

THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL OATHS IN PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

BY

Dr. Ibrahim O. Salawu¹, Dr. Moshood Olayinka Salahu², Adisa, Olufemi Peniel^{3*}

^{1,2} Department of Politics And Governance, Kwara State University, P.M.B. 1530 Malet, Ilorin Nigeria

³ Department of Political Science, School of Secondary Education, Arts, and Social Science Programmes, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education Oyo, P.M.B. 1010 Oyo State, Nigeria



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Corresponding author:

Adisa, Olufemi Peniel

Abstract

This paper examines the role of traditional oaths in promoting good governance in Nigeria. It discusses the concept of traditional oaths within the context of the Nigerian political system and examines the implications of these oaths for the country's good governance. The paper draws on literature from both the social sciences and legal studies to provide an overview of the traditional oaths and their role in achieving good governance in Nigeria. Data collected were analysed using percentages and SPSS. Results show that traditional oaths can serve as a useful tool for good governance in Nigeria and can serve to check corruption, ensure accountability, and ensure respect for the rule of law. However, the effectiveness of traditional oaths depends on the strength of their implementation, as well as the implementation of accompanying legal reforms. The paper concludes with recommendations for the Nigerian government to strengthen the implementation of traditional oaths and legal reforms to effectively promote good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Corruption, Oath, Good governance, Democracy, Democratic consolidation

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Despite the formation, establishment, and operations of different anti-graft agencies by different administration in Nigeria, such as the enactment of the Public Officers (Investigation of Assets) Decree No.5 of 1966, the promulgation of the Corrupt Practices Decree No. 38 of 1975 and the existence of Corrupt Practices Bureau, War Against Indiscipline (WAI) campaign of 1984, Code of Conduct for public officers, enactment of Code of Conduct Decree and establishment of Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal in 1989 and the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WA &C) in 199 War Against Indiscipline (WAI) campaign of 1984, Code of Conduct for public officers, enactment of Code of Conduct Decree and establishment of Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal in 1989 and the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) in 1994, National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Yet it is crystal clear and an indisputable fact that all of them are toothless bulldog that can only bark but not bite because corruption is flourishing in every facet of Nigeria administrative policies be it economy, social, politics, education,

health, agriculture, and even religion.

The Objectives the Study

The objectives of this research include:

1. To investigate the effect that oath taken will have on the good governance in Nigeria.
2. To examine the extent at which traditional oaths place great moral and mystical obligations upon the parties concerned and any breach of the covenant is feared to bring about misfortunes.
3. To establish that traditional oath-taking is no respecter of persons because every person is ontologically equal in the eyes of the gods.

Hypothesis to be tested

1. There is no significant relationship between oath-taking and good governance in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between traditional oaths taken on moral and mystical obligations upon the

parties concerned and any breach of the covenant is feared to bring about misfortunes Nigeria.

3. There is significant relationship between the traditional oath-taking and the class/status of people involved.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research is the quantitative technique. The study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. This is because the researchers used both questionnaire to elicit responses from people and sourced also from newspapers, relevant books, Journals, publications, and the internet materials.

Conceptual clarification

The Concept of Oath-Taking

The Webster College Dictionary (2010) defines oath as a solemn appeal to a deity or to witness one's determination to speak the truth or keep a promise. Similarly, the Collins English Dictionary (2003) defines oath as a solemn pronouncement to affirm the truth of a statement or to pledge a person to some course of action after involving a sacred being or object as witness. From the ethical perspective, oath is seen as a solemn affirmation of the truth or a solemn declaration of an intention of do this or that to say what one knows (the Catholic Encyclopedia 1999). Therefore, to be untrue under oath is to commit a grave sin, to swear to do something without the intention of doing it or without in fact doing it (The Dictionary of Christian Ethics 1997).

According to Ogunleye (2013), an oath is word of promise recited in a conventional formula when taking up an official position. It is a process whereby solemn allegiance is being taken or entered into by individual or group of individuals. This oath-taking or oath of office is sacred and requires steadfastness, truthfulness, and loyalty without which the individual or group of individuals' lives are at a risk. More so, the paraphernalia of office must be respected by the chosen or appointed leader. In the traditional setting, this oath-taking is very sacred and religiously upheld with corresponding effect if not religiously and truthfully upheld.

Oaths have religious undertone that is why at the end there is always a call to a deity to bear witness to the promises made by the oath-takers. For Ogunleye (2013) Oath taking and its administration are very sacred human phenomenon. They are sacred because they have the underlining of spirituality brought to the fore of material or physical realm. First is the pledge of self, the individual to uphold the constitution of the country, serve with all resolve, and then the affirmation and conviction in the utmost help of God of the understanding of that individual being sworn in or on whom oath of office is being administered.

Types Oath-Taking

Since oaths binds people together and creates an atmosphere for peaceful co-existence as a result there are different types of oath; this study shall examine just only two with emphasis on divine oath and African Traditional oath since it is in consonance with what the study is advocating.

Divine Oath

These kind of oath are seen as statement or assertion made under

penalty of divine retribution for intentional falsity. It is a solemn appeal to a god for something holy or revered as witness or sanction of the truth of a statement (The Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, 1976).

The essence of divine oath is an invocation of divine agency to a guarantor of the oathstakers honesty and integrity in the matter under question.

Among the indigenous people of Nigeria oath taking is usually called for in a protracted case where the nature of the matter makes it difficult to discern who is right or wrong in a case. This is because oath-taking is a direct submission to the supernatural for settlement of dispute because the verdict of the deities is final. Sometimes this appeal to the super natural is made when human effort fails or when no confidence is reposed on the human panel. This is practiced in very serious cases; in the event of failure in keeping to the tenets of the oath under the divine oath, time is normally given within which the offender is expected to be revealed by the deity either through sickness or death (Colin Freeman 2018). Accordingly, to reduce the rate of bribery and corruption Kenyatta (1965) stated that oath is the most important factor among the Gikuyu tribe controlling the society. Oath served two purposes namely; to prevent the people from giving false evidence and to help bring the offenders to justice through guilty conscience and confession thus, eliminating bribery and corruption and ensured impartial judgment. Divine oaths are associated with taboos which must be adhered to in order to avert the consequences inherent in the oath (Lawrence-Hart, 2009).

African Traditional Oath

In the African traditional setting, oaths are to seal agreement. Oaths once taken must be kept as the consequences are imminent; these oaths most often are used to settle conflict as well as instrument for peaceful co-existence in the society (Tasie, 2001). Oath-taking is so potent for peaceful co-existence in the traditional setting because violation of its tenets always results to severe consequence; more so, the gods and the ancestors are called as witnesses to offenders. Reason being that the gods are the security agencies of the community whose duty is to punish offenders (Owete, 2010). Consequently, when people secretly violate the oath taken in the traditional setting they are punished and also made to appease the deities where necessary; thus the fear of being punished puts a consciousness of doing the right thing on an individual thereby leading to a peaceful communal living. Furthermore, oath is taken to strengthen good relationship between individuals and communities (Mbiti, 1969)

The Concept of Good Governance

The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) report on governance maintains that good governance is about the processes for making and implementing decisions. It's not about making 'correct' decisions but about the best possible process for making those decisions. It further states that governance can be seen as the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and

groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. The core characteristics as identified by UNDP are as follows: rule of law, participation, transparency, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision (web.worldbank.org../(2009).

Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption is a global phenomenon but it is endemic in Nigeria. Corruption is part of the political culture in Nigeria and it is also called the settlement culture/settle me syndrome. In Nigeria, embezzlement is seen as a ‘strategic essence of government. Hence, corruption is a way of life in Nigeria. Political and military leaders in Nigeria have been said to have stolen or misappropriated \$ 412 billion since independence.

There is no precise definition of what amounts to corruption that will be acceptable to all disciplines, yet a few definitions of corruption will be examined. Simply, corruption is ‘operationally defined as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain’(Adisa 2022). The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000 states that corruption includes ‘bribery, fraud, and other related offences.

Osoba (2012) defines corruption as ‘a form of anti-social behaviour by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on its perpetrators, is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prevailing moral ethos of the land and is likely to subvert or diminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual wellbeing of all members of society in a just and equitable manner.’ Thus, according to Aluko, corruption as a ‘social problem deserves societal attention and collective solution’.

There are two opposing views on corruption; negative and positive. The negative view which is the most widely accepted, posits that corruption has negative effects on productivity, growth, and the socio-economic wellbeing of any organization or country. Other negative manifestations of corruption include the use of less efficient providers and reduced taxes on income amongst others. Also, nepotism, favoritism, bribery, graft, and other unfair methods are some of the negative consequences or manifestations of corruption in the country. Hence, Matthew Page contends that Nigeria is home to more than 500 kinds of graft or corruption.

According Lawrence-Hart, (2009) The positive view on corruption contends that it does not affect a country’s development negatively because the existence of corruption might help by oiling the wheels of bureaucracy. That is, ineffective regulatory or legal systems could be by-passed easily. Thus, corruption enhances efficiency in the public sector by reducing time and paperwork. The positive view of corruption is opposed by the current worldwide efforts to stamp out bribery and corruption, especially in developing countries. The United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and aid donors have put the anti-corruption and good governance measures on the front burner of their programmes.

Owete, (2010). Nigeria has been consistently ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Also, corruption has been

endemic in the country during the colonial and post-colonial eras. For example, in 1970 the then Military Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon in a speech given at the 1970 convocation ceremony of the Ahmadu Bello University stated that ‘Nigeria has never had it so bad’ in terms of corruption in the country. In May 2016, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron in an anti-corruption summit in London (in a conversation with the Queen of the United Kingdom) stated thus: ‘We’ve got some leaders of some fantastically corrupt countries coming to Britain...Nigeria and Afghanistan, possibly the two most corrupt countries in the world. However, the statement by the former UK Prime Minister ignores the fact that some multinational corporations (MNCs) and foreign countries are complicit in corrupt acts in Nigeria. For example, many MNCs operating in Africa have been involved in bribery and inducement of government officials to actualise or enable them to have access to natural resource agreements or contracts amongst others. Arguably, till date, the scourge of corruption is yet to abate in Nigeria.

DATA PRESENTATION

Table 1

S/N	ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%
1.	Do you think using traditional oath taken can reduce the scourge of corruption in Nigeria?	116	96.67	04	3.33
2.	Traditional oath taken can make political and every public office holder accountable.	112	92.33	08	6.67
3.	Masses will feel more positive impact of government if traditional oath taken is introduce to Nigerian political system.	111	92.5	09	7.5
4.	Traditional oath taken will reduce or curb totally the idea of cross carpeting once you know that irrespective of the party by which you are elected you will be sworn in the same way.	100	83.33	20	16.67
5.	traditional oath taken will promote fairness, equity, and justice	117	97.5	03	2.5
6.	Embezzlement, Misappropriation of public funds, and favoritisms will become things of the past if traditional oath taken is employed.	115	95.83	05	4.17
7.	Public office holders are likely	99	82.5	21	17.5

	to morally upright in their dealings with the masses if traditional oath taken is in use.				
8.	The fear of immediate misfortune attached with traditional oath will make Political and public officeholders avoid any breach of the covenant most especially campaign promises.	118	98.33	02	1.67
9.	The use of traditional oath taken will be forcing the Political and public officeholders to be fulfilling their mandate.	113	94.33	07	5.83
10.	Traditional oath taken will make the Political and public office holders to respect the fundamental rights of the masses because of mystical punishment from the ancestors attached to maltreatment of subjects.	101	84.17	19	15.83
11.	Traditional oath taken will give more respect to constituted authority	107	89.17	13	10.83
12.	Citizens are likely to have more trust in Political and public office holders whoever is.	113	94.17	07	5.83
13.	The use of traditional oath taken can enhance democratic consolidation in Nigeria since gods are not respecter of anybody.	118	98.33	02	1.67
14.	Both inter and intra-part conflicts can be eradicated with the use of traditional oath taken	92	79.67	28	23.33
15.	Politics of bitterness may be things of the past if traditional oath taken is employed.	106	88.33	14	11.67
16	Campaign of calumny can be removed from political scene of Nigeria with the use of traditional oath taken because you will be punished immediately you lied against another.	102	85	18	15

17	Traditional oath taken can bring an end to opponent/political assassination in the country.	119	99.17	01	0.83
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Compiled by Author, Fieldwork 2023

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 2

On hypothesis 1: Which says; There is no significant relationship between traditional oath-taking and good governance in Nigeria.

S/N	ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%
1.	Do you think using traditional oath taken can reduce the scourge of corruption in Nigeria?	116	96.67	04	3.33
2.	Traditional oath taken can make political and every public office holder accountable.	112	92.33	08	6.67
3.	Masses will feel more positive impact of government if traditional oath taken is introduce to Nigerian political system.	111	92.5	09	7.5
4.	Traditional oath taken will reduce or curb totally the idea of cross carpeting once you know that irrespective of the party by which you are elected you will be sworn in the same way.	100	83.33	20	16.67
5.	traditional oath taken will promote fairness, equity, and justice	117	97.5	03	2.5
6.	Embezzlement, Misappropriation of public funds, and favoritisms will become things of the past if traditional oath taken is employed.	115	95.83	05	4.17

Compiled by Author, Fieldwork 2023
Table 3: PAIRED SAMPLE STATISTICS

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair YES	111.8333	6	6.24233	2.54842	20.339	5	.000
1 NO	8.1667	6	6.24233	2.54842			

From the above analysis, it is clear that t-calculated is greater than t-table. The interpretation of which is that the hypothetical statement will be rejected. Which is to be restated that *there is significant relationship between traditional oath-taking and good governance in Nigeria*. Meaning that if traditional oath-taking could be applied and employed for political and public office holders it will definitely bring good governance in Nigeria.

Table 4 On hypothesis 2: Which says; There is significant relationship between traditional oaths taken on moral and mystical obligations upon the parties concerned and any breach of the covenant is feared to bring about misfortunes.

S/N	ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%
7.	Public office holders are likely to morally upright in their dealings with the masses if traditional oath taken is in use.	99	82.5	21	17.5
8.	The fear of immediate misfortune attached with traditional oath will make Political and public officeholders avoid any breach of the covenant most especially campaign promises.	118	98.33	02	1.67
9.	The use of traditional oath taken will be forcing the Political and public office holders to be fulfilling their mandate.	113	94.33	07	5.83
10.	Traditional oath taken will make the Political and public office holders to respect the fundamental rights of the masses because of mystical punishment from the ancestors attached to maltreatment of subjects.	101	84.17	19	15.83
11.	Traditional oath taken will give more respect to constituted authority	107	89.17	13	10.83
12.	Citizens are likely to have more trust in Political and public office holders who ever is.	113	94.17	07	5.83

Compiled by Author, Fieldwork 2023
Table 5: PAIRED SAMPLE STATISTICS

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair YES	108.5000	6	7.47663	3.05232	15.890	5	.000
1 NO	11.5000	6	7.47663	3.05232			

From the above analysis, it is clear that t-calculated is greater than t-table. The interpretation of which is that the hypothetical statement will be rejected. Which is to be restated that *there is no significant relationship between traditional oaths taken on moral and mystical obligations upon the parties concerned and any breach of the covenant is feared to bring about misfortunes*. Meaning that if traditional oath-taking could be used, the fear of possible misfortunes upon the parties concerned and any breach of the covenant will make them to be morally upright and fulfill their obligations which will definitely bring about good governance in Nigeria.

Table 6

3. There is significant relationship between the traditional oath-taking and the class/status of people involved.

S/N	ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%
13.	The use of traditional oath taken can enhance democratic consolidation in Nigeria since gods are not respecter of anybody.	118	98.33	02	1.67

14.	Both inter and intra part conflicts can be eradicated with the use of traditional oath taken	92	79.67	28	23.33
15.	Politics of bitterness may be things of the past if traditional oath taken is employed.	106	88.33	14	11.67
16	Campaign of calumny can be removed from political scene of Nigeria with the use of traditional oath taken because you will be punished immediately you lied against another.	102	85	18	15
17	Traditional oath taken can bring an end to opponent/political assassination in the country.	119	99.17	01	0.83

Compiled by Author, Fieldwork 2023

Table 7: PAIRED SAMPLE STATISTICS

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair YES	107.4000	5	11.34901	5.07543			
1 NO	12.6000	5	11.34901	5.07543	9.339	5	.001

From the above analysis, it is clear that t-calculated is greater than t-table. The interpretation of which is that the hypothetical statement will be rejected. Which is to be restated that “there is no significant relationship between the traditional oath-taking and the class/status of people involved”. Is meaning that if traditional oath-taking could be in operation it no respecter of anybody irrespective of social, political, economic, etc. status of such people which will force them to do the needful in their offices of thrust for the masses because of the fear of the unknown to their life, the end result of which will be better life for the masses which could be seen as a product of good governance in Nigeria.

Conclusion

At this juncture, it becomes imperative to make it clear due to the research findings and its outcome by concluding that the use of traditional oath as a means of taking oath of office by all political and public office holders will in no measure promote good governance in Nigeria. This is because, fear of the unknown misfortunes will definitely compel them to be faithful, transparent, law-abiding, accountable, just, etc. the result of which will bring equality, equity, fairness, etc. in the handling, controlling, and distribution of country’s commonwealth (resources) in the interest and benefit of all and sundry as against the spirit of egocentricism because of insatiable appetite which even the law of the land (even 1999 Constitution as amended) is unable to checkmate due to many loopholes and some other inconsistency therein.

Recommendations

From the results of the research findings, it can be seen clearly that it is an indisputable fact traditional oath taken will promote good governance in Nigeria. Therefore in order not to promote good governance alone in Nigeria but so as to be able to sustain it as a means of consolidating it, the following recommendations were made;

- Constitutional amendment is required to include or capture the use of traditional oath taken before the assumption of office.
- There is need to strengthen the system to make corruption impossible rather than running after corrupt officers and officials.
- Financial and other monetary benefits associated with public offices should be drastically reduced so as to make such offices less attractive to people which will result into reduction in campaign calumny, politics of bitterness, etc. which will produce good governance.
- Though there is freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in the Nigerian constitution which gives everybody right of practicing any religion of their choice and interest, yet there must a means instilling fear of immediate and unknown misfortune for anyone who prefer not to use traditional oath taken before the assumption of office, most especially Christians and Muslims, because, these two religions are the most dominating ones in the political scene of Nigeria and of which we are experiencing lack of good governance which people thought the use of traditional oath taken will reduce to the barest minimum if cannot totally eradicate it.

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