

The Ethical and Theological Dimensions of *Emi L'okan* Politics and Its Implication for The Political Future of Nigeria

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Abstract: *Emi l'okan* (literally "it is my turn") ideology, asserting power as an entitlement rather than democratic merit, conflicts with biblical teachings on leadership, justice, and morality. This study explores the ethical and theological dimensions of *Emi l'okan*, examining its impact on Nigeria's political landscape. Through textual and qualitative analysis, it juxtaposes *Emi l'okan* principles with biblical precepts of humility, servant leadership, and ethical governance. The research offers insights for religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society to address entitlement-driven politics, promote ethical leadership, and foster democratic values, ultimately contributing to a more equitable political future for Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethical, *Emi l'okan*, Theological, Political Future, Politics of Entitlement.

INTRODUCTION

The *Emi l'okan* political ideology, translating to "it is my turn," signifies a sense of entitlement to political power based on perceived personal or group rights rather than merit or democratic processes. This ideology, deeply entrenched in Nigerian politics, has significant implications for governance, accountability, and social justice. Originating from the Yoruba language, *Emi l'okan* encapsulates the notion that individuals or groups believe they are entitled to political leadership based on factors such as ethnic affiliation, regional dominance, historical precedence or political negotiations. It has emerged as a defining ideology shaping the nation's governance landscape. This entitlement-driven approach to governance presents a fundamental challenge in reconciling with the rich tapestry of biblical teachings that underpin moral and ethical conduct, particularly in matters of leadership, justice, and accountability.

The genesis of *Emi l'okan* ideology can be traced to Nigeria's intricate socio-political history, where power transitions often hinge more on predetermined rotations among ethnic and regional factions rather than democratic principles of meritocracy and popular mandate. This system, entrenched in the fabric of Nigerian politics, has given rise to a prevailing mindset that views political office as a birthright rather than a privilege earned through service and stewardship. Consequently, political leaders often perceive their ascension to power as an entitlement, leading to governance characterized by patronage, nepotism, and a disregard for the common good. The central problem posed by *Emi l'okan* ideology lies in its inherent conflict with biblical teachings on leadership, justice, and moral accountability. The disparity between these two paradigms raises profound questions about the ethical legitimacy of political authority and the moral responsibilities of those in power.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this research is to explore the ethical and theological dimensions of *Emi l'okan* political ideology and its implications for Nigeria's political future. Through a multidisciplinary inquiry that juxtaposes *Emi l'okan* principles with biblical narratives and teachings; this study seeks to unravel the intricate interplay between entitlement-based governance and religious ethics. By examining how biblical precepts of humility, servant leadership, and ethical governance intersect with the tenets of *Emi l'okan* politics, this research endeavours to shed light on the ethical implications of entitlement-driven governance and its impact on Nigeria's political landscape.

The objectives of this research are manifold. First, it seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the origins, characteristics, and manifestations of *Emi l'okan* ideology within the Nigerian political context. Second, it aims to analyze key biblical teachings on leadership, justice, and moral accountability, elucidating their relevance to contemporary governance challenges in Nigeria. Third, it aims to assess the compatibility between *Emi l'okan* principles and biblical ethics, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence. Finally, by offering actionable insights for religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society actors, this study endeavours to contribute to a more informed discourse on the relationship between religion, politics, and governance, with the overarching goal of fostering a more just and equitable political future for Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical and Cultural Foundations of Entitlement-Based Politics in Nigeria

Entitlement-based politics in Nigeria, as epitomized by the *Emi l'okan* ideology, stems from deep-seated historical and cultural norms. These norms prioritize familial ties and lineage over merit, heavily influencing political practices. In pre-colonial Nigeria, power was derived from kinship, lineage, and heritage, with traditional leadership structures privileging those born into political families. This established a legacy of entitlement that challenges democratic principles. As Okafor

(2017) observes, "traditional leadership structures often privilege those born into political families, fostering a sense of entitlement that undermines democratic ideals" (p. 45).

Among the Yoruba, for instance, political leadership historically emphasizes ancestry. The title of *Oba* (king) is often reserved for members of specific royal families, reinforcing the notion that political authority is tied to heritage (Omotoso, 2019). Such lineage-based frameworks create expectations that political leaders uphold the customs of their lineage, often sidelining meritocracy. This traditional entitlement is further complicated by power-sharing arrangements designed to alleviate ethnic tensions post-independence, which prioritize ethnic representation over merit (Suberu, 2018). Although intended to foster inclusivity, these arrangements sometimes reinforce ethnic claims to office rather than a public mandate, reflecting the *Emi l'okan* sentiment, which implies that power should rotate based on ethnic and regional considerations. As Udegbe (2020) suggests, "this rotation of power, though intended to promote inclusivity, often results in the prioritization of political loyalty and entitlement over effective governance" (p. 112).

The intertwining of lineage with political leadership means that many leaders derive legitimacy from their heritage, claiming ancestral qualifications for leadership roles. During elections, candidates frequently invoke their ethnic and cultural roots to gather support, underscoring a belief in political power as an inherited right rather than an earned responsibility (Afolabi, 2019). This heritage-based entitlement encourages practices like nepotism and cronyism, with leaders often prioritizing familial loyalty over competency. According to Adebayo (2020), "this cultural expectation can lead to nepotism and cronyism, as leaders prioritize familial and ethnic loyalty over competency" (p. 67).

Thus, the *Emi l'okan* ideology reveals how historical and cultural foundations of entitlement-based politics perpetuate patronage and hinder democratic governance in Nigeria. These cultural underpinnings pose challenges to establishing a system grounded in accountability and merit, underscoring the need to address entitlement-driven governance in Nigeria.

The Role of Religion in Shaping Political Ideologies in Nigeria

Religion significantly shapes political ideologies in Nigeria, influencing both individual political attitudes and broader governance practices. With a diverse religious landscape of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous beliefs, religious teachings often provide the moral frameworks guiding political ideologies. Both Christianity and Islam emphasize principles of ethical leadership, justice, and community welfare that align with democratic ideals. For example, the Islamic concept of *Ummah* (community) underscores collective responsibility and social justice, encouraging Muslim political leaders to advocate for social welfare policies that uplift marginalized groups (Mogaji, 2018). Similarly, Christian teachings, such as Jesus's call for servant leadership in Matthew 20:26-28, emphasize service to others, promoting policies that support social justice and accountability

(Nwankwo, 2019). However, interpretations of these teachings vary, creating a complex interplay between religious doctrines and political ideologies.

Religious institutions in Nigeria also wield significant influence over political attitudes and expectations. As platforms for political mobilization, they shape public opinion and guide congregants' political behavior. Ojo (2017) notes that religious leaders often act as moral arbiters, using their authority to advocate for political agendas aligned with their doctrinal beliefs. This influence is particularly strong during elections, when institutions mobilize followers to participate in political processes. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) exemplify this influence by advocating for policies that reflect their respective religious values. CAN has consistently pushed for good governance and accountability, emphasizing leaders' moral responsibility to serve the public (Afolabi, 2020). Conversely, the NSCIA advocates for incorporating Islamic principles into governance, especially in predominantly Muslim areas (Umar, 2019).

Religious beliefs also shape voter expectations of political leaders in Nigeria. Voters often assess candidates based on their perceived alignment with religious values, impacting electoral outcomes and often leading to voting along religious lines (Larmie, 2018). Candidates who are seen as embodying their religious community's values are more likely to receive support from those constituencies. However, this alignment also risks creating divisions, as different religious groups vie for influence over governance. This competition can strain social cohesion, especially in regions where religious identities closely overlap with ethnic identities, complicating the relationship between religion and politics (Adeola, 2021).

In addition, the religious underpinnings of the *Emi l'okan* ideology — while not explicitly religious in origin — are shaped by Nigeria's cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts, influencing beliefs about power and authority. A core theological foundation of the *Emi l'okan* ideology lies in the belief in ancestral authority and divine ordination, which suggests that political leadership is determined by lineage or divine mandate. This belief, deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, fosters the idea that political power can be inherited through ancestral rights or spiritual blessing (Adewale, 2017).

In summary, religion in Nigeria plays a multifaceted role in shaping political ideologies by influencing personal political views, institutional practices, and governance outcomes. Religious teachings provide ethical frameworks that support democratic values, while religious institutions mobilize followers and advocate for policies aligned with their beliefs. However, the intersection of religion and politics also brings challenges, including the risk of division and conflict. A nuanced understanding of these dynamics is essential for addressing governance complexities in Nigeria and promoting a political culture rooted in ethical leadership and social justice.

Biblical Principles of Leadership and Governance

The Bible presents a robust framework for understanding leadership that emphasizes humility, servant leadership, justice, and accountability. These principles are vital for evaluating political ideologies, such as *Emi l'okan*, which operate on entitlement-based governance models. For instance, biblical teachings consistently highlight humility as a cornerstone of effective leadership. In Matthew 20:26-28, Jesus contrasts worldly leadership, characterized by power and domination, with the model of servant leadership, where leaders prioritize serving others: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (NIV). This teaching suggests that true leadership is not about asserting authority or entitlement but about caring for the well-being of others. Servant leadership embodies the idea that leaders are accountable to those they serve, fostering an environment of mutual respect and ethical governance (Greenleaf, 1977). The Apostle Paul further echoes this sentiment in Philippians 2:3-4, where he urges believers to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." This call to humility is essential in countering the entitlement mentality inherent in *Emi l'okan*, as it emphasizes a leader's responsibility to act in the interest of the community rather than for personal gain (De Vries, 2001).

Furthermore, biblical teachings on justice underscore the importance of upholding fairness, equity, and righteousness in governance. In the book of Micah (6:8), it is written, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." This verse highlights the moral imperative of pursuing justice and mercy, guiding leaders to govern with integrity and compassion. Thus, justice is not merely a legalistic concept but involves advocating for the marginalized and ensuring fairness in governance. This principle is crucial for critiquing entitlement-based models like *Emi l'okan*, which often lead to nepotism and inequality.

Accountability is another vital aspect of biblical leadership. Leaders are called to be accountable to God and their communities, as seen in James 3:1, which warns that "not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." This highlights the expectation that leaders must govern with integrity and are responsible for their actions. In the context of Nigerian politics, where leaders may operate with a sense of entitlement, these biblical principles provide a counter-narrative that emphasizes moral responsibility and ethical governance (Peters, 2013). Moreover, biblical narratives of leaders such as Moses, David, and Solomon offer valuable lessons on the moral complexities of leadership and the consequences of moral failure. These narratives provide cautionary tales about the dangers of pride, corruption, and moral compromise in governance, highlighting the importance of moral accountability and ethical leadership.

Theological Perspectives on Entitlement and Servant Leadership

The theological discourse on entitlement versus servant leadership reveals significant tensions between these models of governance in Nigeria. The concept of entitlement, as embodied in *Emi l'okan*, posits that political power is a birthright or reward for loyalty, undermining the biblical mandate for servant leadership and ethical governance. Although the *Emi l'okan* ideology may draw on religious symbolism, its compatibility with biblical narratives and teachings is contentious. The biblical understanding of leadership emphasizes humility, servant leadership, and ethical governance, which starkly contrasts the entitlement-driven model propagated by *Emi l'okan*. Furthermore, biblical teachings on justice and righteousness provide a moral framework for governance.

Entitlement-based leadership often leads to corruption, favoritism, and erosion of public trust, as leaders prioritize personal or group interests over the common good. This stands in contrast to the biblical call for servant leadership, which urges leaders to act in the best interest of their constituents. For example, John 10:11 describes Jesus as the “good shepherd” who sacrifices himself for his sheep, highlighting selflessness in leadership (Fowler, 2017). The theological implications of this contrast are profound. While entitlement politics fosters patronage systems benefiting a select few, servant leadership promotes equity and justice, as illustrated in Proverbs 29:14: “If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will be established forever.” This emphasis on fairness aligns with the biblical mandate for leaders to prioritize the welfare of the vulnerable (Wright, 2012).

The contrast between entitlement and servant leadership also underscores issues of ethical and moral accountability. Theological perspectives stress that leaders are accountable to both God and their communities, which challenges the entitlement mindset. This dual accountability reminds leaders of their moral obligations to act justly and serve selflessly. Biblical teachings foster an environment where transparency and responsibility in governance practices are expected (Laderman, 2016). The ethical implications of the *Emi l'okan* ideology for Nigeria's political landscape are profound, shaping the conduct of political actors and the functioning of institutions. The pervasive sense of entitlement associated with *Emi l'okan* undermines democratic norms, erodes public trust in government, and fosters social unrest. Adesina (2019) argues that this ideology results in prioritizing personal interests over the welfare of the populace, undermining accountability, transparency, and the rule of law while perpetuating corruption and impunity. Furthermore, *Emi l'okan* reinforces socio-economic inequalities, concentrating political power within certain ethnic or regional factions at the expense of others.

In contrast, biblical principles advocate for humility, servant leadership, and ethical governance, offering a moral framework that emphasizes selflessness, compassion, and accountability. Jesus Christ exemplified this principle of humility, demonstrating that leadership is a call to serve rather

than to be served. Biblical teachings underscore the importance of justice, righteousness, and moral accountability in leadership (Proverbs 29:4). This disconnection between *Emi l'okan* and biblical principles exacerbates governance challenges in Nigeria, contributing to systemic corruption, political instability, and economic underdevelopment (Adekunle, 2020).

In light of these ethical implications, scholars and policymakers have advocated for reforms to promote transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership in Nigerian politics. Adewole (2018) emphasizes the need for institutional reforms to strengthen democratic institutions and enhance accountability mechanisms while promoting meritocracy in governance. Civil society organizations also play a crucial role in holding leaders accountable and advocating for ethical governance practices. Ultimately, reconciling entitlement-based governance with biblical principles poses theological challenges. However, there are opportunities for transformation within *Emi l'okan* politics, as religious leaders can promote ethical leadership, accountability, and social justice. Aligning political practices with biblical principles and ethical values is essential for fostering a more just, equitable, and prosperous society in Nigeria.

Previous Studies on *Emi l'okan* Political Ideology

Scholars have provided insightful analyses of the entitlement-based *Emi l'okan* ideology within Nigeria's socio-political landscape. This ideology reflects a belief in personal entitlement to leadership, often subverting democratic principles of meritocracy and accountability. As a result, political power becomes concentrated among select groups, leading to nepotism, corruption, and inefficiencies in governance (Adetiba & Olaniyan, 2020; Akande, 2019). The ideology encapsulates a desire for power based on perceived destiny or entitlement, disregarding the necessity for leaders to demonstrate competence and genuine commitment to public service.

Adesina (2019) emphasizes that *Emi l'okan* politics entrenches a patronage system, rewarding loyalty above competence and integrity. In this environment, officials prioritize self-preservation and personal privileges over the broader public interest. Adesina's analysis reveals how this loyalty-driven framework adversely affects policy implementation, making political appointments more about allegiance to influential figures than skill. Similarly, Adewale (2018) illustrates that *Emi l'okan* reinforces clientelism, hampering equitable access to resources and opportunities as political allegiances replace merit-based advancements.

Adebayo (2020) identifies nepotism and rent-seeking as hallmarks of *Emi l'okan* governance, concentrating resources within the elite and perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities. This style of governance diverts attention from the needs of the broader population, contributing to Nigeria's slow pace of economic development. Afolabi (2019) attributes the entrenchment of entitlement-based governance to Nigeria's post-colonial history, where ethnic diversity and regional disparities have fostered a culture where political power is perceived as the rightful inheritance of certain elites. This sense of political entitlement aligns with historical grievances, whereby political actors

appeal to ethnic and regional loyalties to justify their claims to leadership (Afolabi, 2019; Obadare, 2019).

Olaniyan (2016) further explains that *Emi l'okan* stems partly from historical injustices and elite manipulation of state resources. The lack of robust institutional accountability has facilitated this entitlement culture, where political influence often outweighs ethical or democratic principles. Olaniyan argues that this manipulation, combined with a dearth of transparency, allows entitlement-based governance to persist largely unchecked. From a cultural perspective, Adewale (2017) traces *Emi l'okan* to traditional African beliefs emphasizing lineage and the divine right of leadership. These cultural ideas intertwine with the political rhetoric of contemporary Nigeria, complicating efforts to instill democratic values. Ekeh (2020) posits that traditional power dynamics obstruct democratic progression and societal equity.

Ethically, *Emi l'okan* presents numerous challenges. The pervasive entitlement mentality fosters governance practices prioritizing personal interests over public welfare, leading to corruption and patronage. Adebayo (2018) highlights how entitlement politics undermines public trust in institutions, as political leaders distribute resources to loyal supporters instead of addressing public needs. This environment weakens the rule of law and allows corruption to thrive.

Theologically, *Emi l'okan* stands in stark contrast to biblical principles of leadership, which emphasize humility, service, and justice. For instance, the Gospel of Matthew (20:25-28) records Jesus' exhortation to lead through service, fundamentally challenging the entitlement-driven ideology. Obasi (2021) asserts that Christian teachings on servant leadership provide a counter-narrative to *Emi l'okan*, advocating governance based on ethical commitment rather than personal privilege.

Despite extensive scholarship on *Emi l'okan*, notable gaps exist regarding its ethical and theological dimensions. Most studies focus on political and cultural implications, overlooking intersections with ethical governance rooted in religious values. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the theological underpinnings of *Emi l'okan* and its ethical implications through a biblical lens, providing insights for religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society actors. By emphasizing ethical governance and democratic values, it proposes a framework for countering *Emi l'okan's* influence on Nigeria's political landscape, advocating for civic education, meritocratic leadership, and robust democratic institutions.

Challenges of Applying Biblical Teachings to Political Governance

Aligning biblical principles with real-world political ideologies presents significant challenges, particularly in contexts characterized by entitlement-based governance, such as the *Emi l'okan* ideology in Nigeria. One of the primary practical challenges in applying biblical teachings to political governance is the entrenched nature of entitlement-driven political systems. In many cases, political leaders prioritize loyalty and patronage over ethical governance and accountability.

This leads to a political culture where decisions are made based on personal connections rather than the common good (Adeleke, 2018). For instance, the widespread practice of nepotism within political appointments often undermines the biblical call for fairness and justice (Okonkwo, 2020). As a result, the principles of servant leadership and accountability are frequently sidelined in favor of political expediency.

Moreover, the complexity of Nigeria's diverse socio-political landscape complicates the application of biblical ethics. The intersection of ethnic, religious, and cultural identities often shapes political behavior in ways that do not align with Christian values (Aliyu, 2017). For example, during elections, political leaders may exploit religious sentiments to garner support, thereby compromising their integrity and accountability. This exploitation reflects a disconnect between the teachings of humility and service found in the Bible and the reality of political maneuvering (Nwokolo, 2018).

Theoretically, reconciling biblical principles with political governance raises questions about the nature of power and authority. Christian teachings advocate for leadership rooted in service, humility, and justice; however, these ideals often clash with the realities of political power dynamics, where authority is frequently exercised through coercion and control (Sipe, 2005). This tension creates a dichotomy between the ethical imperatives of Christian leadership and the pragmatic requirements of political governance. Furthermore, the challenge of secularism in modern governance structures presents a significant barrier to the implementation of biblical principles. Many political systems prioritize secularism as a means to ensure inclusivity and neutrality, which can marginalize religious perspectives in the public sphere (Burgess, 2019). This creates a dilemma for Christian leaders who wish to apply biblical teachings in governance, as they must navigate the complexities of secular policies while remaining faithful to their ethical convictions.

Additionally, the rise of global capitalism and market-driven policies often conflicts with biblical values that emphasize community welfare and justice. The profit-driven nature of modern governance can lead to policies that prioritize economic growth over the moral and ethical imperatives outlined in Scripture (Rogers, 2013). For instance, social justice concerns, such as poverty alleviation and equitable resource distribution, may be overshadowed by the pursuit of profit, creating a significant challenge for Christians seeking to advocate for ethical governance. In summary, the challenges of applying biblical teachings to political governance are multifaceted and deeply rooted in the realities of entitlement-based political ideologies. The practical difficulties of entrenched patronage systems, the complexity of Nigeria's socio-political landscape, and the theoretical tensions between Christian ethics and political power dynamics all contribute to the challenges faced by leaders and citizens alike. As such, a comprehensive understanding of these challenges is essential for fostering a political culture that aligns more closely with biblical principles of leadership, justice, and accountability.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, grounded in textual and thematic analysis. The qualitative approach is suitable for capturing the complexities of religious, political, and cultural ideologies, as well as their ethical and theological implications for governance. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of the intersection of *Emi l'okan* with biblical principles, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the political and ethical challenges the ideology presents. The study's multi-disciplinary focus also facilitates the incorporation of insights from theology, political science, and cultural studies, allowing for a broader understanding of entitlement-based governance models.

The primary data for this study includes case studies of notable instances of *Emi l'okan*-influenced governance in Nigeria which are selected to provide concrete examples of how entitlement-based governance has impacted political accountability, justice, and public trust. These case studies examine instances where leaders have claimed political positions based on entitlement or succession norms rather than merit or public mandate. By examining instances of entitlement-driven governance, this study will identify patterns, outcomes, and ethical implications, thereby providing concrete evidence to support theoretical arguments. By capturing insights from individuals with expertise in these areas, this study seeks to deepen its understanding of entitlement-based politics and its ethical implications. In addition, secondary data comprises existing literature on *Emi l'okan*, theological teachings on leadership, and scholarly articles on Nigerian politics and governance. Specifically, biblical texts and theological commentaries that address themes of leadership, humility, justice, and moral accountability are analyzed to determine their relevance to *Emi l'okan* and entitlement-based governance. This secondary sources include peer-reviewed articles, books, and research reports on the intersection of religion, politics, and governance in Nigeria.

Furthermore, this study employs comparative analysis to juxtapose the principles of *Emi l'okan* with biblical teachings on leadership and accountability. By identifying areas of convergence and divergence between entitlement-based governance and biblical values, this analysis will highlight the ethical and theological challenges of *Emi l'okan* politics in Nigeria. The comparative approach will also allow for an evaluation of how biblical teachings can serve as a counter-narrative to entitlement-driven politics.

Lastly, while this methodology offers a comprehensive framework for examining *Emi l'okan*, it may be limited by the scope of available scholarly literature on this specific ideology. As *Emi l'okan* is a relatively recent concept in Nigerian politics, there may be constraints in locating a diverse range of academic studies on the topic. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative data means that the findings may not be generalizable to all entitlement-driven political systems outside the Nigerian context. However, this study aims to mitigate these limitations by focusing on robust

textual and theological analyses, as well as integrating expert opinions to provide a thorough examination of the topic.

A Case Study on the *Emi l'okan* Principle

This case study examines the rise of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a prominent Nigerian political figure whose ascent to power has been significantly influenced by the *Emi l'okan* principle. Tinubu's political journey highlights how claims of entitlement can shape leadership styles, governance outcomes, and public perception within the context of Nigerian politics. Tinubu served as the Governor of Lagos State from 1999 to 2007 and has since played a pivotal role in Nigerian politics, particularly within the All-Progressives Congress (APC), a party he helped to establish. His rise to power is emblematic of the *Emi l'okan principle*, which asserts that political leadership is a birthright rather than a position earned through competence and public mandate.

Tinubu's claim to leadership is intricately linked to his party's political landscape and the broader context of entitlement-driven politics in Nigeria. His emergence as a political leader followed the end of military rule and the transition to civilian governance, a period marked by political instability and the struggle for democratic consolidation (Ojo, 2017). Tinubu capitalized on his political connections and the support of influential figures within the Lagos political landscape, presenting himself as a rightful heir to political leadership based on his historical ties to the region's elite (Falola, 2020). Once in power, Tinubu's leadership style reflected the entitlement-driven ethos of the *Emi l'okan* principle. He implemented policies that prioritized loyalty over competence, often rewarding political allies and loyalists with key positions within the state government (Adeleke, 2018). This practice of political patronage, while ensuring loyalty, undermined meritocracy and fostered a culture of nepotism within Lagos State governance.

The governance outcomes of Tinubu's administration in Lagos State were mixed. While his tenure saw infrastructural development and significant revenue generation for the state, the underlying issues of corruption and inefficiency persisted. Critics argue that the entrenchment of entitlement politics stifled accountability and transparency, ultimately impacting the quality of governance in Lagos State (Obi, 2020). For instance, allegations of corruption against Tinubu and members of his administration raised questions about ethical governance and the prioritization of public welfare over personal and political interests (Eze, 2019).

Furthermore, during his 2022 presidential election campaign, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the current President of Nigeria, popularized the phrase *Emi l'okan* as a rallying cry to justify his candidacy. In May 2022, the then National Leader of the APC, at a sensitization/stakeholders meeting in Abeokuta, Ogun State declared:

. . . *To ba je tiwe, mo kawe* . . . (If it's about education, I am educated)

To ba de je oro agba, emi l'egbon . . . (If it's by age, I'm the most senior)

Apemora eni la n pe temi dire . . . (You use your mouth to confess good things about yourself)

Mo ti n sin yin bo, ojo ti pe . . . (I have been serving you all the while);

E gbe kini yi wa . . . (bring this thing (presidency))

Emi l'okan ! . . . (It's my turn)!

Tinubu, argued that it was his turn to lead the country, having supported others in the past and waited patiently for his opportunity. In effect, according to a Vanguard Newspaper report;

Tinubu challenged the much-vaunted but less-observed universal notion of nationalism and patriotism and equated his personal interest with that of the nation at large. The ideal of Nigerian nationalism was thereby torn apart for the more receptive concept of “turn by turn”; that is, the major political actors taking their turn to rule the nation, to reflect the federal character or rotational power sharing/allocation policy (Vanguard News, 02/09/2023).

The *Emi lokan* mantra resonated with some Nigerians who saw Tinubu as a strong candidate with a track record of achievement, particularly in Lagos State. While others described it as “an outburst from a politician who has not only felt suppressed by the Aso Rock faction of the APC but is struggling to retain relevance in the scheme of things” (Agbeleoba et al., 2023). A Vanguard news report however contrasted this view thus:

If candidate Tinubu could ride on the slogan, “Emi Lokan” (it is my turn) to evoke the deep-rooted sentiment of portraying himself as a victim or someone in danger of being denied his rightful place in the political scheme of things, it stands to reason that his strategy worked with Nigeria and that the strategy was acceptable to many who supported him. Having won the presidential election and transmuted from candidate Tinubu to President Tinubu based on this skewed but incisive slogan, one can then understand or appreciate the magnitude of crack inflicted on the very core of Nigerian nationalism (Vanguard News, 02/09/2023).

Nevertheless, this submission equally connotes a subtle distaste for Tinubu's slogan as an appreciation of “the magnitude of crack inflicted on the very core of Nigerian nationalism,” implying that the presidency was a personal entitlement rather than a call to serve the nation (Rotimi-John, 2022).

The *Emi l'okan* concept has become a controversial and debated topic in Nigerian political discourse, symbolizing both the aspirations and the criticisms of Tinubu's presidency. Supporters often view him as a transformative leader who facilitated Lagos State's growth and development, asserting that his political acumen is essential for navigating Nigeria's complex political landscape (Falola, 2020). However, detractors highlight the pitfalls of his entitlement-based approach, criticizing the nepotism and corruption that pervaded his administration. This duality reflects the broader societal struggle in reconciling the principles of democratic governance with entrenched entitlement politics (Adeleke, 2018). As Nigeria continues to grapple with issues of accountability and transparency, the case of Tinubu serves as a critical lens through which to examine the implications of political entitlement for effective governance.

Intersection of Religion, Politics, and Governance in Nigeria

Research on the intersection of religion, politics, and governance in Nigeria reveals the intricate ways in which religious beliefs, political ideologies, and governance practices converge. These studies highlight how religious ideologies influence political values and leaders' accountability, reflecting a cultural context where religion and politics are deeply intertwined (Agbaje, 2020). For example, Ojo (2017) investigates the role of religious institutions in shaping political attitudes and behaviors in Nigeria, emphasizing that religious leaders wield significant moral authority and influence public opinion on governance issues. By framing political discourse within a religious and ethical paradigm, these leaders contribute to the formation of political attitudes and community expectations regarding governance.

Umar (2019) explores the impact of Islamic ideology in Northern Nigeria, examining how Sharia law intersects with both traditional governance structures and democratic institutions. Umar's research underscores the influence of Islamic principles on the legal system, governance practices, and community relations, arguing that the fusion of religious values with governance can create both alignment and tension between traditional values and democratic ideals. This illustrates the powerful role religion plays in shaping governance models within diverse regional contexts in Nigeria.

Studies by Adeolu (2018) and Onuoha (2020) focus on the ethical dimensions of leadership in Nigerian politics, emphasizing that religious teachings can promote accountability, transparency, and social justice. They argue that religious values can serve as a counter-narrative to the entitlement-driven governance practices prevalent in Nigeria. Adeolu suggests that ethical leadership inspired by religious morals counters the prevailing culture of entitlement and impunity, fostering a more just and accountable political environment. Onuoha (2020) further emphasizes that religious teachings on servant leadership can inspire political leaders to prioritize the common good over personal gain, thereby strengthening the ethical foundations of governance in Nigeria.

Within this discourse, *Emi l'okan* ideology—embodying a belief in power as an entitlement based on lineage, political inheritance, or regional affiliation—has become a focal point in discussions of religion and politics. Literally meaning “it is my turn,” *Emi l'okan* is not merely a political sentiment but also a socio-cultural concept that challenges the meritocratic principles of democratic governance (Adewale, 2019). This entitlement-based ideology often manifests in claims to political office as a birthright, reminiscent of traditional values that historically placed leadership within certain families or groups, prioritizing inheritance over competency or democratic representation (Ajayi, 2019; Adebayo, 2021).

This study aims to assess the compatibility of *Emi l'okan* principles with Christian ethical values by analyzing entitlement-based governance through a biblical lens. It focuses on core tenets of entitlement-based politics, such as power rotation, political inheritance, and the perception of leadership roles as personal or familial entitlements. By juxtaposing these principles with biblical narratives—such as the teachings on servant leadership (Matthew 20:25-28) and humility (Philippians 2:3-4)—this study explores areas of convergence, tension, or divergence between traditional, entitlement-based governance models and Christian ideals of ethical leadership, moral accountability, and service to others.

This comparative approach provides a unique contribution to Nigerian governance literature by highlighting the potential of religious teachings to challenge entitlement politics and promote ethical standards in leadership. The findings may support the advocacy of religious leaders aiming to inspire ethical governance, encouraging leaders to transcend narrow interests and foster a more inclusive and meritocratic political culture. Additionally, the study calls for civil society and policymakers to consider religious ethics as a valuable resource for nurturing a political ethos grounded in accountability, transparency, and the common good.

Implication of Findings for Research

Implications for the Political Future of Africa

The investigation of *Emi l'okan* ideology, with its emphasis on entitlement over merit in political leadership, has profound implications for the political future of Africa. By exploring the ethical and theological dimensions of this ideology, this study provides insights that extend beyond Nigeria, offering valuable lessons for the entire continent. This analysis reveals the potential consequences of entitlement-based governance and proposes strategies to promote ethical leadership and democratic values across Africa.

Africa's political landscape is diverse, yet many countries face similar challenges regarding governance, corruption, and the erosion of democratic principles. The *Emi l'okan* ideology, prevalent in Nigeria, exemplifies broader patterns seen across the continent, where political power is often viewed as an inherent right rather than a responsibility earned through democratic processes. This entitlement mentality can lead to governance practices that prioritize personal and

group interests over public welfare, undermining the principles of democracy and good governance (Adejumobi, 2000).

For example, in Kenya the politics of entitlement is evident in the long-standing dominance of certain families in political leadership. The Kenyatta and Odinga families have been central to Kenyan politics for decades, often leading to perceptions of politics as a family entitlement. This has resulted in political patronage, where public resources are distributed based on loyalty rather than need or merit. The 2017 election crisis, which led to widespread violence and a disputed presidential election, underscored the fragility of public trust in political institutions marred by entitlement politics (Mueller, 2018).

Additionally, Zimbabwe's political landscape has been heavily influenced by the entitlement mentality, particularly during Robert Mugabe's rule. Mugabe's prolonged tenure and his eventual efforts to position his wife, Grace Mugabe, as his successor, reflected a deep-seated belief in his entitlement to power. This resulted in significant economic decline, corruption, and public disillusionment with the political system. The controversial land reform programme, which was executed with a sense of entitlement to redistribute land without proper planning or compensation, led to severe economic repercussions and a loss of public confidence in the government (Raftopoulos, 2009).

Similarly in South Africa, entitlement-based governance has also manifested, particularly within the African National Congress (ANC). The "cadre deployment" policy, where loyal ANC members are appointed to key positions regardless of their qualifications, has been a major source of inefficiency and corruption. The era of President Jacob Zuma was marked by numerous corruption scandals, including the infamous Gupta family state capture, where public resources were diverted to benefit a few individuals. This has severely eroded public trust in political institutions and hindered socio-economic development (Sole, 2017). According to Diamond, the persistence of such practices erodes public confidence in the political system and hampers socio-economic development (Diamond, 2008). This is the situation in many African countries including Nigeria today.

Implications for the Political Future of Nigeria

The *Emi l'okan* ideology, by emphasizing entitlement over merit, significantly impacts governance effectiveness in Nigeria. This ideology perpetuates a culture where political leadership is seen as a right rather than a responsibility, leading to governance practices that prioritize personal and group interests over public welfare. In Nigeria, entitlement-based governance has been a persistent issue, particularly within the political elite. The "zoning" system in Nigerian politics, where different regions take turns to hold the presidency, exemplifies the *Emi l'okan* ("it is my turn") mentality. This system often prioritizes regional balance over merit, leading to the selection of leaders based on their regional affiliation rather than competence. This practice has contributed to widespread corruption and inefficiencies in public administration. For instance, during the

administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, numerous corruption scandals, including the \$20 billion missing from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, highlighted the severe impact of entitlement-based politics (Adibe, 2015).

Consequently, this results in several adverse outcomes for governance effectiveness. First, the entitlement mentality inherent in *Emi l'okan* politics undermines the principles of meritocracy and competence. Leaders are often chosen based on their perceived entitlement rather than their qualifications or abilities. This can lead to the appointment of individuals who lack the necessary skills and experience to govern effectively, ultimately hampering policy implementation and public service delivery. Adebayo notes that this practice has led to inefficiencies and a lack of innovation in public administration, as leaders are more focused on maintaining their power and privileges than on addressing the needs of the populace (Adebayo, 2018).

Second, *Emi l'okan* ideology fosters corruption and patronage. Political leaders who view their positions as entitlements are more likely to engage in corrupt practices to secure and maintain their power. This can involve the allocation of state resources to loyal supporters, nepotism in public appointments, and the manipulation of electoral processes. According to Ogundiya, such practices undermine public trust in government institutions and erode the rule of law, creating an environment where corruption thrives and governance becomes less effective (Ogundiya, 2010). Third, the sense of entitlement promoted by *Emi l'okan* politics can exacerbate ethnic and regional tensions. By prioritizing the interests of specific groups, this ideology can marginalize other communities, leading to social fragmentation and conflict. This has been particularly evident in Nigeria's history of ethno-regional power struggles and insurgencies. Nnoli argues that such divisions undermine national unity and stability, making it difficult to achieve cohesive and inclusive governance (Nnoli, 2008).

Role of Religious Leaders, Policymakers, and Civil Society

To counter the negative impacts of *Emi l'okan* ideology, it is crucial to promote ethical leadership and democratic values in Nigeria. Religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society organizations have crucial roles to play in promoting ethical leadership and democratic values. For instance, religious leaders can leverage their moral authority to advocate for ethical governance and social justice. By educating their congregations about the importance of humility, service, and integrity in leadership, they can challenge entitlement-driven politics and promote values that align with theological teachings. An example of this is seen in Kenya, where religious leaders played a significant role in advocating for peace and reconciliation during and after the 2007-2008 post-election violence. They used their influence to promote dialogue and forgiveness among conflicting parties, thereby contributing to social cohesion and ethical governance (Gifford, 2009).

On the other hand, policymakers must enact and enforce laws that promote transparency, accountability, and meritocracy in governance. This includes implementing anti-corruption measures, ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes, and protecting the independence of

democratic institutions. Support for initiatives that encourage ethical leadership training and civic education is also essential. In South Africa, the establishment of the Public Protector's Office has been a significant step in promoting accountability and transparency. The Public Protector, empowered by legislation, has investigated and exposed various cases of corruption and maladministration, thereby reinforcing the principles of good governance (Sole, 2017).

Similarly, civil society organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in advocating for democratic reforms, monitoring government actions, and holding leaders accountable. CSOs can conduct research, raise public awareness, and engage in advocacy campaigns to promote ethical governance. In Nigeria, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has been instrumental in promoting transparency and accountability through litigation, advocacy, and research. By providing platforms for dialogue and collaboration, CSOs like SERAP help address the challenges posed by entitlement politics and foster a more inclusive and accountable political system (Ibrahim, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study delves into the intricate interplay between *Emi l'okan* politics and biblical principles, illuminating the ethical and theological dimensions of entitlement-driven governance in Nigeria. *Emi l'okan* ideology represents a significant challenge to democratic governance in Nigeria. Its emphasis on entitlement over merit undermines public trust, fosters corruption, and exacerbates social divisions. By critically examining the ethical and theological dimensions of this ideology, this study provides a comprehensive analysis that contributes to the broader discourse on religion and politics. It highlights the discord between entitlement-based leadership and the biblical mandates of humility, servant leadership, and justice.

Furthermore, it offers a path forward for promoting ethical leadership and democratic values, emphasizing the need for a paradigm shift towards governance grounded in humility, servant leadership, and justice. It therefore, underscores the necessity of aligning political practices with ethical and theological principles to foster a more just and equitable governance system. Moreover, it provides actionable insights for religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society actors, emphasizing their pivotal roles in promoting ethical leadership and democratic values. Additionally, by leveraging the influence of religious leaders, the legislative power of policymakers, and the advocacy efforts of civil society organizations, Nigeria can navigate the complexities of entitlement politics and work towards a more effective and ethical governance framework. Ultimately, it enriches the dialogue on the intersection of religion, politics, and governance, offering a path forward for Nigeria's political future grounded in ethical and theological integrity.

Areas for Further Research

Comparative Analysis of Entitlement-Based Political Ideologies Across African Nations

Expanding the study of entitlement ideologies beyond Nigeria, future research could examine similar entitlement-based ideologies in other African countries. This analysis would explore how traditional succession norms, lineage-based leadership claims, and entitlement beliefs manifest in various political systems across the continent, contributing to a broader understanding of how entitlement ideologies influence governance, accountability, and democratic principles across different cultural contexts.

The Role of Religious Institutions in Counteracting Entitlement Politics

Further research could investigate how religious institutions in Africa might actively engage in countering entitlement-based politics through advocacy, civic education, and ethical training. This area of study would assess the capacity of religious leaders and organizations to encourage democratic values and ethical leadership, examining the effectiveness of their interventions in mitigating entitlement-driven governance and fostering accountability.

Evaluating the Impact of Entitlement-Based Governance on Youth Political Engagement

This study could examine the effects of entitlement politics on youth engagement and attitudes towards governance. As young Africans increasingly advocate for change and transparency, this research would explore how entitlement-based governance influences their political outlook, their trust in democratic institutions, and their willingness to participate in political processes, identifying potential avenues for engaging youth in fostering democratic reforms.

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