

## **CORRUPTION WITHIN THE POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: THE PLACE OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHER KING**

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### **Abstract**

The world today is in the grip of several complications such as, corruption within the leadership circle and within the citizenry, clashes within and among the nations, climate change and global warnings etc. Such situations require cerebral leaders to facilitate collaboration among the international communities and as well enable mutual support of the citizenry and their leaders to be able to surmount these myriads of challenges effectively. This paper intends to convey the correlation between corruption and political governance in Nigeria, arguing that the major impediment to progression and development in Nigeria is corruption emanating from political governance as exemplified in policy formulation, implementation and general leadership. The aim is basically to apply the model of Philosopher king given by Plato to deal with problems of contemporary Nigeria leadership system. The objective of the study is to recognize the concept of Philosopher king and in what manner it continues to be relevant and valuable notwithstanding variations in the context and framework in which it was originally propounded. A combination of both hermeneutical and qualitative method of analysis of the concept with detailed study of Plato's political philosophy are used in the study. The study learns that the politics and governance in Nigeria have writhed for too long in the hands of political jobbers, specialized funds looters and individuals with questionable characters. The study recommends that despite some flaws of the concept of Philosopher king by Plato, it still can go a long way in resolving existing leadership and corruption challenges in Nigeria. Thus, the visions of Plato can be best appreciated by having the understanding of the context in which the discourse was advocated and learning from such references which also stays applicable in the present setting.

Keywords: Corruption, Political governance, Philosopher king

### **Introduction**

In most African countries and indeed, in Nigeria, the problem of corruption has been a critical aspect of the persistent development crisis in Africa. Obtainable records from the Transparency International as well as other related sources showed that there is a high rate of corruption in most African states. Thus, "Nigeria has ranked 145 out of 180 countries and scored 25 out of 100 points in the recently launched 2023 Corruption Perception Index, published by Transparency International Nigeria". (TI, 2024)

Notably, various countries of the world are experiencing their respective problems 'ipso facto', Nigeria has got hers and her problems are essentially drawn from corruption, fiscal crisis and criminalities, political volatility, insecurity, etc., all aiming to the question of ensuring good governance. Consequently, the problem of good governance has always generated concern in her public affairs. This is basically because Nigerians have continued to be confronted with the issue of poor visionary leadership, abuse of public office, self-centeredness of their political class.

Sharma, Sadana and Kaur (2013) observed that, Good governance establishes the rule of law, enforces contracts and agreement between the individuals, maintains law and order, guarantees security to the people, economizes on cost and resources, protects the government and properly delivers services to the society. It also determines an optimal size of the government and makes best possible use of government resources.

As a matter of fact, governance has been at the center of discussion regularly, where some people would passionately argue that there is good governance, others would argue on the opposite. However, all the positions are centered on various experiences people have about governance. For instance, seamless situations that validates such an experience narrates the mistaken accounts given by the government and leaders on security situation of the country, the misleading approach of the political class who in an attempt to be tactful, tell lies to international communities in the matters and wellbeing of the citizens. They oftentimes propose a typical government that is deceptive in the actual situation of governance of the country, etc.

The concept of Philosopher king was made prominent by Plato in his famous discourse, 'The Republic'. It basically came up as a result of Plato's dissatisfaction with the situations predominant at that time in his home town Athens. Then, the Athenian leaders operated on a style of governance that was characterized with incidences of high level corruption; where leaders were all out to satisfy their egoistic interests.

Then Plato was in his prime and in an attempt to contribute positively towards overcoming these flaws that characterized the Athenian rule, Plato offered the idea of 'Philosopher King' being the lover of wisdom and an ardent seeker of truth. Thus, the philosopher king was the foundation of Plato's model state. In view of this, Plato discovered a fundamental and lasting belief that those malevolent would never cease until philosophers become rulers or rulers become philosophers (Carugati, Ober & Weingast, 2015).

However, it appeared natural that competency ought to be the condition for leadership everywhere. The leaders of the government should be people who have the requisite aptitudes to live up to that responsibility. Therefore, those who possess the utmost of the abundant potentials should be saddled with the duty of governing the state. Consequently, the core drive of this paper is to unknot the application of Plato's idea on philosopher king in the present-day leadership predicaments in Nigeria with a view to expressing proposals for capable leadership in Nigeria applying Plato's pattern.

### **Corruption**

The concept of corruption can be viewed from several perspectives and this is based on how the offence is being committed or the nature of the offence. In the words of Adisa (2003) corruption or corrupt practices has to do with fraudulent activities especially siphoning of funds that are meant for the general populace for one's aggrandizement only. In line with this, Osoba (1996) defines corruption as an anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms and which undermines the authority's ability to improve the living condition of the people. Akinseye (2000) sees it from the perspective of 'mother of all crimes' and identifies four forms of corruption as bribery, prebendalism, graft and nepotism. Economic and Financial Crime Commission, (EFCC) which is a commission that deals with economic financial crime matter in Nigeria, through Ngwakwe (2009) defines corruption from economic standpoint as follows: the non-violent criminal and illicit activity committed with objectives of earning wealth illegally either individually or in a group or organized manner thereby violating existing legislation governing the economic activities of government and its administration. Nonetheless, a concise definition is that given by AusAID (2003) which states that corruption is the misuse of entrusted power for private gain. Kayode, Adagba & Salisu (March 2011) observe that, all over the world, and particularly in developing societies, the issue of corruption has become a major problem to be tackled, because of its corrosive impact on good governance and the socioeconomic the well-being of the people for whom government ordinarily exists for. From these definitions however, we are meant to understand that corruption is a self-seeking and fraudulent act that denies a huge majority besides the perpetrators and beneficiaries of the corrupt act, the desired benefits, such as social, economic, political, and other genuine benefits.

### **Political Governance**

Political governance is the practice of policymaking in order to articulate policy. In the meantime, the logical usage of the term governance has become more and more widespread and notion has been extensively used ever since the turn of the epoch for telling new forms of political navigation and assimilation. Thus, it begins with a synopsis of the governance discourse at the start of the 21st century. In the words of Tariq Mehraj (2020) Governance means the Process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. Governance is associated with any plans for improving government undertakings, government actions, and also boosting and improving the economic activities and, certainly, humanity as a whole. Politics therefore, becomes the study of how such choices are made. It might also be the study of how such choices or decisions ought to be made. Cambridge Dictionary defines politics as, "the activities of the government or people who try to influence the way a country is governed". While politics is the art of governance, governance becomes the use of power or authority by political leaders who are more or less the actors in the process of governance.

### **Challenges of Corruption And Political Governance in Nigeria**

The World Bank research of Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) came out with the findings that, "The problem of Africa's Development is a crisis of governance; the study affirms that because of the countervailing power that has been lacking, state officials in many countries including Nigeria have served their own interests without fear of being called to account (Lawal & Owolabi, 2012). Even though corruption is a worldwide plague, Nigeria seems to experience the pains of corruption enormously. It has become a normal conception that the nation has a culture of corruption. No doubt, Nigeria is a nation blessed with enormous wealth, a nation that is balanced on oil wealth, but virtually none of these wealth gets to the people. The endless restructurings and deficiency in credibility on the part of the leaders have subjected Nigeria to an irredeemably corrupt nation with a dubious political

governance. Politicians with dubious characters would join a political party, rig elections, and emerge winners and would mess up the entire polity with their bad governance. Other forms of corruption like embezzlement of public funds, cronyism, graft, bribery etc would become the order of the day when a bad leader ascends leadership position. In all these, one would ask, what hope does good political governance have when the leadership is severely rooted in corruption. No doubt, corruption is multifaceted as well as a stubborn and malignant worm which eats deep into the very fabric of Nigeria. In Nigeria, as in many African states, it is a malaise that inflicts the society (Obuah, 2010). The face of corruption in Nigeria's political governance is overwhelmingly devastating. Corruption has mainly contributed to the backwardness and failure of good governance in Nigeria. The country has not been able to implement policies which promote good governance and facilitate the development and success of the democratic process due to the prevalent existence of corruption at both high and low levels. (Fatile, 2012). The costs of corruption on a nation's image as well as her socio-political and economic growth are countless. The negative effect impacts on economic growth as it, among other things, reduces public spending on education (Mauro, 1997). The level of corruptions found in Nigeria political governance has continued to strangle the economic growth and cause decrease in productivity in spite of the vast resources in the country. It has continued to create adverse national image and loss of much desired income. Familoni (2007) posits that corruption has taught the Nigerian a dangerous and wrong lesson that it does not pay to be honest, hardworking and law abiding. Through corrupt means, many political office holders acquire wealth and property in and outside Nigeria; and many display their wealth (which is beyond their means), but the society does not blink.

### **Corruption and Governance in Nigeria: The Categorical Imperatives**

The issue of corruption no doubt remains a huge challenge in the growth and progress of any society. However, in order to effectively battle corruption in governance in Nigeria, there is always the need to install a machinery that will radically change the culture and legacy of corruption. Progressive revolution in Nigeria can only happen through addressing the foundation grounds of corruption and through putting into effective use, all the lawful mechanisms already in place. Here, it becomes imperative to note that despite all the efforts by government at all levels, corruption has continued to remain a vital worry, and viable efforts are necessary through many-sided approaches to curtail the danger of corruption so as to bring about good governance to the people. Oftentimes, institutions of political governance as soon as created last no longer than the government that created them. Therefore, a committed effort should be put in place to ensure that these institutions are erected on thorough moral values and orientations. Their management should be made to go through and absorb long-term moral preparations and as well as building up virtues that can be handed on to upcoming generations so as to assure integrity, transparency and responsibility in civic service. No doubt, all these will restore the depravity in agencies and organs of government, particularly the supervisory bodies such as the judiciary, police and all the anti-graft bodies.

The entire process of public procurement in Nigeria is largely marred with lots of fraud and this is one of the areas in which the government and indeed political office holders required to step up its struggles through the training of both state and non-state actors who regrettably have little or no experience in the job. The Nigerian Government must also make sure that facts associated with public contracting are followed with due process.

Today the Nigerian government has created the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000 under the aegis of Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and also the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act 2002 as well as a comprehensively reviewed and reorganized Money Laundering Act. Consequently, in all these Acts, the tools for detecting, probing and sentencing criminals are boosted. Ajibola (2006) observes that, the use of presumptions, the reversal in the burden of proof, the seizing of assets or freezing of accounts and the establishment of specialized autonomous anti-corruption agencies apart from police are included in the Anti-corruption Acts.

Freedom of press is a very essential instrument in combating corruption hence, it will be employed to instigating and demanding accountability in government through their ability to investigate and expose corrupt acts. Self-regulating and unrestricted press will also help to fight corruption by disabusing the general conception of the public that corruption is unavoidable and that investigation is always selective. The media will be used to raise public awareness, expose corruption and will assist to build a coalition to combat corruption (Olowu, 1993). Public/Civil Service has always been a conduit through which corruption happens in Nigeria. There to forestall this ugly scenario coming from them, there is need for a reform which should be effected nobly instead of the current 'window dressing policy' in this respect, the participation of the civil society becomes vital.

### **The Place of Plato's Philosopher King in Nigeria Political Governance**

Philosophy has been a foundation of motivation and ideas for social revolution since its beginnings in ancient times. There is no doubt about this because philosophy, in an effort to resolve social tasks, poses critical

investigations about the nature of human knowledge and proposes logical questions such as: Has the political system in present-day Nigerian society any moral imperfections? Does this come to thoughts while one contemplates about the country's political system? Unfortunately, such moral contemplations are certainly not brought up in the Nigerian political system due to obvious reasons, selfishness. Indeed, Nigeria's leadership disaster is so bad and disheartening that one might be forced to agree with Wambutda (1991) that

Nigeria is unquestionably in need of good leadership, for the constant change in the leadership in our history clearly testifies that we are a people groping in the dark, searching and yearning for a more reliable form of government- government that is fair, just, and caring enough to evoke spontaneous patriotism from the people.

Ehusani (2002), observes that leadership in many of today's communities in Nigeria is a contamination of leadership abilities. Instead of leadership, we have a disgraceful display of cowardly obedience and a falsification of bravery and valor.

Plato wrote a book with the title '**Republic**', whereby inside the book the theory of democracy is discussed, providing a stage or radiating a driving force for his idea of the ideal state in the Republic. In his philosophy Plato provides a prominent place to the concept of the philosopher ruler. 'Philosopher king', the notion according to which the superlative form of government is that in which philosophers rule. It is to be noted that Plato borrowed the idea of philosopher king from his master Socrates, who defined a philosopher as one who loved wisdom, had an appetite for knowledge, and was always inquisitive and eager to learn.

The model of a philosopher king was born in Plato's dialogue known as 'Republic' which as a matter of fact is part of the dream of a just city. It was prominent in the Roman Empire and was even rejuvenated in European political teachings in the time of absolutist monarchs. The rulers in the Plato's theory had the tasks of maintaining and upholding the interests of the whole community. Their objective is, as expressed by Plato in the 'Republic', giving orders and happiness to the state. The prevailing states according to Plato were unsatisfactory because philosophers were not rulers, which is the reason why he propounded the notion of philosopher king. The idea of the philosopher ruler was the fulcrum of Plato's Ideal State. It was consequent upon his conviction that the philosopher had the intellect, knowledge and training to render good political governance. No doubt, ruling, like any other job, necessitates talents and experiences, and the purpose was basically the over-all well-being of all. A good ruler therefore was one who not only looked-after the lives of his people, but also improved their lives as human beings. According to Plato, the philosopher ruler was the correct person to govern, hence he would be less stirred about gaining power for self- status.

Plato's idea of the ideal state in his socio-philosophy stipulates the criteria for both active and aspirant Nigerian political leaders. Plato has plainly presented that there are three classes of citizens centered on their natural gifts: artisans, auxiliaries, and guardians.

**The Artisans:** This is the class of the citizens, which includes the craftsmen/women, labourers, commercial drivers, local farmers. In Plato's words

But we cautioned the shoemaker, you know, against attempting to be an agriculturist or a weaver or a builder besides, with a view to our shoemaking work being well done; and to every other artisan we assigned in like manner one occupation, namely that of which he was naturally fitted and in which if he let other things alone and wrought at it all his time without neglecting his opportunities, he was likely to prove a successful workman (Plato, 1991, p. 56).

One significant fact in the above is that each one of these artisans should focus and major in the talent which is gifted by nature for the reason that there is no one in the world who would make the best out of what he desires to become without concentration and practice.

**The Auxiliaries:** The auxiliaries are persons who are skilled by nature to be strong-willed and fearless. Therefore, they are the soldiers and in addition include any one in that group whose duty is to guard the state and preserve its national integrity against trespassers both foreign and domestic. Plato uses the boldness of a well-trained dog to feature the abilities required of the auxiliaries thus:

...they ought both of them to be quick to discover an enemy, and swift to overtake him when discovered, and strong also, in case they have to fight when they have come up with him. Certainly, all these qualities are required. Moreover, they must be brave if they are to fight well...Nevertheless, they certainly ought to be gentle to their friends and dangerous only to their enemies, else they will not wait for others to destroy them, but will be the first to do it for themselves (Plato, 1991).

Consequently, the state requires a very strong army to push away invaders or react to assaults of war in order to protect lives and property.

### **The Guardians:**

Plato highlighted what it takes and the roles of the guardian since the health, harmony, and fairness in the state rest on how discreet and effective the guardians are talented to organize the other classes so as to function amicably. The guardians are anticipated to have three straightforward qualities namely: temperance, courage, and wisdom. Temperance has to do with the ability to regulate one's appetite for things like eating and drinking. Courage deals with the ability to overcome fear, threat, and insight to handle applied issues towards correct decisions.

However, of these three categories of hierarchy in the state, the guardians (rulers) which in our present-day circumstance can be referred to as the political leaders perform the key and most complex functions of managing and bringing together the other two classes of people in the state namely: the auxiliaries and the artisans. In other words, in the mind of Plato, political leaders are entrusted with the most sensitive responsibilities of the state. Accordingly, an extraordinary educational package was planned for them to undergo, and only those that are successful are fit to rule. This is distinct through scholastic training. Although it seems that he paid extra attention to the guardian class than the artisan and auxiliary classes no doubt, it is for the reason that the guardians controlled or presided over the other classes for justice to carry the day in the state.

Plato has evidently presented that there are three classes of citizens centered on their natural gifts, namely: artisans, auxiliaries, and guardians. Although it looks as if that he paid more consideration to the guardian class than the artisan and auxiliary classes nonetheless, it is for the reason that the guardians controlled the other classes for the prevalence of justice in the state.

With this, the main and basic stage of education that goes on till the age of fifteen is what is equivalent to the contemporary school certificate in Nigeria. Possibly, the final stages would be comparable to university education in Nigeria. Thus, (Ariche, 2015) opines that Nigerian presidents and governors, from independence in 1960 to then (and indeed to date), with this qualification, have suffered a leadership deficit in comparison with those that have earned higher qualifications like Bachelor's or doctorate degrees.

Ariche, further agrees with Plato, upholds that only philosophers have the power of dialectical reasoning. However, the relevance of this to the Nigeria situation is that the country's rulers could be either prospective artisans, auxiliaries, or accidental guardians because here senior school education had yet to classify the people. Ariche, (2015) further observes that, Nigerian presidents and governors, from independence in 1960 to then (and indeed to date), with this qualification, have suffered a leadership deficit in comparison with those that have earned higher qualifications like Bachelor's or doctorate degrees. This is why Nigeria is moreover not capable of transiting from the state of deteriorations into the state of progress.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria although a nation with vast potentials, has been tainted by several problems. The country has been agonized with a severe lack of skilled and responsible leaders with moral character, vision, and integrity. This is owing to defective leadership and extensive corruption, which are all signs of weak and failing governmental institutions that were brought about by poor governance. As a result of the poor performance of our political leaders, several advantages of good political governance which includes good roads, rural electricity, pipe bore water and healthcare services, have hitherto to be enjoyed by many Nigerians. In the entire work, the fight for good political governance in Nigeria and the place of Plato's theory of Ideal State were extensively explored. Plato's philosophy might appear dried, intangible and inapplicable in contemporary societies, but then again some parts of it may be adapted and amended as a guide to resolve existing truths. Thus, by estimation, Plato's opinions on preparation to meet the requirements of the Guardians would serve as a leader to rescue Nigeria from this leadership challenge because the art of leadership is too intricate for a school certificate holder to comprehend and explore. Consequently, Plato's ideal state was centered on his notion of man as a rational, social, political and moral being. Plato desired the kind of the social order with the needed conditions or potentials for realization of man's natural needs in line with the hierarchy of man's social position. In lieu of this he says, "If we have founded it (state) properly, our state is presumably perfect... Then it will obviously have the qualities of wisdom, courage, self-discipline, and justice". The helpful contributions of Plato in the arena of education have unlimited applicable inferences on Nigeria's educational system. It offers the basis for Nigerians to educate and choose their government responsively and responsibly. Consequently, Plato's notion of education of the artisans (masses) in accordance with the needs of each skill fit in to vocational training, which is essential for skill procurement for valuable living in the Nigerian society. With these, leadership problems would be drastically minimized in Nigeria.

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