

CICERO'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE NATURE OF GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The paper affirms the propositions as suggested by various political theorists that, the state exists to enhance moral order within society. People surrender certain rights to the state, which, in return, is tasked with ensuring order, peace, security, and progress. In this sense, the state is often conceptualised as a social contract, where governance involves a covenant between the government and the governed. While citizens are expected to support their government, the government, in turn, must fulfill its obligation meet by establishing institutions and fostering an environment conducive to the welfare of its people. Central to this framework is the Constitution, which defines and governs the state through a system of law.. However, the promise of good governance remains elusive for many governments. This paper explores governance in Nigeria through the lens of Cicero's political philosophy, exploring both speculative and analytical methods of philosophical investigation. The findings reveal that good governance in Nigeria is more of an illusion than a reality. The paper concludes by suggesting that Cicero's ideas could serve as a guide to African states, particularly Nigeria, by emphasising the importance of prioritising citizens' welfare in government policies and actions.

Keywords: Governance, Welfare, Constitution, Law, Politics Equity and Morality

Introduction

The paper aims to critically examine governance in Africa, with specific focus on Nigeria, through the lens of Cicero's political philosophy. Cicero, a prominent Roman statesman and philosopher emphasized the importance of justice, moral integrity, and the welfare of the citizens as foundational principles of good governance. His political ideas, especially regarding the responsibilities of the state and the covenant between rulers and the ruled, offer a timeless framework for addressing the challenges the challenges of governance in modern states.

Scholars have long debated the relationship between governance and moral order. Prominent Political theorists such as John Locke (1669)¹ and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762)² introduced the concept of social contract, where the individuals surrender certain freedoms to the state in exchange for protection and promotion of common welfare. In the African context, scholars like Ake (1996)³ and Ekeh (1975)⁴ have critiqued the failure of post-colonial states to achieve good governance, citing corruption, institutional decay, and leadership deficits as major impediments. This work provide essential insights into the persistence governance crisis in Africa which often lack a philosophical grounding that explores classical ideas as solution.

Given the above, Cicero's political philosophy will be used as a theoretical lens to analyse governance in Nigeria. Drawing on his idea, particularly his emphasis on moral leadership, justice, and the prioritisation of citizen's welfare, this paper will attempt to bridge a gap in the existing literature that often overlooks the relevance of classical political thought in addressing modern governance issues. However, the paper attempt to justify the urgent need to address governance deficits in Nigeria, where the state has struggled to fulfill its responsibilities to the people. Despite numerous reforms and constitutional provisions, governance in Nigeria remains plagued by systematic corruption, insecurity, and lack of accountability.

On the basis of this, the paper is structured as follows: introduction, an exposition of Cicero's political philosophy, the nature of governance in Nigeria, Cicero's political thought and the Nigerian experience, analysis of Cicero's system of governance and Nigeria system of governance, and conclusion.

Exposition of Cicero's Political Philosophy

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 B.C – 43 B.C) was a Roman senator, statesman, lawyer, scholar, and writer known for preserving Republican ideals in the wake of civil wars that destabilised the Roman Republic. Concerned about the decline of the republican constitution, Cicero's primary political goal was to restore the Roman constitution to its pre-revolutionary form. He viewed the Roman constitution, shaped by various minds and evolving through responses to political challenges, as the most stable and perfect government that history had produced⁵. Cicero's political philosophy was deeply rooted in stoicism composed of . law as right reason in the state, reason as ruler of the state, natural law, human equality as backed by natural law, and on the republican and welfare of the people.

¹. John Locke, *Two Treatise of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969)

². Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962)

³. Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1996)

⁴. Peter P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1 (1975)

⁵. George H. Sabine and Thomas L. Thorson, *A History of Political Theory*, 4th ed. (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1973),

i. On Law as Right Reason in the State

Cicero's political philosophy is grounded in the belief that "law is the highest reason, rooted in nature, commanding what must be done and prohibiting the opposite"⁶. Once this reason is internalized and secured in the human mind, "it becomes the law"⁷. The idea of reason governing the state is not unique to Cicero but has been echoed by various political theorists throughout history. Plato, in his *Republic*, assigns rational governance to philosopher kings, while in the *Statesman*, he exemplifies reason in an absolute ruler who possesses the knowledge to govern. In *Laws*, Plato argues that reason resides within the legislator. Similarly, Aristotle asserts that "every state is a community of some kind, established with a view to some good," and that rational governance must be embedded in the Constitution"⁸. St. Thomas Aquinas also contends that political society inherently involves government, as no society can exist without it. Government's primary duty is to provide for individuals' basic needs and good life."⁹

Aquinas argues that a government truly committed to this goal must uphold three key principles: peace, moral life, and the provision of life's necessities. He articulates this view in his *Summa Theologica* thus:

For the good reason of the community, three things are required. First, that the community should be established in the unity of peace. Second that the community, united in in the bond of peace, should be directed to good actions... Third, that, through the ruler's diligence there should be sufficient supply of the necessities for the good life¹⁰.

In principle, Aquinas' first two points emphasize the importance of vibrant political institutions while the third highlights the need for effective leadership. A responsible government is judged by its ability to adequately provide the necessities of a good life for its citizens.

Modern political thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Rawls also stressed the role of reason in civil society. For Thomas Hobbes, civil society is formed through the exercise of reason, which guides individuals in overcoming the brutality, isolation, and poverty of the state of nature. John Locke viewed reason as a virtue essential for protecting individual liberty. Jean

⁶. Fred D. Miller Jr., "The Rule of Reason in Cicero's Philosophy of Law," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. S1 (1986): 321-333

⁷. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*, edited by James E. G. Zetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 1-15

⁸. Graaf, Gjalt and van Asperen, Hanneke. "The Art of Good Governance: How Images from Past Provide Inspiration for Modern Practice." *International Review of Administrative Science* 82, no. 4 (2016): 405-420.

⁹. Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947): Bk1.chp.15

¹⁰. Aquinas, *Summa*, Bk1, Chap.15

Jacques Rousseau argued that reason is embodied in the "general will," which supersedes individual interests. Meanwhile, John Rawls saw reason as the principle of social justice within the state. Thus, a state's laws are seen as custodians of its reason.

ii. Reason as the Ruler of the State

Cicero views "reason as the defining and universal trait of human beings"¹¹. He believes that reason elevates humans above animals, enabling us to make inferences, construct arguments, refute claims, and engage in discussions and demonstrations. "The most significant aspect of reason is that it is shared by all, and although individuals may differ in their knowledge, everyone possesses the same capacity to learn"¹². He asserts that since reason governs, politics should be guided by reason, to improve human life by expanding resources and ensuring safety through thoughtful plans and efforts"¹³. Cicero ultimately holds that reason is the sole justification for the rule, and it is embedded in natural law, which gives legitimacy to all other laws.

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iii. Natural Law

The Stoic notion of natural law was given a redefinition by Cicero. For him, "natural law is right reason in agreement with nature"¹⁷. He conceives that the validity of any law or human convention is dependent on its accord with the dictates of nature. Cicero maintains that nature has endowed mankind with the law it must obey, discernible by reason. Hence, the natural law, for him, is a universal law of nature that originates from God, does not change, and applies to all men and nations. He accents thus:

¹¹. Omoregbe, Joseph. *Social-Political Philosophy and International Relations: A Systematic and Historical Study*. P 24.

¹². Miller, Fred. "The Rule of Reason in Cicero's Philosophy of Law" p321

¹³. Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*

¹⁴. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Republic*, trsns, Niall Rudd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p3

¹⁵. Miller, Fred. "The Rule of Reason in Cicero's Philosophy of Law" p322

¹⁶. Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*, p30

¹⁷. Essien, Ephraim, Ukpe, Anietie and Iniodu, John. *Political Philosophy and Practice*. (Uyo: Advantage Media House, 2014)' p82

There is a true law – namely, right reason – which is by nature, applies to all men, and is unchangeable and eternal. By its commands this law summons men to the performance of their duties: by its obligations, it restrains them from doing wrong. Its commands and prohibitions always influence good men but are without effect upon the bad. To invalidate this law by human legislation is never morally right, nor is it permissible ever to restrict its operation, and to annul it wholly is impossible... But there will be one law, eternal and unchangeable, binding at all times upon all peoples; and there will be, as it were one common master and ruler of men namely, God who is the author of this law, its interpreter, and sponsor. The man who will not obey it will abandon his better self and in denying the true nature of man, will thereby suffer the severest of penalties, though he has escaped all other consequences men call punishment”¹⁸

Cicero sees the law of nature as the standard of right and wrong both in human conducts and in nobody or government can dispense anybody from its obligation. The point here is that, law of right reason, is a natural law and as such moral. Therefore, the quality of governance in a state depicts the moral standard of its leaders. In other words, politics and morality intertwine in the pursuit of responsive governance.

iv. Human Equality is Backed by Natural Law

Natural law shifted the discourse of equality into a right-based framework that offered increased opportunities for individuals to assert the idea of equality in a political-legal sense. The observation by Clifford merely restates the position which stresses the equality of all men before the law of nature. This equality, according to him, arises from reason as a property common to all men. He elucidates:

Out of all the material of the philosopher's discussions, surely there comes nothing more valuable than the full realization that we are born for justice, and that is based, not upon man's opinion, but upon Nature. This fact will immediately be plain if you once get a clear conception of man's fellowship and union with his fellow men. For no single thing is so like another: Nay, if bad habits and false beliefs did not twist the direction they are inclined, no one would be so like his own self as men would be like others¹⁹.

John Rawls in his social contract points out that it is impossible to discuss social justice without equality of rights. In his first principle of social justice, he states that: “Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all”²⁰. Rawls advocates for social institutions that will aid the distribution of

¹⁸. Cicero, *On Commonwealth*, pp11-22

¹⁹. Clifford, Jarlath. “Locating Equality: From Historical Philosophical Thought to Modern Legal Norms.” In Petrova, Dimitrina (Ed.). *The Equal Rights Review*. (UK: Prontapaint Bayswater, 2008), p96

²⁰. Rawls John, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), p219

fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages and social cooperation”²¹. By this “major institution, he means the political Constitution and the main and social arrangements of the society.

The notion of human equality is a very important and crucial discussion in a democratic society. It constitutes an important aspect of any Constitution. This position is echoed by Dewey when he states that:

“All individuals are entitled to equality of treatment by law and its administration...Each one is equally an individual and entitled to equal opportunity to develop his own capacities, be they large or small in range”²².

The social philosophy that underlies the conception of human equality is an egalitarian understanding of social justice and of the common good, wherein the moral worth of equality is centered on its ability to provide equal outcomes for individuals or at the very least a satisfactory outcome for the most disadvantaged groups”²¹. In Nigeria, however, there are problems arising from inequality, especially in areas such as gender and ethnicity.

v. On the Republic and the Welfare of Citizens

A republic is a system of government in which the supreme power rests with citizens who are entitled to vote, and this power is exercised by elected officials accountable to the people and governed by law”²². The republican form of government is often regarded as the most appropriate for diverse societies. Cicero refers to the state as *res publica*, meaning "the affair of the people"²³. He argues that the state belongs to the people, as its authority originates from them, and thus, the people own both the state and its laws. He avers:

The commonwealth, then, is the people's affair; and the people is not every group of men, associated in any manner, but is the coming together of a considerable number of men who are united by a common agreement about law and rights and by the desire to participate in mutual advantages”²⁴.

Cicero emphasizes that the state is a commonwealth or a common property of the people and derives its authority of government from the collective power of the people. The authority of the people resides in the will of the people. The people choose the leader who must act according to

²¹. Ibid., p.215

²². John Dewey, “Democracy and Educational Administration.” In Abernethy, George. *Introduction to the Idea of Equality: An Anthology*. United States: John Knox Press, 1959

²³. Clifford, Jarlath. “Locating Equality: From Historical Philosophical Thought to Modern Legal Norms.” In Petrova, Dimitrina (Ed.). *The Equal Rights Review*. P.18

²⁴. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*. Merriam-Webster Inc.

law”²⁵. “For as the laws govern the magistrate, so the magistrate governs the people, and it can truly be said that the magistrate is a speaking law, and the law is silent magistrate”²⁶.

Essien et al. outlines four laid down general principles of government according to Cicero as follows:

- i. The authority proceeds from the people;
- ii. That authority should be exercised only by warrant of law;
- iii. That authority is justified only on moral grounds; and
- iv. That the welfare of the people is the supreme law (*Salus populi supreme lex*)”²⁷

One of the key influences of Cicero's thought lies in his ideal of liberty and free agreement, which significantly shaped English republicanism”²⁸. His ideas also laid the foundation for early American republicanism, where the concept of freedom justified the protection of individuals' basic rights, such as security from harm, protection of private property, and the liberty to engage with their environment. Cicero's thought helped establish the connection between individual and political liberty. He preceded John Locke, who later aligned with Cicero's belief that the legitimacy of government is rooted in the consent of the people.

The Nature of Governance in Nigeria

Governance in Nigeria has been characterised by a mix of potential and persistent challenges. Despite its democratic framework, Nigeria is facing significant issues of weak institutions, widespread corruption, and a lack of accountability. Though Nigeria operates under the federal system with a constitution designed to uphold the rule of law and democratic principles, but in reality, governance in Nigeria has diverged from these ideals. Power is concentrated in the hands of few elites, and the legal system has been subverted to serve personal or political interest rather than the common good. Corruption permeates various levels of government which undermines public trust and hinders the effective delivery of essential services such as education, healthcare and infrastructure. Equally of importance is the fact that, Nigeria is marked by ethnic and regional tension, which is having negative impact on policy decisions and promoting inequalities. Security challenges such as insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts, further complicate government efforts, diverting resources and attention away from development priorities.

Since gaining independence, Nigeria has been confronted with governance challenges that are reflective of broader issues experienced across much of Africa. As Rotberg notes, "the state of

²⁵. Cicero. *On the Commonwealth (Republic 4)* pp. 1-25

²⁶. Ibid.,

²⁷. Essien, et,al. *Political Philosophy and Practice*. P.67

²⁸. Cicero, *On the Law* 3. P.1-2 _____

governance on the continent is indeed worrying"²⁹.

Rotberg's assertion above highlights the pervasive challenges that undermine effective governance across Africa. It reflects the widespread issues such as weak institutions, corruption, poor leadership, and lack of accountability that characterize many African states. These challenges hinder economic development, exacerbate poverty, and bring about instability, therefore creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.

To address these challenges, Nigeria's Vision 2010 document thereby outlined principles for "good governance, including transparency, equity, rule of law, an independent judiciary, public participation, and a high standard of living"³⁰. However, despite these aspirations, governance challenges have persisted as a critical issue in the country. Widespread corruption, poor leadership, and failure to uphold these ideals created an environment that ultimately paved the way for military interventions, as the nation's governance system struggled to address these systemic flaws. Okene observes that "the military era was marked by coups, counter-coups, corruption, and instability, which undermined democracy and resulted in a civil war just six years after independence"³¹. Since then, governance has deteriorated, with Fagbadebo "noting that "rather than serving the people, the Nigerian state serves the ruling oligarchy"³².

Ibrahim's analysis of governance in Nigeria using international standards, such as the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and inclusion, reveals significant shortcomings"³³ Good leadership is essential to good governance, and the persistent issues in Nigeria are closely linked to poor leadership"³⁴. Nigerian governance is plagued by corruption, godfatherism, lack of visionary leaders, and ethnic divisions. Onimi elucidates thus:

This country exists only in name and as a geographical expression. The quest for relevance by many ethnic groups has given rise to mutual distrust and disharmony.... Nigeria is a nation only to foreigners or while one is abroad, but inside the country, everyone knows to which ethnic nationality he belongs

... When you hear people fighting for the North or the South, it is a push of their ethnic agenda and evidence of ethnocentrism and a vote of no hope in Nigerian

²⁹. Rotberg, Robert. *The Roots of Africa's Leadership Deficit*. P.1

³⁰. Ekundayo, Woleola. "Good Governance Theory and the Quest for Good Governance in Nigeria." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, (2017). Pp 154-161

³¹. Okene, Ahmed. "National Security, Good Governance and Integration in Nigeria Since 1999: A Discourse." *Asian Social Science Journal*, Pp 166-176

³². Fagbadebo, Omololu. "Nigeria and the Perennial Problem of Governance: Explaining State Future in the Midst of Abundant Resources." *Journal of Social Policy and National Productivity*, (2009), Pp 20-25

³³. Magami Ibrahim. *The Ibrahim Index of African Governance*. <http://www.alafrikanprogress.net> (2020)

³⁴. Ekundayo, Woleola. "Good Governance Theory, op.cit., P.159

'nationhood'... Because no one owns Nigeria, no one is loyal to her. A nationless state lacks the patriotism to sustain common values, create and maintain the Commonwealth and so, adopts ad hoc methods or solutions to lingering problems. In a nationless country, citizenship is meaningless, for you don't even know the nation 'Nigeria,' not to talk of being one of her citizens³⁵.

Omogbe, also observes that Nigeria is “a country richly endowed by God with both natural and human resources”³⁶. Yet, he refers to it as a “beggar country today, with huge and crushing debt while ironically Nigerian millionaires, multi-millionaires, and even billionaires abound everywhere. As the country acquires more money through the sale of oil, the money goes into private accounts and she gets poorer while few citizens get richer. Nigeria, like many African states, is a center of bad governance. The welfare of the people is not guaranteed and there is no respect for the law of the state as the law only binds the 'inferior' class while the 'superior' class owns the law.

Cicero Political Thought in the Light of Nigerian Experience

The attempt to detach politics from morality poses a significant challenge to the political development of African states. Historically, the political landscape has been perceived as deeply corrupt, inhabited by individuals with questionable ethics. One prevalent expectation for engaging in politics in Africa is a complete abandonment of moral integrity. Consequently, it is not surprising that individuals who assume political roles in Africa often act as if they are above the law. The prevailing view is that politics is a realm where virtuous individuals are unwelcome.

This phenomenon is notably evident in Nigeria, where the absence of effective governance initiatives is a direct result of a political environment devoid of moral principles. Omogbe anticipated this issue, stating, “Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale”³⁷. This suggests that a government comprised of dishonest and self-serving individuals, whose primary goal is personal enrichment, is not truly a government but rather a band of thieves and embezzlers. In essence, when morality is stripped from governance, the institution itself disintegrates into a criminal enterprise with the keys to national resources in the hands of the corrupt. Cicero writes:

Virtue is not some kind of knowledge to be possessed without using it: even if the intellectual possession of knowledge can be maintained without use, virtue consists entirely in its employment; moreover, its most important employment is the governance of states and the accomplishment in deeds rather than words

³⁵. Onimisi, Samuel. “Ethnicity and Nigerian Politics.” *The Sun Newspaper*

³⁶. Omogbe, Joseph. *Social-Political Philosophy and International Relations*, P.147

³⁷. Ibidem, p.130

of the things that philosophers talk about in their corners³⁸.

Cicero's deep concern for the intersection of ethical values and politics reflects his belief that the character and political wisdom of individuals is crucial for advancing and sustaining the broader goals of society³⁹. Cicero encapsulated the importance of moral awareness in the pursuit of a better state. According to him, "The Roman commonwealth rests on its traditions and its men, *moribus antiquitis res stat Romana virisque*"⁴⁰. He portrayed the ideal state leader as one possessing strong moral character, intelligence, and skill in statecraft. Such a person, he asserted, serves as "the guide and helmsman of the state"⁴¹. When we apply Cicero's perspective to the Nigerian context, it becomes evident that the primary challenge to governance in Nigeria stems from corruption, a direct consequence of moral decline among those in power. To make meaningful progress, individuals entrusted with the responsibility of managing state affairs must possess proven moral integrity. Without this commitment to ethical leadership, the governance of the country will remain in the hands of corrupt individuals who advantage of their positions.

Aristotle also stressed the importance of the rule of law when he asserts that:

It is more proper that law should govern than any one of the citizens: upon the same principle, if it is advantageous to place the supreme power in some particular persons, they should be appointed to be only guardians and the servants of the laws⁴².

In his view, the law represents an impartial reason and fairness, whereas governance by individuals alone is prone to bias, personal ambition, and corruption. When the law is supreme, it ensures that all citizens, including leaders, are held accountable to the same standards. However, in Nigeria, the rule of law is often subverted, allowing individuals or groups in power to govern arbitrarily rather than in service to the law. This is evident in cases where legal systems are manipulated to favour the elites, protect corrupt officials, and suppress dissent, rather than ensuring justice and equity for all citizens.

Cicero asserts that everyone must be subject to the law, emphasizing that true freedom cannot exist without it. He states, "The magistrates who administer the law, the judges who act as its spokespersons, and all of us who live as its servants grant it our allegiance as a guarantee of our freedom"⁴³. He does not exempt any state member from the law's authority. The modern concept

³⁸. Cicero, *On the Commonwealth* bk 1. P.3

³⁹. Zetzel, James (Ed.). "Introduction." In Cicero. *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*. P.ix

⁴⁰. Cicero, *Republic* 2. P.51

⁴¹. *Ibidem*, p.21

⁴². Aristotle. *The Politics*. P.16

⁴³. Cicero, *On the Law Bk. 2*. p.217

of the rule of law can be summarised into three foundational principles: the supremacy of the law, equality before the law, and citizens' inherent and inalienable rights. The rule of law differs from the rule by law; the former signifies the law's supremacy in the state and reflects a political framework where all citizens receive equal treatment under the law. In contrast, the rule by law often elevates certain individuals above legal accountability.

The situation in Nigeria reflects a troubling reality where the rule of law is often undermined. Rather than serving as a tool for justice and fairness, the law has frequently been used to entrench injustice and suppress dissent. Those who dare to critique the government or expose its shortcomings are often targeted and silenced under the guise of legal action. For instance, the enactment and enforcement of laws such as the controversial Cybercrimes (prohibition, prevention, etc.) Act, particularly in *section 24*, have been used to intimidate, journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens. This law has been wielded not to protect citizens but rather to penalize critics of the government under the claim of cyberstalking or defamation. The legislature, which is constitutionally tasked with representing the interest of the people and upholding justice, appears increasingly detached from its mandate by prioritising self-serving laws such as approving extravagant salaries and allowances for lawmakers while failing to address pressing issues like widespread poverty, unemployment, and insecurity.

Nigeria exemplifies the rule by law rather than the rule of law, which has had detrimental effects on governance. In this system, ruling elites often act corruptly, shielded by the law. In a country where leaders perceive themselves as “the law,” achieving good governance becomes impossible unless they too are held accountable to legal standards. Violating the rule of law is never beneficial for any government or individual; when this occurs, it leads to widespread issues, as seen in Nigeria. Wolfgang observes that “in mainstream economic discourse, crises emerge as consequences for governments that fail to adhere to the laws that genuinely govern the economy”⁴⁴.

Cicero's political thought on the Stability of Government and Citizen's Welfare is also an important area of his political philosophy. Political stability is characterized by a government's ability to maintain its power, ensure peace, uphold law and order, and remain shielded from external threats⁴⁵. When discussing a government's self-maintenance, it refers to its capacity to remain in office for the duration stipulated by the constitution. Achieving this requires the government to earn the support, favor, and loyalty of the populace. The most effective approach to gain this support is by prioritising the welfare of the citizens in government policies and

⁴⁴ Streeck, Wolfgang. *The Crisis in Context: Democratic Capitalism and its Contradiction*. New Left Review, Vol. 71. P.29

⁴⁵ Omoregbe. *Social-Political Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, P.57

actions. In essence, the government should be people-oriented in both its policies and its execution, and this orientation must be evident to the public”⁴⁶. Consequently, political stability is best assured in states that adopt welfare-oriented governance, as the ultimate justification for political authority lies in the well-being of the people.

Cicero asserts that the state exists primarily to serve the welfare of its citizens, viewing this as the highest good a state can achieve. He contends that ensuring the welfare of the populace should be regarded as the supreme law. Advocating for a just and egalitarian society, Cicero emphasizes that justice and fairness are foundational to political stability. The most effective means of ensuring political stability is through the fulfillment of citizens' basic needs, which fosters comfort and happiness. However, Nigeria has faced significant political tensions and instability stemming from issues such as marginalization, poor governance, and misrepresentation. The alarming rise of violence, terrorism, and kidnapping in Nigeria highlights the government's struggle to maintain its authority. While such trends may be prevalent in modern society, in Nigeria, they are largely driven by ineffective governance that has failed to secure the welfare of its citizens, leading to a descent into anarchy. For Nigeria to achieve stability, the government must prioritize the welfare of its citizens, which includes safeguarding them from criminal threats. A balanced system of reward and punishment should be established, wherein deserving citizens are recognized while those who merit punishment face consequences as prescribed by law. To foster political stability in Nigeria, it is crucial to eliminate the politicization of justice based on ethnic, political, and religious affiliations.

In the same vein, ethnicity is undeniably another significant barrier to good governance in Nigeria. Kings notes that “Nigeria's ethnic diversity stems from its complex territorial makeup, encompassing various backgrounds, ancestries, and traditions”⁴⁷. The unequal treatment of citizens based on ethnicity is a pervasive characteristic of political leadership in many African nations. To achieve effective governance in Nigeria, addressing the issue of ethnicity is essential. Cicero's concept of universal citizenship could help mitigate ethnic tensions. Government officials should abandon nepotism and view all tribes as integral parts of a sovereign entity governed by the same laws. This shift would promote equality and justice. Achieving this requires the presence of true statesmen in government who consistently prioritize the welfare of the state as the highest law.

Cicero also talks about the constitution and political institutions as pivotal in the running of a state. According to him:

the growth of a state is contingent upon its legal system and its internalization.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p.58

⁴⁷ Kings, Solomon. “The Issues of Ethnicity in the Federal System of Government in Nigeria.” P. 1

A genuinely people-centered constitution must reflect the will and desires of its citizens. A constitution that denies its people their welfare cannot foster equality”⁴⁸. Hawley, in his exploration of Cicero's political thought, argues that the liberal ideals of individual protection from interference and harm can only be realized through political institutions that empower citizens to defend themselves against violations⁴⁹.

He further asserts that free institutions such as suffrage, the rule of law, and elements of popular governance:

are crucial for safeguarding citizens' liberties. Only through such institutions, where citizens have a genuine voice, can suffrage, the rule of law, and elements of popular governance be crucial for safeguarding citizens' liberties. Only through such institutions, where citizens have a genuine voice, can liberty be preserved by the rule of law, not the rule of men. Thus, the liberty of the state and the liberty of its citizens are intrinsically linked. Ultimately, liberty becomes a central goal of a just regime⁵⁰.

The Constitution serves as the most powerful political institution within any state. Constitutions and constitutionalism are often viewed as the most viable means of dismantling oppressive internal colonialism and restructuring governance to align with the will of the people. This perspective resonates with many Nigerians advocating for a review of the existing constitution, which has been criticized for fostering inequality. The Nigerian constitution is widely regarded as an imposed and undemocratic framework that fails to provide a solid foundation for effective governance. The survival of Nigerian democracy hinges on the acceptability of its constitution, which calls for action from various groups, human rights advocates, women's organizations, ethnic groups, and pro-democracy activists, who believe that addressing issues of inequality in resource allocation and access to power necessitates constitutional reform. To achieve effective governance in Nigeria, it is essential to strengthen political institutions, which is directly related to the legal framework.

Analysis of Cicero's Republican System of Government and Nigeria's System of Government

Cicero outlined a model for a truly republican system of government, which he considered the best political structure. In a republic, all classes of citizens are fully represented, supported by strong checks and balances to limit the excesses of each group. Cicero emphasised that “*res*

⁴⁸ Cicero, Republic bk 1. Pp. 25

⁴⁹ Hawley, Michael. “Cicero's Legacy and the Story of Modern Liberty”. Pp 162-163

⁵⁰ Hawley, *ibid.*, p.165

publica” is a “thing of the people,” and clarified that by 'a people,' he refers, not to any arbitrary association but to “a large assembly in agreement to justice and collective welfare”⁵¹. He argued that a republic is distinct from other associations because its members are united by shared principles of justice governing their relationships.

Evaluating Nigeria's republican system against Cicero's model reveals significant shortcomings, including exclusion, inequality, self-interest, and a lack of power separation among governmental institutions. Although Nigeria comprises the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the president's role as commander-in-chief often undermines the independence of these entities. The legislature tends to operate in alignment with the president's preferences, while the judiciary frequently appears to be a tool of the ruling government. This dynamic persists at the state and local government levels, where governors and local leaders exert control over other branches. Such arrangements compromise the separation of powers and distort Nigeria's justice system, leading to widespread oppression. There is a noticeable disconnect between the citizenry and the government, largely because many in authority lack genuine mandates from the people, instead emerging from a system of political patronage that prioritizes the interests of political godfathers. In this context, Nigeria's republic becomes more about the agendas of powerful figures than about the people's will. Even the principle of federal character has been manipulated into a reward system for loyalty.

To experience true governance in Nigeria, it is imperative to reconsider the structure of its republic in light of Cicero's model, where all citizens are represented, justice prevails, transparency is upheld, powers are distinct, and the populace has the authority to elect accountable leaders.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the erosion of justice and the rule of law in Nigeria through the work of Cicero's political philosophy. Cicero's ideas on the supremacy of law, the role of virtue in leadership, and the necessity of justice as the foundation of governance provide a powerful foundation for understanding Nigeria's challenges. The central aim has been to how Cicero's principles highlight the failures of governance in Nigeria, particularly the manipulation of laws by those in power to perpetuate injustice and suppress dissent. The central argument has established that Nigeria's governance problems emanate from a deviation from the principles of good governance as advocated by Cicero. Instead of being an impartial force that upholds justice and promotes the common good, the law in Nigeria is often used by the political elites to serve personal and partisan interests. This misuse undermines public trust in institutions and creates a society marked by inequality, and social unrest. As put forward by Cicero, justice is the

⁵¹. Cicero, Republic bk 1. Pp.1, 25, 39, 64-65

foundation of a legitimate state, and without it, governance becomes a form of tyranny that resonates strongly with the Nigerian experience.

Cicero's insistence on the moral duty of leaders to serve the law and uphold justice eschews the philosophical importance of this paper. Unlike the political scientist approach, which might focus on institutional weakness or policy failure, this work emphasizes the ethical dimension of leadership and governance. Cicero's political thought calls for a return to virtuous leadership where the law is supreme, and where leaders are guided by reason, justice, and commitment to the public good. This normative measure of moral uprightness differentiates the work from merely diagnosing its structural or procedural flaws. In a nutshell, the paper argues that the path to addressing Nigeria's governance challenges lies in rediscovering and applying Cicero's principles. Leaders must become true guardians of the law, serving justice and the common good rather than personal ambitions. For Nigeria to progress, the rule of law must be restored to its rightful place as the supreme authority, and both leaders and citizens must embrace a commitment to fairness, accountability, and equity. The current governance in Nigeria stands in stark contrast to Cicero's vision of a republican state, which significantly hinders the prospect of effective governance. Therefore to achieve good governance, it is essential to develop a political institution that aligns with a republican system in which the rule of law, political morality, statesmanship, citizens' welfare, inclusion, and stability are prioritised.

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