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PROPHETIC TEACHINGS ON GOOD GOVERNANCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY: AN OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE FOR AFRICAN CHRISTIAN DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: Many African states, Nigeria among them, continue to suffer from poor governance and rising insecurity. In 2025 Nigeria scored 26 out o1f 100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index, and in 2026 it was ranked the fourth most terrorism-affected country in the world. This situation has renewed scholarly interest in what religious traditions can offer to public life. This article examines the teachings of the Old Testament prophets as a theological resource for good governance and national security in African Chr1istianity. The study adopts a qualitative design which combines library and Internet-based resea1rch with exegetical analysis of Deuteronomy 16:18-20, Deuteronomy 17:14-20, Amos 5:21-24 and Amos 8:1-14. It is guided by two frameworks: covenantal kingship theology and the prophetic imagination. The covenant lawsuit (rib) motif is used as a hermeneutical brid1ge between ancient Israel and present-day Africa. The study finds that the selected texts teach five related principles: justice, accountability, impartiality, restrained power and car1e for the vulnerable. It also finds that the prophets treated national security as the fruit of justice

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and not of military strength alone. When these principles are set beside current evidence of corruption, electoral weakness, banditry and the Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency, the prophetic tradition offers African Christianity a clear language for confronting bad governance. The article argues that the Church should move beyond charity alone towards steady structural critique and constructive civic engagement. It recommends leadership formation in churches, reform of theological curricula, ecumenical peacebuilding, financial accountab1ility within churches and further exegetical research.

Keywords: *Old Testament Prophecy; Good Governance; National Security; African Christianity; Nigeria*

1.0 Introduction

Good governance and national security are two of the most pressing concerns in Africa today. Across the continent, citizens live with the effects of corruption, weak institutions, disputed elections and armed violence. The 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance reported that progres1s in governance across Africa had stalled, and that the decline in security and the rule of law w1as undermining gains made in human development. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, presents these problems in a sharp form. In February 2026 Transparency International placed the country 142nd out of 182 countries, with a score of 26 out of 100, well below the1 sub-Saharan African average of 33. A month later the Global Terrorism Index ranked Nig1eria fourth in the world and noted that it recorded the largest increase in terrorism deaths of1 any country in 2025.

These facts raise a question that African theologians cannot avoid: what does the Christian faith have to say to a nation where leaders fail to deliver justice and citizens are not safe? Christianity is a major force in Nigerian public life, and churches have large memberships, schools, hospitals and media platforms. Yet many observers note that the Church's influence on the conduct of public office has been weak. The Old Testament prophets offer a valuable resource here. They spoke directly to kings, judges, priests and merchants, and they connected the moral life of the nation with its peace and survival.

This article therefore examines selected prophetic and legal texts of the Old Testament and draws from them principles for good governance and national security. It reads Deuteronomy 16:18–20 and 17:14-20 as the covenant basis of the prophetic message, and

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Amos 5:21-24 and 8:1-14 as examples of prophetic indictment. It then relates these principles to the current African, and especially Nigerian, situation, and suggests ways in which African Christianity may respond.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's Constitution states that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. In practice, many citizens experience the opposite. Insecurity has spread from the North-East to the North-West and North-Central regions, while corruption continues to drain resources meant for public services. At the same time, much Christian response to these problems has taken the form of prayer meetings and charitable relief. These are good and necessary, but they do not by themselves address the structures that produce injustice. Studies of Amos in the Nigerian context have shown the relevance of the prophet's message, but few have brought the Deuteronomic laws of office, the prophetic indictments and the question of national security together in one framework. This gap leaves the Church without a coherent biblical theology for public engagement. This study responds to that gap.

3.0 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the prophetic teachings of the Old Testament on good governance and national security, and to show their relevance for African Christian development. The specific objectives are to: (i) examine the principles of governance in Deuteronomy 16:18–20 and 17:14-20; (ii) analyse the prophetic critique of injustice in Amos 5:21–24 and 8:1-14; (iii) explain the covenant lawsuit motif as a bridge between ancient Israel and contemporary Africa; (iv) relate these principles to current evidence of corruption, electoral weakness and insecurity in Nigeria and Africa; and (v) suggest practical ways by which the African Church can engage public life prophetically.

3. Significance and Scope of the Study

This study is significant in three ways. First, it contributes to African biblical hermeneutics by showing how Old Testament law and prophecy can be read together as a single resource for public ethics. Second, it offers church leaders, theological educators and Christians in public service a biblical basis for engaging questions of governance and security, rather than treating them as matters outside the concern of faith. Third, it provides policy makers

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and civil society with a moral vocabulary, rooted in a tradition shared by millions of Nigerians, which can strengthen calls for accountability and reform.

The study is limited to four passages: Deuteronomy 16:18-20, Deuteronomy 17:14-20, Amos 5:21-24 and Amos 8:1-14. Other prophetic books are mentioned only where they help to explain the covenant lawsuit form. Geographically, the study focuses on Nigeria, with reference to the wider Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa where the evidence is relevant. The governance and security data are drawn mainly from reports published between 2023 and 2026, so that the discussion reflects the present situation. The study does not report fieldwork; it is a theological and documentary study.

4.0 Methodology

The study is qualitative and literature-based. It combines library research with Internet-based research. Primary sources are the Hebrew Bible texts named above, read in the Masoretic Text with the help of standard English versions. Secondary sources include commentaries, journal articles and books on Old Testament prophecy and African theology. Current data on governance and security were obtained from reports by Transparency International, the Institute for Economics and Peace, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Amnesty International and the European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria. Preference was given to recent Nigerian and African scholarship. The exegetical method pays attention to the literary and historical context of each passage and to key Hebrew terms. The interpretation follows the contextual approach of African biblical hermeneutics, which reads the Bible in conscious dialogue with the life situation of African readers.

5.0 Conceptual Clarification

Good Governance. Governance refers to the way power is exercised in managing a nation's resources and affairs. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation describes it as the provision of the political, social, economic and environmental goods that citizens have a right to expect from their state. Good governance therefore includes the rule of law, accountability, transparency, participation and respect for human rights. In biblical terms, it is captured by the pair mishpat (justice) and tsedaqah (righteousness).

National Security. National security traditionally meant the defence of a state against external attack. Today it is understood more broadly as the protection of people from

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violence, fear and want. This human-centred view fits the biblical idea of shalom, which means wholeness, peace and well-being in community.

Prophetic Teaching. In this article, prophetic teaching refers to the message of Israel's prophets as God's spokespersons who called the nation, and especially its leaders, back to the covenant. It also includes the Deuteronomic laws which the prophets assumed and applied.

6.0 Theoretical Framework

Two related theories guide this study. The first is covenantal kingship theology. In the Old Testament, Israel's king was not an absolute ruler but a servant under the covenant between Yahweh and the people. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 limits the king's power and places him under the same law as his fellow Israelites. Reinhard Müller has shown that this passage reshapes ancient royal ideology by presenting the king as primus inter pares, first among equals. Leadership on this view is a trust, and its legitimacy depends on faithfulness to justice.

The second is Walter Brueggemann's theory of the prophetic imagination. Brueggemann argues that the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture a consciousness that is different from the dominant culture. The prophet both criticises the existing order that oppresses people and energises the community with hope of a new future under God. Together, these two theories explain why the prophets judged rulers by covenant standards, and how the Church today can speak to power without being absorbed by it.

7.0 Review of Related Literature

A growing body of Nigerian scholarship has applied the book of Amos to national life. Akintola, reading Amos 5:21–24 from a justice-seeking perspective, called on prophets of The Apostolic Church to speak boldly to the political establishment in solidarity with the poor. Awojobi found that conditions in Amos' time resemble those in Nigeria, and argued that many church leaders have failed in their prophetic role because they benefit from corrupt leaders. Anyamdoom and Apuuivom used narrative criticism to compare the oil wealth enjoyed by a small political class with the deep poverty of the majority. Adegboyega likewise offered an exegesis of Amos 5 as a biblical response to social injustice.

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Studies on Deuteronomy have also appeared. Bello examined justice in Deuteronomy 16:18–20 and recommended that the integrity of judges must not be compromised and that corrupt officers should be sanctioned. From South Africa, Coetsee showed that the same passage makes justice the duty of the whole community, not only of judges. Katho, writing from the Congolese context, argued that the Church in Africa must teach rulers the proper use of power and teach citizens that they share responsibility for the kind of government they accept.

On the Church and public life, Onuorah argued that the Nigerian Church, through its networks and moral influence, can help address the country's leadership problems. Amaole showed that prayer, though important, cannot replace active political participation. Adebayo's study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God challenged the idea that Pentecostals are uninterested in public life, but also noted criticism that social programmes may spiritualise the root causes of poverty. These works are valuable. However, most treat a single text or a single theme. The present study brings law and prophecy together and links them explicitly with national security.

8.0 Exegetical Analysis of Selected Texts

8. Deuteronomy 16:18-20: Justice and Impartiality

This passage opens the section of Deuteronomy that deals with offices in Israel (16:18-18:22). Moses commands the people to appoint judges (shophetim) and officers (shoterim) in all their towns. The judges must judge with righteous judgement. Verse 19 contains three prohibitions: do not pervert justice, do not show partiality, and do not take a bribe, 'for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous' (KJV). The Hebrew word for bribe, shohad, describes a payment that bends a decision away from the truth.

Verse 20 repeats the noun for emphasis: tsedeq, tsedeq tirdoph, 'justice, justice you shall pursue'. The verb radaph means to chase or pursue with effort. Justice is not something that happens by itself; it must be actively sought. The verse also links justice with life and the possession of the land. In other words, the survival and stability of the nation depend on fair courts. As Coetsee observes, the appointment of judges was a task of the whole community, which makes citizens partly responsible for the quality of justice in their land. The principles here are impartiality, integrity and shared responsibility.

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8.2 Deuteronomy 17:14-20: Restrained Power and Accountability

The law of the king is the only passage in the Torah that deals directly with kingship. It allows Israel to have a king but sets clear limits. The king must be chosen by Yahweh and must be an Israelite. He must not multiply horses, which stood for military power; he must not multiply wives, which often meant political alliances and foreign worship; and he must not greatly multiply silver and gold for himself (17:16-17). Each limit targets a common temptation of rulers: trust in force, trust in alliances and the greed for wealth.

Positively, the king must write a copy of the law and read it all the days of his life (17:18-19). The purpose is that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers (17:20). The king is thus under the law, not above it. This is a remarkable statement in the ancient Near East, where kings were often seen as divine or semi-divine. For modern governance, the passage teaches constitutional limits on power, personal integrity in public finance and the idea that rulers are accountable to a higher standard. It also suggests that security does not rest finally on weapons, since the king who trusts in horses is warned against.

8.3 Amos 5:21-24: Worship Without Justice

Amos prophesied in the eighth century BCE, during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel. It was a time of economic prosperity for the elite and oppression for the poor. In 5:21-23 Yahweh rejects Israel's feasts, solemn assemblies, offerings and songs. The language is strong: 'I hate, I despise your feast days' (5:21). The problem is not worship itself but worship cut off from justice.

Verse 24 gives the alternative: 'But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream' (KJV). The image of an ever-flowing stream (nahal ethan) contrasts with the seasonal wadis of Palestine that dry up in summer. Justice must be constant, not occasional. The passage speaks directly to religious communities that are active in worship but silent about injustice. As Akintola argues, it calls prophetic ministries in Nigeria to speak to the powers in solidarity with the marginalised.

8.4 Amos 8:1-14: Economic Exploitation and National Collapse

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Amos 8 begins with the vision of a basket of summer fruit (qayits), which gives rise to a wordplay on the end (qets) of Israel (8:1–2). The reason for the coming end is given in verses 4–6. The merchants trample the needy and wait impatiently for the Sabbath to pass so that they can sell grain. They make the measure small and the price great and use false balances. They even 'buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes' (8:6, KJV).

The judgement that follows is national: the land will tremble, feasts will turn to mourning, and there will be a famine of hearing the word of the Lord (8:8-12). Here the prophet links economic injustice directly with the insecurity and collapse of the nation. Corruption in the market place is not a private matter; it destroys the social fabric on which national security depends. The famine of the word (8:11-12) also suggests that when a society silences prophetic truth, it loses its capacity for moral correction.

8.5 Synthesis: Principles Derived from the Texts

Taken together, the four passages yield five related principles for public life. The first is justice: the courts and the market place must be fair, and justice must flow constantly like a mighty stream. The second is accountability: the king must read the law daily and is answerable to the same standard as his people. The third is impartiality: judges must not respect persons or receive gifts that blind their judgement. The fourth is restrained power: rulers must not trust in military strength, political alliances or accumulated wealth. The fifth is care for the vulnerable: the test of a just nation is how it treats the poor, the needy and those without power.

These principles are not isolated moral rules. They belong to the covenant, which binds God, the ruler and the people together. Where they are kept, the texts speak of life, long rule and secure possession of the land (Deut 16:20; 17:20). Where they are broken, the prophets announce trembling of the land, mourning and national ruin (Amos 8:8-10). In this way the Old Testament presents good governance and national security as two sides of one covenant reality.

9.0 The Covenant Lawsuit Motif as a Hermeneutical Bridge

Many prophetic oracles take the form of a covenant lawsuit, known in Hebrew as rib. In this form, Yahweh brings a legal case against his people. Heaven and earth are called as witnesses, the charges are stated, and judgement is announced (see Isa 1:2-20; Hos 4:1-3;

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Mic 6:1-8). The lawsuit assumes an existing agreement, namely the covenant, with clear obligations. The prophets did not invent new standards; they held the nation to standards it had already accepted.

This motif offers a useful bridge for African contexts. Modern African states also have covenants of a kind: constitutions, oaths of office, and regional charters on democracy and governance. Like the prophets, the Church can call leaders to account by the very standards they have sworn to uphold. When the Nigerian Constitution names the security and welfare of the people as the primary purpose of government, it provides a public basis for a prophetic 'lawsuit' against failure. In this way, the Church's critique is not partisan opinion but a call to covenant faithfulness that every citizen can understand.

10.0 The Contemporary African Context

10. Corruption and Accountability

Corruption remains the clearest sign of failed governance in Nigeria. The country's score of 26 in the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index was unchanged from 2024, and it now trails 33 other African countries. The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre, Transparency International's Nigerian chapter, described the result as stagnation in the fight against corruption, though it noted some progress in asset recovery. Concerns about the integrity of the judiciary have also been raised by Nigerian commentators, some of whom appeal directly to Deuteronomy 16:19. These conditions mirror the perverted justice and the false balances condemned in Deuteronomy 16 and Amos 8.

10.2 Electoral Integrity

The prophetic tradition insists that power must be held on trust. In modern democracies, elections are the main means by which citizens grant that trust. The European Union Election Observation Mission found that the 2023 Nigerian general elections exposed enduring systemic weaknesses, and that operational failures and lack of transparency damaged public trust in the electoral commission. The presidential vote also recorded the lowest turnout since the return to civilian rule in 1999. In August 2024 young Nigerians took to the streets in the #EndBadGovernance protests over hardship and governance failures. When citizens lose faith in the means of choosing leaders, the legitimacy of the state is weakened and the risk of instability rises.

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10.3 Insecurity: Insurgency and Banditry

Nigeria's security crisis has many faces. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2026, terrorism deaths in Nigeria rose by 46 per cent to 750 in 2025. Borno State accounted for more than two-thirds of attacks and deaths, and the Islamic State West Africa Province and Boko Haram together caused about 80 per cent of terrorism deaths. Beyond the North-East, banditry and communal attacks have devastated rural communities. Amnesty International reported that at least 10,217 people were killed and 672 villages attacked between May 2023 and May 2025, with Benue and Plateau States worst affected. The Federal Government's counter-terrorism centre disputed some of these figures, but the scale of the crisis is not in doubt. In early 2026 Amnesty documented at least 1,100 abductions in northern states within four months.

Nigeria is not alone. The Sahel accounted for more than half of global terrorism deaths in 2025, and six of the ten countries most affected by terrorism were in sub-Saharan Africa. Analysts commonly link this violence to weak state presence, unemployment, poverty and the perception that the state serves only the elite. This is precisely the connection Amos makes: injustice within leads to insecurity throughout the land.

10.4 The Church's Present Response

The Nigerian Church has not been silent in the face of these problems. Church bodies regularly issue statements on insecurity, organise prayers for the nation and provide relief to displaced persons. Large denominations run schools, hospitals and social welfare programmes; the Redeemed Christian Church of God, for example, formally adopted a programme of corporate social responsibility covering health care, education and charity in 2017. These efforts deserve recognition.

Yet the response has tended to focus on relief rather than reform. Some church leaders have been accused of seeking favours from politicians, and the voice of the Church is sometimes divided along ethnic and partisan lines. The prophetic texts suggest that compassion must be matched by courage. The Church must be willing to name injustice, support honest institutions and model transparency in its own life. Only then can it speak with the moral authority that the prophets enjoyed.

11.0 Implications for African Christian Development

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First, the texts show that security is the fruit of justice. Deuteronomy 16:20 links justice with life in the land, and Deuteronomy 17 warns the king against trusting in horses. Military action against insurgents is necessary, but lasting security requires fair courts, honest use of public funds and care for the poor. The African Church should teach this connection clearly.

Second, leadership is a trust under law. The law of the king supplies a theological basis for constitutionalism, term limits and the separation of public office from private gain. Churches that train Christians for public service should root that training in these texts.

Third, worship must be joined to justice. Amos 5:21-24 warns against a religion that is loud in praise but silent on injustice. Nigerian scholarship has observed that some church leaders have become beneficiaries of corrupt power. The Church's prophetic voice depends on its own integrity, including transparency in church finances.

Fourth, the Church must move from charity to structural critique. Relief for victims of violence and poverty is a Christian duty. Yet Amos did not only feed the poor; he named the systems that made them poor. The African Church must combine compassion with sustained advocacy on policy, budgets, elections and the rule of law. As Amaole notes, prayer must be joined by active participation in civic life.

Fifth, the prophetic imagination offers hope. Brueggemann reminds us that prophecy does not end in criticism; it also energises people with hope of a new order. African Christianity, with its strong sense of God's power, is well placed to offer a vision of a just and peaceful society that inspires citizens to work for change.

12.0 Conclusion

This article has examined the prophetic teachings of the Old Testament on good governance and national security. The exegesis of Deuteronomy 16:18–20 and 17:14-20 showed that Israel's covenant required impartial justice, freedom from bribery, restrained power and leaders who are accountable to the law. The study of Amos 5:21–24 and 8:1-14 showed that the prophets condemned worship without justice and linked economic exploitation with the collapse of the nation. The covenant lawsuit motif provided a bridge by which these ancient texts can address modern African states, whose constitutions and oaths of office set out standards that leaders have accepted.

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When placed beside current evidence of corruption, electoral weakness and widespread insecurity in Nigeria and the wider continent, the prophetic tradition proves to be far from a relic of the past. It supplies African Christianity with a clear and coherent language for confronting bad governance and for building a society in which justice produces lasting peace. The task of the Church is to recover this voice with courage and integrity.

13.0 Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

i. Leadership formation in churches. Churches and denominations should establish programmes that train members for public service, using texts such as Deuteronomy 17:14-20 to teach integrity, humility and accountability.

ii. Theological curricula. Theological colleges and seminaries in Nigeria and Africa should include courses on public theology, prophetic ethics and governance, so that future pastors are equipped to engage public life.

iii. Ecumenical peacebuilding. Church bodies such as the Christian Association of Nigeria should work with Muslim leaders, traditional rulers and civil society on early warning, reconciliation and support for victims of violence.

iv. Ecclesial financial accountability. Churches should publish audited accounts and adopt clear policies on gifts from politicians, so that their prophetic voice is not compromised.

v. Further research. Scholars should carry out further exegetical work on other prophetic books, such as Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah, and conduct field studies on how Nigerian congregations understand the link between faith, justice and security.

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