developed and implemented laws that regulated people's conduct as well as the governance and administrative activities of their territory (Osungboye & Adegbami, 2022). Besides this, there was a well-structured adjudicatory system for administering criminal justice and settling conflicts among the people. Although the various laws of the Yoruba nation, before modern state institutions, remained unwritten but were embedded in the people's cultures and traditions (Osungboye & Adegbami, 2022). This shows that precolonial Yoruba institutions were people-centered, and as such, prioritized the people, which increased loyalty and respect for the government (Adewusi, 2018).

Unlike the indigenous governance model of the Yorubas, which was centered on the people, the governance and administrative system of Nigeria appears deficient and has distanced itself from the people, and as such, has not been able to enhance national development. It is not surprising, therefore, that a large number of people in Nigeria are under a precarious economic situation that manifests in high

unemployment levels, poverty, hunger, unemployment, violent conflict, and insecurity, among other problems.

The existing literature on governance in Nigeria shows that scholars such as Sklar (1963), Akinjogbin (1992), and Azoro et al. (2021) have mostly concentrated on the weaknesses of modern state institutions and the failures of political leadership. Furthermore, many studies on indigenous governance, especially Yoruba systems, are primarily historical or anthropological, documenting their structures and cultural importance (Sklar, 1963; Akinjogbin, 1992). However, few scholarly works have extensively examined the relevance of Yoruba indigenous governance principles as alternative or supplementary frameworks for contemporary state governance in Nigeria. Additionally, there is scarce research connecting indigenous governance practices with modern governance challenges, particularly in exploring how traditional governance systems and structures could address institutional shortcomings in Nigeria. This gap highlights the need for a critical exploration of Yoruba indigenous governance, not merely as a cultural artifact but as a potential resource for rethinking governance in Nigeria.

The above explains why this study is necessary, to answer questions such as: What are the factors contributing to Nigeria's poor governance system? Why do Nigerian political leaders uphold it? To what extent can the Yoruba's indigenous governance model be used to address Nigeria's governance issues?

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Integrity Theory of Omoluabi**

The theoretical framework developed and adopted for the study is the "Integrity Theory of Omoluabi". The development and adoption of the theory are premised on the fact that it is deeply rooted in Yoruba traditions and cultures. As such, the theory is suitable and fits into the study's setting,

which is Nigeria, where the Yoruba ethnic group remains one of the major groups. The development of a theory also marks a significant departure from the common practice of applying a foreign theory to locally gathered data (Adegbami, 2022).

The Yoruba people undoubtedly have a unique tradition and a valuable culture that must not be allowed to go into extinction. The Yoruba, for instance, do not take the issue of ethics or morality with levity but see them as the most indispensable part of life that shapes human society for development and corporate existence (Olanipekun, 2017). That explains why the word Omoluabi and what it represents are so meaningful and important to a typical Yoruba man or woman.

Omoluabi is a Yoruba word or coinage that means a well-mannered or well-behaved person. The word Omoluabi can function as either a noun or an adjective. It is a “psycho-cultural underpinning of value and guiding principle in all human struggles and conditions” (Azenabor, 2022). Omoluabi is displayed in a person with good character, as well as a good parental upbringing; as such, a person showing Omoluabi qualities could be compared with Socrates’ “Virtuous man”, Plato’s “just man”, Aristotle’s “Great Soul”, and Nietzsche’s “nobleman” (see Azenabor, 2022). The coinage of Omoluabi encapsulates the Yoruba sense of critical assessment of quality behavior, or the attitude of one personality towards another (Adeniji-Neill, 2011). This explains why the Yoruba will rate some personalities as Omoluabi (well-mannered, well-behaved person or person of quality character), while others are referred to as Omopapanlagi or Omokomo (ill-mannered or irresponsible person). An individual can be termed an Omoluabi irrespective of gender, whether male or female.

In essence, the indigenous African moral system is centered on the quality of one's behavior, character, and character traits. Omoluabi has, therefore, become a commonly accepted model of character among the Yoruba people. The

qualities of Omoluabi are deeply rooted in Iwa, which means character (Oyebade et al., 2018), and as such, character can be good or bad. It is a good character that distinguishes the Omoluabi from Omopapanlagi or Omokomo. While Omoluabi encourages and promotes corporate existence and harmonious relationships, solidarity, peace, tranquility, and interdependence to achieve the common goals of the community, Omopapanlagi or Omokomo will promote disunity, hatred, confusion, and conflict in society. Omopapanlagi or Omokomo will encourage the divide and rule method in society for the benefit of their cliques and to the detriment of the generality.

### **The Features (Attributes) of an Omoluabi**

- Omoluabi is a well-trained personality;
- Omoluabi is an honorable personality and a person of integrity;
- He or she accords respect to the people and respects the rights of others;
- He or she gives back to the community and is dedicated to the service of a just community;
- He or she speaks the truth and is not a deceiver; and
- He or she is intelligent.

### **The Relevance of the Integrity Theory of Omoluabi to Nigeria's Governance System**

The recurrent poor governance observed by the people from successive administrations in Nigeria can be viewed through the lens of the "Integrity Theory of Omoluabi." There is a connection between good governance and good character (integrity). Therefore, understanding the Yoruba etiquette of Omoluabi could serve as a foundation for rebuilding Nigeria's democratic governance system. Nigeria has adopted democracy because of its benefits, such as holding periodic,

credible, free, and fair elections; promoting credible and transparent political competition; and enabling citizens to participate in governance and have their preferences represented. However, most of these democratic values and norms are still promises that have not been fulfilled. This is because these values and norms cannot be realized without the active participation of the people, especially the political leaders.

The governance and administrative system of Nigeria faces numerous challenges. During election campaigns, politicians promise great things to the people. They persuade, pressure, and confuse citizens into believing their antics. Once in office, they distance themselves from those who voted for them. The political leaders' inability to deliver on their campaign promises can only earn them the labels of Omolangidi or Omopapanlagi, as no Omoluabi, a person of good parentage and proper upbringing, can make promises without fulfilling them.

Similarly, Nigeria's political scene is plagued by plunderers, including corrupt politicians, leaders, and public officials. These individuals and their allies continue to loot the country's wealth and resources. They have developed various methods to corner public resources, such as inflated contracts, crude oil theft, and budget padding, among others, which negatively impact social services across the country. This situation may result from the failure to instill social values like those of the Yoruba and other ethnic groups into political leaders from a young age. For example, one of the traits of the Yoruba Omoluabi is being honorable and having integrity. Therefore, it is difficult for people with honor and integrity to fall so low as to engage in corrupt practices, much less steal public funds meant for societal development.

The aspect of morality is absent in most of Nigeria's political leaders; this is why Nigeria's political elite deliberately circumvent the constitution and constitutional rules to suit their whims and caprices. It is not surprising,

therefore, that political leaders take steps to infringe on the rights of the people. And, the violators of the rights of the people, most of the time, are not held accountable or brought to justice, simply because of their powers over the constitution, and as such, violations and abuses of people's rights continue unabated. This practice negates the feature of Omoluabi, who always believes in respecting the rights of others. A typical Omoluabi accords respect to the people and respects the rights of others; he or she has emotional intelligence, sympathizes, and empathizes with others. In other words, an Omoluabi has a good and positive mind towards others.

Another trait of an Omoluabi is that he or she gives back to the community and is committed to serving a fair society. The question is, can this be said of Nigeria's political leaders? Naturally, the answer is no. Most Nigerian political leaders are selfish and self-centered. The recent accusation by a member of the National Assembly that his colleagues inflated the 2024 budget confirms this. Senator Abdul Ningi, representing Bauchi Central Senatorial District, claimed that over N53 billion worth of projects in Nigeria's 2024 Appropriations Act lack specific locations (Majeed, 2024). This is not the first time political officeholders in the National Assembly have been accused of such issues; it's a recurring problem. Furthermore, lawmakers also receive large sums of money for "constituency projects," meant to develop their districts for the benefit of citizens. It is disheartening that most of this money intended for constituency projects ends up in the legislators' pockets, leaving many communities in Nigeria undeveloped. Therefore, instead of giving back to their communities, political leaders are extorting them.

Unlike Omoluabi, who speaks the truth and does not deceive people, politicians and political leaders are liars and deceitful. Most politicians during campaigns raise people's hopes only to dash them once they gain power. They make various promises that often go unfulfilled; it is hard to find an

honest politician. They have deceived Nigerians many times and continue to do so because many Nigerians are gullible; they are easily convinced by the same politicians every election year. The above is supported by Iyiola Oyedepo, a politician and former Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Kwara State, Nigeria. According to him, "Politicians must deceive; they are like applicants; they are applying for jobs, and if they should deceive people to get the job, they will do it" (Oyedepo, cited in Premium Times, 2021, para. 7).

An Omoluabi is said to be intelligent and diligent; however, most Nigerian political leaders do not fit this description. Very few are both intelligent and diligent, and many are not intellectually sound and are lazy as well. Most cannot boast of having worked or engaged in tangible work before entering politics. In other words, it can be inferred that many of Nigeria's politicians and leaders are indolent and suffer from intellectual poverty. They have diminished intellectual capacity; in other words, they lack problem-solving skills. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of Nigeria's longstanding problems remain unsolved, and new issues continue to emerge.

The intellectual ability of political leaders is vital because they remain crucial in understanding the complexities of the country and its many challenges; therefore, intelligent leadership is essential. Countries led by highly educated leaders usually have a strong economy, a stable political system, and an attractive social environment. Conversely, when leaders fail to think carefully, they become vulnerable to harmful practices. Essentially, like an Omoluabi of Yoruba, Nigeria also needs knowledgeable, diligent, and virtuous political leaders to ensure a prosperous future. This is because the growth of a society depends on good character and intellectual ability.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The data for this study are qualitative and sourced from secondary materials, including textbooks, journals, government official documents, official publications from international institutions and organizations, newspapers, and online sources. A documentary analysis was adopted in reviewing government policy documents, constitutional provisions, reports from Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies, and electoral bodies; these were used to evaluate the shortcomings of modern governance. Documents on the Yoruba indigenous governance structures and their historical accounts were analyzed. Archival research was also applied in examining colonial records, historical texts, and anthropological studies that document the governance systems of the Yoruba before and during colonial rule. These documents were sourced from the National Archives and local palace records. The data collected were analyzed through content analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Poor Governance: Inducing Factors in Nigeria**

Poor governance can be seen from the relationship between a country's ruling authority and its citizens, especially in decision-making. The issue of bad governance comes from decisions made by those in power, as it impacts the people they govern. Therefore, poor decisions, including violations of accepted norms and ineffective economic policies, create strained relationships between rulers and the ruled. In other words, bad governance occurs when the government is corrupt, deceptive, and implements unfair policies. The World Bank has developed six Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGIs) to measure governance performance. These indicators include Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Control of Corruption, Voice and

Accountability, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, and the Rule of Law (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2023). Based on this, the factors contributing to poor governance are identified and discussed as follows:

### *Political Instability and Violence*

Political instability refers to a state of uncertainty or volatility in a country's political environment. It describes a situation where a nation faces multiple challenges, including conflicts, governance problems, or changes in leadership (Bhat et al., 2023). This term is used to characterize the unpredictable or unstable condition of a country's public affairs. Essentially, it indicates a scenario where governance activities are not maintained or secured. It is evidenced by the deterioration of political structures, unstable economic conditions, and periodic societal upheavals (Kolstad, 2019, Isife, 2020). Consequently, political instability has been a persistent issue in Nigeria, deeply rooted in its political landscape (Isife, 2020). From this, it can be concluded that Nigeria faces serious challenges related to insecurity, political crises, and economic disasters, perhaps the most severe forms of instability any country could encounter.

Beaumont (2021) succinctly captures the extent of instability of the country, thus: ...large parts of the country are in effect becoming ungovernable, fearing that the conflicts in Africa's most populous state were bleeding over its borders. The mounting insecurity from banditry in the north-west, jihadist groups such as Boko Haram in the north-east, violent conflict between farmers and pastoralists across large swathes of Nigeria's "middle belt", and Igbo secessionists in the south-east calling for an independent Biafra once again. It has also seen the oil multinational Shell announce that it is planning to pull out of the country because of insecurity, theft, and sabotage (Beaumont, 2021).

Concerning violence in Nigeria, Adegbami & Adeoye (2022) state that "the dimension in which violent conflicts are

being perpetrated in Nigeria is unprecedented". The activities of insurgents, armed banditry, and farmers-herders, in one way or another, always result in conflict. In a similar vein, the issues of unemployment, poverty, and inequality between/among diverse groups, as well as ethnic diversity, have on many occasions induced conflict in Nigeria. Beyond this is the challenge of the precarious economic conditions of the country, resulting in hunger, anger, and frustration, which have continued to induce violent conflict. As such, the hungry and angry youth population, who were at the center of all violent conflict in the country, were repeatedly involved in these criminal activities to be able to have food in their stomach (Adegbami & Adeoye, 2022).

### *Weak Control of Corruption*

Corruption and poor governance are often closely linked. Despite repeated promises from successive governments in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the country continues to experience unprecedented levels of corruption. The severity of corruption in Nigerian public offices is better understood through the 2023 report from the global anti-corruption watchdog, Transparency International. In its annual Corruption Perception Index, released in January and covering 180 countries worldwide, it was revealed that many countries, including Nigeria, have failed to make any progress in their fight against corruption since 2017. Essentially, Nigeria was ranked 145 out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2023).

Corruption has, therefore, become a major obstacle to political development and economic stability in Nigeria. Since its independence, corruption has cost the Nigerian economy over \$550 billion. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) of Nigeria recovered about \$750 million in both local and foreign currencies from corruption-related cases in 2021 (World

Justice Project, 2023). Corruption has been one of the main barriers hindering Nigeria's pursuit of progress and the country's goal of lifting many Nigerians out of poverty (UNODC, 2019). The root of corruption in Nigeria can be traced to the weak rule of law observed across the nation. According to the World Justice Project's "Rule of Law Index Ranking," Nigeria ranked 120 out of 140 countries in 2022 regarding the absence of corruption (World Justice Project, 2023). Corruption in the country permeates all levels of government. It ranges from large-scale contract fraud and inflated project costs to petty bribery, embezzlement of public funds, money laundering, and the existence of fake or ghost workers. It is estimated that billions of dollars are stolen each year through corruption within the state apparatus (Campbell & Page, 2018), which has continued to hinder the country's socio-economic progress

### ***Low Voice and Poor Accountability***

Bad governance happens when a country's citizens' voices are ignored by the government. When rulers see the governed as insignificant and refuse to listen, bad governance has already begun (Unacademy, n.d.). The Nigerian government has not been attentive to the people's voices because its officials are self-centered. These officials often struggle to distinguish between private and public organizations; they therefore run the country like their personal businesses (Adegbami & Uche, 2016). As a result, they are unlikely to listen to reason, especially from the citizens.

On the other hand, democratic governments emphasize accountable governance. So, what exactly is accountable governance? It simply means respecting the constitution or ruling in accordance with the country's constitution, where every government activity is subject to accountability. It is a government system that is transparent

and accessible. Accountable governance promotes transparency, equality before the law, fairness in law enforcement, and participatory decision-making (Kuwali, 2022).

Accountable governance is essential for achieving socio-economic development. When the government is accountable to citizens, it fosters peaceful and inclusive societies that support development. Without accountable governance, creating rewarding jobs becomes impossible. In fact, accountable governance creates an enabling environment for economic efficiency and helps establish fair and functioning markets. In other words, it can boost the creation of rewarding jobs, which can make citizens self-reliant and promote peace (Kuwali, 2022). Ethical leadership is the foundation of accountable governance; however, many public offices in Nigeria have become centers of unethical practices, hindering national development. The lack of strong condemnation against these unethical practices has only made the situation worse. As a result, unethical behaviors continue to discourage investment, and investors are relocating their businesses out of the country (Adegbami & Osungboye, 2019).

### *Ineffectiveness in the Governance System*

Government effectiveness reflects the quality of public services and the civil service, as well as how free it is from political pressures. It also involves the quality of policy development, policy implementation, and the government's commitment to ensuring those policies are followed exactly as intended. In other words, government effectiveness indicates the government's fulfillment and dedication to governance tasks in the most cost-effective way, considering resources and time. The government is expected to provide effective and efficient governance for the well-being of the country. Effective governance must be exercised across political, economic, and administrative spheres. These should be

reflected in the overall management of the country's affairs and resources. For a government to be effective, it must establish mechanisms and institutions that allow citizens to freely express their interests, easily exercise their legal rights, and fulfill their obligations (Kefela, 2011).

With regards to government effectiveness evaluation in Nigeria, as compiled by the World Bank and tagged development indicators the country was rated -1.0351 in 2022 (World Bank, 2024, Trading Economics, 2024). The fact that Nigeria has a percentile rank below 50 for the respective governance indicator, is harming its credit profile (Fitch Ratings, 2023), and as such, weakened economic fundamentals, and has led to the situation where the country's persistent inflation reached a high of 25.8% in 17-year as of August 2023, this has left millions of Nigerians in poverty (World Bank, 2024), while the trend is likely to continue with poor governance system in the country

### *Poor Regulatory Quality Index*

The regulatory quality indicator evaluates a country's government ability in policy formulation and implementation, as well as the development of comprehensive policies and regulations that encourage and support private sector growth (Millennium Challenge Corporation, 2022; World Bank, 2024). For a country's economy to function properly, effective regulation must be in place. In other words, well-designed policies and regulations are essential for economic progress. Legislation that creates a conducive business environment is necessary for businesses to succeed and for proper economic growth. Essentially, the quality of regulations significantly influences economic growth (Saravakos et al., 2022).

Essentially, a strong regulatory framework remains a key driver and supporter of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows in Nigeria. This indicates that the Nigerian

government should establish a favorable and enabling environment to attract FDI into the country. Through regulatory quality, the government can promote political and socio-economic stability. However, poor governance and weak institutions in Nigeria continue to hinder FDI inflows and overall economic growth. Therefore, a robust institutional environment is a necessary condition for attracting foreign investment (Ozekhome, 2022).

### *Disregard for the Rule of Law*

The rule of law is a political ideal where all citizens and institutions within a country are held accountable to the same laws, including those who create and enforce the laws (Sempill, 2020). It is a vital component of democracy, and without it, democracy remains incomplete. Therefore, the rule of law serves as a foundation for good governance (Adegbami & Uche, 2016). Additionally, the rule of law assumes that both the state and its citizens are subject to the law, and that the judiciary is a crucial agent in upholding it. It also emphasizes the government's responsibility to respect individuals' rights and to determine all actions and proceedings related to disputes between individuals and the state (Omole, 2021). Despite this, Nigeria struggles to ensure that the law is applied equally to all. Many political leaders, for example, violate the law with impunity, acting as if they are above it. The government itself often disregards court orders and violates fundamental human rights at will (Adegbami & Ganiyu, 2023). Consequently, any nation or state that rules contrary to the constitution or fails to apply the rule of law in its governance and administrative practices is undoubtedly engaging in poor governance.

## **The Yoruba Indigenous Governance Model: Can It Be Used in Solving the Poor Governance System In Nigeria?**

There were well-organized and well-structured government institutions in African societies, especially in the Yoruba nation before the British imperialist contact and conquest of the continent (Adegbami & Nofiu, 2013). During this period, there were traditional Yoruba rulers whose powers were uncodified, with an unwritten constitution rooted in the culture and traditions of the people (Osungboye & Adegbami, 2022). Although the Yorubas did not have a well-documented history, they managed to pass down their detailed history orally from generation to generation. The Yoruba, through their cultures, traditions, and past experiences, drew inspiration for the effective operation of their administrative system and were able to develop and implement policies successfully, thereby providing various social services to their people.

Therefore, the indigenous or traditional administrative system of the Yorubas is the native way of managing the Yoruba nation based on local customs, without external influence. Ellias (1967) describes traditional administration as a political system that derives its power, legitimacy, influence, and authority from the cultures and traditions of specific communities. Various societies in Africa have their own indigenous systems for governing and managing administrative affairs through local institutions. These institutions have helped address issues related to security, justice, and conflict resolution. In the Yoruba nation, these institutions' activities were governed by local laws. Proper enforcement of these laws fostered peace and order, helping maintain a stable system of governance for a long time before the arrival of the British colonizers. Some of these Yoruba indigenous governance models and how they contributed to long-term good governance will be discussed. If these models are integrated into the modern Nigerian governance system,

they could significantly address many of the system's existing flaws and anomalies.

### *The Yoruba Indigenous Judicial Model*

The Yoruba nation and its people had well-structured judicial systems long before colonial intervention in their political affairs. Although these Yoruba legal institutions were informal, they effectively served their intended purpose. Oladipupo suggests that the “Yoruba idea of law tends towards the positive law which does not contradict the tradition left behind by the ancestors” (Oladipupo, 2023, p. 120). Similarly, Adewoye states that Yoruba law and moral etiquette are interconnected and cannot be separated. In other words, Yoruba laws are driven by morality and integrity, operating within a socio-cultural environment where people believe in supernatural powers and a social structure led by respected elders and leaders (Adewoye, 1987).

During this period, the Yorubas highly esteemed and revered their rulers and leaders. The king (Oba) was regarded as the supreme head of government, wielding significant power and influence throughout his domains. The Oba, along with his Chiefs (Ijoyes) and Elders (Agbagba), presides over courts in Yorubaland, adjudicating cases involving individuals or groups within society. These cases were resolved according to laws rooted in the land's history, culture, and traditions. Civil or petty cases could be handled by lower courts headed by the family head (Olori Ebi) and assisted by family elders, while criminal cases were resolved in the court presided over by the King. Difficult cases that could not be settled at the family level were transferred to the Oba's court for proper adjudication.

It is also worth noting that, on some occasions, religious leaders were involved in court proceedings. They were usually contacted whenever cases involved oaths to help uncover the truth of secret matters. Through the involvement of religious groups, many controversial cases were resolved

more easily, which minimized errors in case judgments. After cases were decided, the guilty were typically sanctioned accordingly. Different sanctions were applied depending on the case's severity. For example, civil or petty cases might result in penalties like a verbal apology or other appropriate fines. Criminal cases, however, carried harsher penalties such as banishment from the town, restrictions from holding leadership positions, removal or denial of titles, or even death. These penalties served as a deterrent within the Yoruba judicial system. If revisited and adapted to modern governance, the Yoruba adjudication system could help improve Nigeria's judicial system.

In modern courts, it is often difficult to uncover the truth about cases. The judiciary in Nigeria is not helping the situation. Several instances have occurred where lawyers had to instruct offenders on what to say in court, essentially to manipulate the facts, to win cases. Additionally, a significant number of judicial officials have been found guilty of perverting justice. As a result, Nigeria's legal process is flawed (Adegami & Ganiyu, 2019). The outburst of the former Nigeria Bar Association President, J. B. Daudu, confirms that Nigeria's judicial system is not commendable. He stated, 'there is a growing perception backed up by empirical evidence that justice is purchasable and has been purchased on several occasions in Nigeria' (Daudu, cited in *This Day*, 2021, para. 2). Essentially, the lack of morality and integrity are major issues among most members of Nigeria's judiciary, unlike the Yoruba indigenous judicial system, which did not face such problems.

The judicial committee in Yoruba courts went the extra mile to ensure that justices were not corrupted. They aimed to find the truth in all cases by seeking help from religious groups and supernatural beings, and therefore, they based their judgments on verified facts. Modern Nigerian lawyers often coach their clients on how to lie to deceive courts, while presiding judges are corrupting justice and delivering rulings

in favor of the highest bidders. Sometimes, lawyers and judges conspire together to pervert justice. To address issues in Nigeria's judicial system, ideas could be borrowed from the Yoruba indigenous legal practices.

### ***The Checks and Balances In Yorubaland***

In the Yoruba indigenous political and administrative system, checks and balances were well operated. The King (Oba) in the Yoruba nation, for instance, was regarded as the supreme head of the government and consequently, wielded many powers that he could exercise over different matters of governance in his domains. As such, the King's authority could not be challenged by his subjects, because he was considered to be the *Alase ekeji Orisa*, who is a second in command to the gods; he was also referred to as *Kabieesi*, which means the unquestionable. The accolades and powers wielded by the King in Yorubaland notwithstanding, his powers were considerably checked. In essence, the checks and balances system, deep-rooted in the Yoruba indigenous governance system, restricts the powers of the King to some extent. The King in the Yoruba nation, therefore, cannot rule or single-handedly make decisions without consulting the Council of Chiefs. In other words, it means the King in Yorubaland could not wield absolute powers, as he could not act arbitrarily. In the Oyo kingdom, which was one of the famous states of the Yoruba nation, for instance, the Oyomesi, that is, the seven kingmakers, headed by the Basorun, checked on the excesses of the King (the Alaafin). The Ogboni, that is, the powerful religious sect, headed by Oluwo, also constituted checks on the excesses of the King.

In a situation of arbitrary rule or any form of misrule on the part of the King, the Oyomesi and the Ogboni could pass a vote of no confidence on the King. As such, the King could be asked to abdicate the throne or be forced to vacate the throne. Beyond this, the King could be banished from the kingdom or forced to commit suicide. Forcing the king to

commit suicide in Yorubaland is very simple; it is done by presenting the King an empty calabash, which he will be asked to open. Through these processes, checks on excesses of the King were easily maintained, and this consequently enhanced good governance in Yorubaland.

In modern Nigeria, the blatant disrespect for the rule of law by Nigerian leaders who had sworn to uphold the constitution is disturbing and concerning. Nigeria's leaders are guilty of unjustifiable arrests, unfair trials, executive lawlessness, suppression of free speech, and excessive dominance of minorities (John, 2011). In line with John is Onyekpere, who unequivocally condemns the attitude of the executive toward the rule of law. According to him: Can the Nigeria of today be described as one run under the tent of this constitutional prescription? The continued disobedience to court orders by the executive, harassment of judges, and desecration of the courts, being the judicial temple, especially at the federal level by the President's appointees, question the very basis of civil and democratic governance (Onyekpere, 2019).

The successive governments in Nigeria have continued to engage in policies that harm the people, which can be called misrule. This has led to immense hardship for the citizens. For example, during the recent protest by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC), the Nigerian Labour Union explained that the causes of the protest include the difficult economic situation in the country, characterized by rising national debt, high inflation, unemployment, and poverty. These issues are causing a cost-of-living crisis. According to Lai Brown, the general secretary of the Automobile, Boatyards, Transport, Equipment & Allied Senior Staff Association (AUTOBATE): In the last two months, we have witnessed a series of socio-economic attacks on the workers, including an astronomical hike in petrol, arbitrary increases in tuition fees at public institutions, and the devaluation of

the naira. These events have caused untold hardships to members of AUTOBATE. The labour movement must keep up the pressure until the government meets the legitimate demands of the workers, including a monthly living wage of 200,000 naira (\$264) (Cited in IndustriALL, 2023).

Eight months after the Nigerian Labour Congress protests, little has been done for them or the Nigerian masses. Although the Nigerian Federal Government approved N5 billion for each of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to buy food for the poor (Channels TV, 2023), most governors did not use the money properly. As a result, many Nigerians continue to suffer from hunger due to rising unemployment and poverty caused by poor governance in Nigeria. If Nigerian leaders followed the Yoruba governance model, many would have been removed from office or forced to resign. Some would have been banished or even executed. Knowing that a death sentence awaited them for poor governance or arbitrary actions, few would seek such positions in the first place. Those who did would be cautious and strive to provide good governance for the people.

Therefore, it is not a curse that Nigerians will continue to suffer from poor leadership and an ineffective governance system due to weak institutions responsible for constitutional and administrative laws in Nigeria. It was to this extent that Adegami and Ganiyu argue that: Apart from the faulty preparation of the constitution and some amendments made to it by the National Assembly, the elite, who appear to be above the law, do not allow the constitution to work. These elites are mainly among the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive; they are all guilty of stemming and whittling down the power of the constitution, and the law of administration by their flagrant disregard for the rule of law and the constitution in their various capacities (Adegami & Ganiyu, 2023).

Therefore, one of the best ways to significantly improve Nigeria's poor governance system is to study and adopt the

checks and balances model of the Yoruba indigenous governance and administrative system. Public officials in Nigeria must be made to adhere to constitutional law and administrative law; anything less than that will be counterproductive and will continue to hinder good governance in the country.

### *The Security Model of Yorubas*

Securing or defending the territory occupied by the Yorubas before the British imperialist penetration into their territories was never a big deal. This is because the Yoruba nations had a committed, formidable, and well-organized army that was tasked with protecting their territories. Beyond its duty to defend the Yoruba land, the army also fought wars to expand Yorubaland. Before the British changed its governance system, the Yoruba had a standing army of specialist cavalry soldiers. In the Oyo kingdom, for example, the army, called the Eso, consisted of young and strong war chiefs chosen by the Oyo Mesi with the approval of the King, the Alaafin of Oyo (Smith, 1989). The Eso were selected purely for their military skills and tactics, regardless of their family background, although certain families were known for their prowess in war.

The head of the army, or the Chief of Army Staff in the Oyo Kingdom, was known and addressed as the Aare-Ona-Kakanfo, meaning the war general. Aare-Ona-Kakanfo was recognized for his bravery and for having magical powers. He was expected to defend the Oyo kingdom against aggressors and occasionally provoke wars for the expansion of the kingdom. He was supposed to win all the wars he undertook, with the penalty that if he failed to win any, he would be banished from the kingdom or executed. Due to these strict penalties, successive Aare-Ona-Kakanfo were able to protect the kingdom for a very long period.

Contrary to expectations, Nigeria faces serious security challenges described by Adegami (2013) as “a hydra-headed monster” that Nigerian security agents seem unable to handle. The multiple forms of insecurity in Nigeria include indiscriminate suicide bombings, kidnapping and hostage-taking, banditry, and the destruction of lives and property of individuals and the government. In March 2024, over 280 pupils were abducted by gunmen from LEA Primary School, Kuriga, Kaduna State, Nigeria, while they gathered on the assembly ground in the morning (BBC News, 2024; The Punch, 2024). This incident occurred just about 24 hours after insurgents abducted around 200 internally displaced women in Borno State (The Punch, 2024), and several weeks into the kidnapping, no significant steps have been taken to free the victims. Nothing has changed regarding the kidnapped victims because the government shows little concern for its citizens, contrary to the provisions of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended). Section 14(2)(b) of the constitution clearly states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Nigeria is a country where the constitution often seems to be disregarded, especially by elites in public office across the nation; thus, the government’s indifferent attitude toward the pervasive security crisis remains unabated.

If the scenario described above were part of the Yoruba indigenous governance era, many of the so-called security and service chiefs would have been either banished from the country or executed for exposing the nation to security threats. Many security and service chiefs in Nigeria have failed to do their duty because no penalties are imposed on them, and the executive branch cannot question or reprimand them because they are culpable. Essentially, if Nigeria operated under the Yoruba indigenous security system, the recurring security issues would have been resolved long ago.

### *Other Features of the Yoruba Governance Model*

Some other specific areas where the Yoruba indigenous governance and administrative system is relevant, especially in improving public accountability, include the following: Sanctioning of wrongdoers by their immediate community. These sanctions could be in the form of denial to marry within the community, complete banishment from the community, denial of chieftaincy titles, and denial of other privileges.

### **CONCLUSION**

The laxity in governance shown by successive Nigerian political leaders, reflected in their steadily declining ability to address issues like hunger, anger, frustrations, poverty, unemployment, and insecurity among citizens, raises serious concerns. The leaders' failure to implement effective measures to eliminate these problems causes people to doubt more than ever the capacity of the modern government system to solve basic issues. The manner of ascension to political power contributed to the poor performance of political leaders and poor governance. Many politicians have reached leadership positions through power rotation, shifting, and arrangement, thus creating opportunities for incompetent individuals to assume power. The negligence of political leaders and public officials continues to hinder the country's development, as these so-called leaders are not influenced by the global waves of progress.

The poor governance system in Nigeria, therefore, results from the declining intellectual capacity of Nigerian political leaders, many of whom lack problem-solving skills. Beyond this, they also lack the qualities or attributes typical of Omoluabi. As such, the recurring poor governance in the country is because political leaders who violate people's rights to "security, welfare," and a good quality of life, among other things, have not been held accountable or brought to justice.

The Yoruba indigenous governance model, to a greater extent, could help address issues in Nigeria's governance system. For example, the Yoruba judicial model of "serious oath-taking," along with appropriate and timely sanctions for offenders, can be beneficial. The Yoruba model of checks and balances, which could lead to banishment or even the death penalty for guilty leaders, and the security slackness that may involve banishing a security chief if they fail to protect the Yoruba nation, are some elements of Yoruba indigenous governance that could boost good governance in Nigeria if adopted and properly implemented.

Building on this, Nigeria needs to be restructured and reorganized into a nation where immorality and impunity are strongly condemned and opposed. It should be a country where mediocrity and laziness are rejected, and where the values and qualities of Omoluabi are deeply rooted. The study concludes that until the Yoruba indigenous governance model is adopted and politicians and leaders embrace the qualities of Omoluabi, Nigeria is unlikely to experience a well-ordered society and effective governance

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