



The Imperative Of Justice As Virtue For Good Governance In Nigeria

Abstract

The incessant and alarming cases of senseless killings, massive political malfeasance, herders-farmer's clashes, cultism, banditry, terrorism, assassinations, nepotism, kidnapping, brain drain, rising cost of living, industrial action, unemployment and poverty constitute the evident features of bad governance in Nigeria. Thus, the central task before scholars and other relevant stakeholders is on how to overcome these challenges and attain sustainable socio-political development in which the goods of society will benefit everyone. From the Classical period of philosophy where the focus was on man and the development of society, this study identified justice as a pivotal value that is expedient for the realization of good governance and surmounting the problems in Nigeria. Justice, as a vital tool for realizing good governance, is a *sine qua non* for achieving citizens' fulfillment, happiness, transparency, accountability and stability in the society. The paper holds that virtue of integrity, rule of law, accountability and transparency, which are the cornerstone of civilized democracy can only be attainable in Nigeria if justice is entrenched in governance. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study examined the place of justice as a virtue for achieving good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Justice, stability, nepotism, virtue, value, good governance

Ogugua, Jeremiah Chukwu

Department Of Educational Foundations

Federal College Of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State

Phone Number: 08036727081

Itelimo, Morrison (PhD)

Department Of General Studies

Isaac Jasper Boro College Of

Education, Sagbama Bayelsa State

Email: itelimorrison@gmail.com

Phone Number: 0803774-2087

Emeronye, Maryann Kelechi

C/O: Department Of Philosophy,

University Of Port Harcourt

Email: maryann2002@yahoo.com

Corresponding Author's Email:

chukwu74@yahoo.com

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Introduction

Africa, particularly Nigeria, have continued to swim in the waters of mal-administration, massive political corruption, high rate of unemployment, inefficient institutions, infrastructural decay, poverty, electoral violence, injustice, underdevelopment and general insecurity manifesting in kidnapping, terrorism, banditry, political assassinations, ritual killing, cult and ethnic clashes. Socio-political philosophers and other scholars have attributed the causes of the above problems bedeviling Africa and Nigeria

specifically to bad leadership and absence of good governance. Buttressing the above, Ogugua, Nwaogu and Itelimo (2023) clarify that political scholars are united in their views that corruption, bad governance and ineffective leadership constitute the bane of instability, political insecurity, high rate of poverty, injustice, unemployment, weak democratic institutions and high infant mortality. The problem of leadership, bad governance and corruption, for purposes of clarity, did not originate today, but manifested profoundly after the return of democracy in 1999.

Nigerians had hopes that the return of democracy would usher in the much desired socio-economic development vis-à-vis the delivery of dividends of democracy and strengthening of democratic institutions. But, the hopes of Nigerians were dashed as democracy not only encouraged political malfeasance on a large scale, accelerated the rampant ineffectiveness of democratic institutions such as INEC to conduct free, fair, transparent and credible elections and the Courts to dispense justice impartially.

Buttressing the above, Onuoha and Nwachukwu (2016), Yagboyaju (2019), Ayodele, Aluko and Ogunjimi (2022) unanimously assert that no significant impact has been recorded in the economic and social well-being of majority of the citizens in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999. They further contend that the most salient features and dividends of democratic governance in Nigeria since 1999 include; social injustice, acute graduate unemployment, soaring poverty, political assassinations, ethno-religious conflicts, insecurity, general economic and political decay. Shedding more light, Egharevba and Chiazor (2012) reiterate that a critical analysis into the governance situation in most Third World countries including Nigeria, reveal that inept leadership, mismanagement and embezzlement of resources, weak value system, institutional impunity, social injustice, etc., are some of the factors stifling socio-economic transformation, good governance and development. Therefore, they aver that "rather than use available resources in their country

justly to ensure the promotion of the well-being of the citizenry, political leaders in Third World countries like Nigeria have embezzled and converted these resources to their private pockets; thereby impoverishing the people" (Egharevba and Chiazor, 2012).

However, it is interesting to note that the above scenario (injustice) played out in Athens and America during the time of Plato and Rawls. For Plato, the incessant plundering of the resources of Athens by the political class and the enthronement of injustice as well as incompetent leadership underdeveloped Athens to a great extent such that majority of the citizenry become impoverished. Thus, it is apt to note that Plato's postulation of the philosopher-king to take charge of his Ideal State stems from his desire to curb injustice, corruption and bad governance cum leadership. Depicting the political injustice in Athens in the days of Plato, Bhandari (2010) posits; "Plato was highly displeased with the degenerating conditions which made Athenian democracy to be on the verge of ruin... orchestrated by political selfishness and incompetent leadership..." (Bhandari, 2010). Bhandari made it explicitly clear that the task before Plato was how to save Athenian democracy from decay and restore confidence of the citizens in the government to assist them in attaining their potentials.

On the other hand, Rawls maintains that the inequitable and unjust distribution of economic benefits in America during his day led to incessant social conflict and political instability

between government and the governed. Thus, Rawls was saddled with the responsibility of fashioning a socio-political philosophy capable of amicably resolving socio-economic and political disputes so as to enthrone a stable society anchored on the principles of justice and fairness. From the foregoing, it is glaring that the above philosophers sought for ways to alleviate the plight of the citizens vis-à-vis proffering a lasting solution to socio-political and economic injustice so as to enthrone good governance, happiness and harmonious co-existence between rulers and the ruled. The solution, as envisioned by them, to the myriads of problems in the polity, consists in the use of justice, considered as a vital value, to overcome the challenges of bad leadership and governance in society

Therefore, it is in light of the foregoing thematic issues that the paper conceives justice as a virtue for attaining good governance and this constitutes the focus of the paper. To achieve the desired objectives, the paper is structured into three parts. Section one clarifies the meaning of vital concepts and highlights the consequences of bad governance in Africa, particularly Nigeria as well as its accompanying challenges. Section two undertakes the elucidation of concepts, while section three x-rays justice as a virtue for attaining good governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is expedient to undertake the elucidation of vital concepts used in the body of the paper so as to remove any

form of ambiguity in relation to the meaning of the terms.

Justice: The concept of justice has been variously defined by scholars. Thus, the term has no universally acceptable definition. Etymologically, justice derives from the Latin word “*jus*”, which denotes ‘fair or right’. The above root meaning sees justice as behaviour or conduct that is fair and right. Thus, Ogugua and Agboufa (2020) conceive the term as the act of portraying character, actions and conduct that people can commend and classify as being fair, impartial and reasonable in the society or a political setting. Onuoha and Nwachukwu (2016) define justice as an attitude and value perception which depicts how an individual particularly a decision maker ought to act. The above definition of justice equates the term to be synonymous with equality for all in society. Obanubi (2015) conceives justice as a moral virtue which permits individuals and groups within a society to be treated fairly as well as receive equal distribution of the goods and benefits in society impartially. Hornby (2010) sees justice as the characteristic of being fair and just. Plato (2000) sees justice as a general virtue that makes individuals behave morally with a view to making society good. This means that justice makes individuals in the society to be upright and the actions they exhibit as a result of their uprightness brings about socio-economic transformation, progress and development in such a polity.

Value: This is a term used to describe the quality which makes a thing or object desirable. It is that which defines

the worth of an object. Ravi (2015) sees value as the guiding principles of life necessary for all-round development. For him, the term constitutes a vital part of a country's philosophy used to advance transformation in all fronts. Dewey (2000) defines the concept in terms of prize by seeing it as the act of treasuring something dearly. Ramji defines value as what is desired and sought when appreciating an object or a thing. He also relate value to humans by denoting it as a fundamental principle of life that is advantageous to the physical and mental health of a person as well as the social welfare and adjustment in line with the prevailing culture.

From the foregoing definition, it is apt to deduce that value can be conceptualized as acceptable norms of good/right moral conduct expected of humans to be portrayed in our day-to-day interaction with others in the society. Value refers to the ideas and beliefs which people cherish and hold to be desirable; owing to its power to be generally accepted as standards guiding and governing conducts in the society.

Good Governance: Several definitions have been adduced by scholars regarding the meaning of good governance. To this end, Oshaba (2021) sees good governance as a system of governance in which socio-economic and political policies are rooted on broad consensus and the voices of the minorities as well as the most vulnerable are heard not only in the decision-making process, but also in the allocation/distribution of resources and formulation of policy. Arowolo and

Aluko (2012) define the concept as the capacity of individuals administering the affairs of a state to formulate and implement sound policies, as well as the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions. Okpaga (2009) conceives good governance is the process through which a state's affairs are managed effectively in the area of public accountability, responsiveness and transparency, all of which must be in the interest of the governed and the rulers. Sharma (2007) conceptualizes the term as the extent to which a government is perceived and accepted as legitimate, while remaining committed to improving the public welfare and being responsive to the needs of its citizens in terms of delivering public services and creating an enabling policy environment for productive activities; and equitable in its distribution of benefits and appointments. Mohideen (1997) cited in Odo (2015) defines good governance as a governing system operated in accordance with legal and ethical principles as conceived by society. The definition further identifies the functional elements of good governance to include accountability, transparency, rule of law, freedom of expression and association, electoral legitimacy to mention but a few.

Virtue: This is one term that scholars have used their different lens to conceptualize. It refers to the strong resolve of an individual to always portray good character at all times. Petruzello (2026) asserts that the concept entails exhibiting good character that is in conformity with

morality. From the above definitions, it is clear that virtue connotes the ability or capacity of a person to perform acts that are good. This is why Aristotle (2000) posited that “to know the good is to do the good”, while Plato avers that there are four cardinal virtues namely: prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice (Plato, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the social contract theory as the theoretical construct. The justification of the usage of the theory emanates from its lucid clarification that governance emanates from a pact entered into by men. One of the proponents of the theory, Thomas Hobbes, avers that prior to the formation of civilized society, men lived in a state of nature where life was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short (Hobbes, 2000). To remedy the situation, Hobbes asserts that a sovereign would be chosen by the people to enthrone peace, security and ensure justice in exchange for their rights.

Implied in the above analysis by Hobbes and other proponents of the theory, is the notion of good governance, which is needed to rid the society of evils such as insecurity, greed and stealing. It is against this backdrop that the paper utilizes the theory for the study.

Achieving Good Governance in Nigeria through Justice

Globally, justice has been regarded as a pivotal virtue for attaining good governance. In fact, during the Classical

period of philosophy, Plato was the first to conceive justice as a moral virtue for achieving an ideal society, where harmony, specialization, stability and happiness of the citizenry can be attained. It is instructive to state here that justice, in Plato’s understanding, has a curative effect of ridding Athenian society of the evils promoting its destruction and advancing good governance. Following Plato, Aristotle also identifies justice as a veritable instrument capable of making government performs its function of serving as an agency for individuals to attain their potential (Stumpf, 1994). In the Contemporary era, John Rawls also believe in the efficacy of justice in resolving the incessant socio-economic and political conflicts pervading the American society of his day. For him, justice ensures the attainment of a well-ordered society, where just institutions, democratic equality, respect for the rule of law, accountability and transparency thrive in governance. Hence, his two principles of justice together with his notion of the veil of ignorance were vital in promoting a harmonious peaceful society devoid of political instability and social upheavals.

However, the elusiveness of good governance in Nigeria has attracted the attention of scholars and socio-political philosophers. These scholars are united that the absence of good governance is responsible for the many problems and socio-economic backwardness in the country. Highlighting a succinct articulation of happenings in Nigeria, Fayemi (2015) posits:

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...the long years of political misrule and bad governance exemplified by civilian administrations and military dictatorships since the country's political independence has left the nation politically de-mobilized, humanly underdeveloped and economically sterile with an ample population ravaged by poverty. Thus, with the return to democratic rule in the country in 1999, Nigerians had expected that the new wave of political leadership and democratic governance would accelerate the tide of development in the nation. The political leadership was expected to grapple with the socio-economic and political problems of the country, which border on poverty, corruption, lack of good governance, corrupt electoral system, unemployment, and insecurity, among others.

Using the above as a premise, Odo (2015) asserts that some of the above problems are not only getting worse, but appear to defy solutions. Thus, Nigerians have become deeply frustrated and disappointed over unfulfilled hopes of solving persistent economic crises, social tensions and political instability. The emergent political corruption and deceit have created widespread national disaffection, which has been hijacked by some interest groups for their own parochial purposes. Taking a cursory glance of political events in Nigeria from 2015 till date, one would also discover that injustice in federal appointments remain the order of the day as political appointments have been tilted to a particular ethnic nationality to the detriment of other tribes. This political injustice has led to cries of marginalization, particularly from people of the South-East extraction.

Justifying the above assertion, Ayodele, Aluko and Ogunjimi (2022) asserts that since 2015, bad governance has remained the bane of underdevelopment in Nigeria. It has promoted massive looting and embezzlement of public funds, entrenched lopsided appointments skewed in favour of a particular region, emasculated Nigerians by hindering the attainment of their potentials, exacerbates hunger, poverty and youth unemployment. The Niger Delta, which generates over 90 percent of the country's revenue is not left out in the injustice as their sources of livelihood have been affected.

Therefore, the solution to these challenges lies in the adoption of justice as a value to be entrenched in governance. The entrenchment of justice will promote accountability, just institutions, transparency, equity and respect for the rule of law. These, in turn will guarantee good governance, which ensures equitable distribution of benefits in society to all in an impartial manner. Showing the relevance of justice in galvanizing good governance, Onuoha and Nwachukwu (2016) also assert that the role of justice in ensuring the realization of an effective democratic society cannot be over-emphasised as justice enables the society to be regulated in such a way that growth and development are achieved. This means that justice is sufficient and necessary for promoting good governance and its centrality consists in the fact that it is a sine qua non for human development and fast-tracking of a well-ordered society, where things are properly done and

people-oriented policies are formulated for the common good of everyone. Justice as a value will make political leaders such as the President, Vice-President, Governors, Law-makers, Ministers and Commissioners to be accountable to the people. This will also promote strong institutions in Nigeria and not strong individuals with the resultant effect being sustainable socio-economic and political development.

Conclusion

The paper examines the importance of justice as a virtue for promoting good governance in Nigeria. Good governance has continued to elude Nigeria since its Independence and this has continued to agitate the minds of scholars and public affairs analysts. The general underdevelopment, unemployment, poverty, kidnappings and rising insecurity plaguing the country have solely been attributed to lack of virtue and bad governance. Thus, the paper holds that values of integrity, rule of law, accountability and transparency, which are the cornerstone of civilized democracy can only be attainable in Nigeria if justice is entrenched in governance. As one of the cardinal virtue, justice ensures equitable distribution and allocation of resources, make political leaders accountable to the people, promote just institutions and ensure fairness in political appointments with the resultant effect being socio-economic transformation in attitudes and interaction. The same way that both Plato and Rawls employed justice in achieving stability so can Nigeria harness the benefits in creating a social order devoid of banditry, bad

governance, kidnappings, terrorism and political instability.

Recommendations

The paper outlines the following recommendations as vital inputs for achieving a just, humane and stable polity in Nigeria.

1. There should be a revival of family and societal values such as honesty, hardwork and discipline so as to entrench desirable conduct/characters capable of promoting a harmonious, peaceful and stable polity devoid of mediocrity, favouritism, and injustice in Nigeria.
2. Government at all levels, including political appointees, should ensure that transparency and accountability is entrenched in governance. This would justify the confidence of the electorates in their elected representatives to represent them justly and ensure the delivery of the dividends of good governance to the citizens.
3. Government at all levels should ensure that federal character principle is upheld in the distribution of economic benefits, while all employments and appointments into public offices must be based on merit, not on favoritism, tribalism or nepotism.

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