

JUSTICE, INCLUSION AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES IN STATE-BORDER COMMUNITIES RELATIONS FOR NATIONAL PEACE, SECURITY AND ECONOMY: A PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATION

Julius Adekunle Fasina
Department of General Studies,
Gateway (ICT) Polytechnic, Sapaade

Abstract

Amongst the problems that have in-turn becomes perennial discourse in the contemporary era is that of security and social justice in Nigeria. What has led to the clamour and quest for a fair, equitable and just society by individuals of the same creed, heritage and cultural orientation in border community regions are: (1) they have been marginalized and underdeveloped both politically and economically (2) the hands of fellowship and inclusion have been totally not catered for, if not overlooked (3) the dividends of democracy have not been so much enjoyed, benefitted and not too budgeted for in the national budget. These, amongst several other issues experienced by the residents of border communities have geared them towards advocating for a just and better society that is built on inclusion, justice, equity, fairness and a shared responsibility. Drawing on classical and contemporary political thought of John Rawls concept of justice, the paper explores the intertwined roles of the state (nation) and border communities cum residents in fostering national peace, security and justice through a philosophical-historical lens. Through a philosophical and a historical approach, the paper argues and submits that there is a need to redefine the collaborative roles of the state and border residents in the pursuit of justice, peace, and security. This can only be achieved through a reciprocal approach fostering the extension of hands of fellowship, inclusion and justice to the residents of the border communities. It is worth knowing that the actions and reactions of the border communities and residents play pivotal roles in shaping the security architecture, economy and peace of the nation.

Keywords: Equity; Fairness; Justice; Border Communities; Peace; Security; Philosophical-historical; Inclusion

Introduction

It is imperative to state that, the concept of 'peace' and 'security' transcends the absence of conflicts alone. Rather, the notion of peace and security in any nation such as Nigeria can be sustained through justice, inclusion and shared responsibilities hinged on equitable distribution of national resources and sense of belonging. The agitation for meaningful participation and substantial representation in the national dialogue towards national peace and security by the residents of border communities has been fostered by distrust and marginalization by the national government. This, as in most cases, led to illegal activities and economic sabotage by the residents which serves as threats to the national economy, peace and security but which has been perceived by these residents as legal and as a means to an end or a means of economic survival.

The consistent security challenges, insurgencies, and resource disputes happening in many border communities in Nigeria are as a result of the failure on the path of the national government to extend the hand of inclusivity both adequately and morally to the residents of border communities. This has led to the continuous demand for fairness, justice and equity by these residents from the national government. However, the residents of the border communities may be perceived to be

meager in population, but they pose a kind of threats to the national economy and security architecture of the nation if adequate hands of infrastructural development, sense of belonging in participation and representation are not duly extended to them. The theoretical framework for this paper is centered on Rawls concept of 'Justice'. This philosophical approach to the notion of justice was discussed by John Rawls in his work titled *A Theory of Justice* (1971) where he argued justice as fairness. Rawls (1971) contends that there are two basic principles to justice vis-à-vis: (1) the principle of equality and; (2) difference principle. Rawls focused on the structuring of the society which justice, fairness and equality serves as the foundation. The concept of justice in this instance is not just about the enforcement of law and order, but the establishment of fairness and equitable opportunities for the residents in border communities.

Situating the paper in the Rawlsian context of justice as fairness, the paper submits that there is a need to redefine the collaborative roles of the state and border residents in the pursuit of justice, peace, and security. This can only be achieved if and only the hands of fellowship, inclusion and justice is been extended to the residents of the border communities. This can only be achieved through a reciprocal approach whereby the national government embraces inclusivity, fair-sharing of national resources, protection of the residents and infrastructural development, adequate representation and proper participation. The residents on the other hand, embrace a paradigm shift towards shared responsibilities in fostering national peace, security and economy of the nation.

The Philosophical Basis for Rawlsian Concept of Justice

John Rawls is one of the prominent political philosophers in the twentieth century which conceived justice as fairness. He sees justice as the first virtue of any social institution. A social institution for Rawls is that which is predicated and structured on the principle of equity, fairness and most importantly, justice. Rawls (1971, p. 3) asserts that the basic structure of society is embedded with politics, law and economics. The state and the individuals are different and independent entities with different functions that make the society. Each and every basic individual cum state is saddled with responsibilities and functions to share and distribute the social burden and benefits amongst themselves. The individual is responsible for social cooperation with other fellow individuals in the society. The state on the other hand, is responsible for provision and protection of individual rights and freedom. Accordingly, Rawls contends that a good society is that which is egalitarian and that which power is vested in the citizens while their rights and freedom is principally inherent in them and their protection is solely catered for by the state. In order to have a society that is just, fair and equitable to all and sundry, in his book titled *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls demonstrated how justice is distributed as it pertains to fairness which amount to equitable distribution and allocation of resources. The allocation and equitable distribution of resources within the society serve as a benchmark for his concept of justice. According to Nwagbaji and Orji (2024, p. 51), Rawls sees the society as a collection of persons who get together to construct it. They contended that, a well-ordered society is one in which all members share the same moral and ethical ideals and are aware that these standards are generally met by essential social institutions. According to Rawls, the fundamental structure of society is “the ways in which significant institutions such as the family, political system and economic system interact to determine people's prospects in life” is most relevant when considering justice (Nwagbaji and Orji, 2024, p. 51). Justice for Rawls is that of having rights to equal rights. He deduced two principles from the notion of justice which are: (1) the equality principle and; (2) the difference principle (Rawls, 1971, p. 57). Meanwhile, the difference principle desires that if there is a social and economic difference within a society, then that difference will be regulated in such a way that will give the greatest advantage towards members of society that are less fortunate; therefore, it realizes social justice.

The first principle holds that equality is each and every individual's right. The first principle as cited by Afisi seeks to “safeguard individual rights and freedoms” (Rawls, 1971, p. 58; Afisi, 2023, p. 10). The second principle which is the difference principle holds that the moment there is difference in the society's economic and social principles, the difference should be regulated in such a way that the greatest advantage should be given to the less privileged in the society. With this, social justice is realized (Sari, 2020, p. 212). The second principle tolerates disparities so long as they are to the advantage of the most disadvantaged in society (Rawls 1971, p. 237; Afisi, 2023, p. 11). It entails that any socioeconomic inequalities need to be configured in a way that benefits society's most disadvantaged members to the greatest extent. Rawls' concept of justice is predicated on the basis that fairness, equality and justice should involve the unbiased distribution of goods. As reiterated by Elijah, Rawls conceived justice with how social goods are distributed not according to merit, but by equality” (Elijah, 2014, p. 14). The first aim of Rawls' however, is with the way the major social institutions generate and accordingly circulate fundamental rights and duties.

Hence, the basic thrust of the criterion of need is that the demands and benefits take cognizance of the needs of the people (Elijah, 2014, p. 14). Rawls (1971, p. 214) asserts that the socio-political and economic importance of any society is determined by the sharing formula which is socially integrated at the advantage of the people in the society or the state. Imperatively, both the state and individuals are independent and distinct entities that makeup the society. The major role of the state as a major institution is to determine the rights and duties, as well as the benefits of the citizens (Orji, 2023, p. 85). However, justice for Rawls involves a kind of reciprocal approach. Here, the state and the people have duties of integrating justice in the society. Essentially, the state defines and establishes the citizens' rights and freedom as it relates to justice which is constitutionally enshrined. Accordingly, Rawls posits that: “taken together as one scheme, the major institutions define men's rights and duties and influence their life-prospects, what they can expect to be and how well they can hope to do. The basic structure is the primary subject of justice because its effects are so profound from the start” (Rawls, 1971, p. 7; Orji, 2023, p. 85).

Rawls believes that justice and a just society can only be achieved through something akin to the social contract, which allows us to freely agree on how the basic institutions of society should be structured to allow for the establishment of a just society. His core theory however, is the modification of two essential justice standards, which guarantees a just and morally respectable society. The first principle according to Rawls is that: every individual shall have an equal right to the broadest possible system of equal basic liberties that is compatible with an all-encompassing system of liberty. The second principle states that: both economic and social inequalities should be set up to maximize the advantages to the most disadvantaged which conforms to the fairness and associated with equitable opportunity. In other words, Komal contended that the second principle involves: “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity” Komal (2019, p.5).

In attaining a just, fair and equitable society which is equivalent to justice as fairness, Rawls asserted there is a need for social cooperation. In attaining this social cooperation three criteria must be met. First, social cooperation is built on rules that general society can accept and not from an authority outside of society. Second, social cooperation must hold on to a fairness concept, which other parties do not dominate. In fair social cooperation, society's freedom must be guaranteed, and freedom will not be sacrificed for anyone else's interests. Third, social cooperation must aim to achieve greater good together (Rawls, 2001; Sari, 2020, p. 212). Accordingly, Rawls states that the major institutions mean various political associations, constitutions and the socio-economic programmes of the state. Rawls understands social justice as that which is the totality of major socio-economic structures as well as the constitution of the people. Rawls (1971, p. 118) reiterated

that justice can be achieved through “The Original Position”. As cited by Sari, “the original position was a hypothetical situation in which personal things are behind a veil of ignorance” (Sari, 2020, p. 213). Rawls believes that if someone wants to act fair, then that person must wear the veil of ignorance. Therefore, a person wearing this veil will go through the process of concealment of self, in which that person has to forget about his or her economic, social and physical status until achieving a social justice position (Rawls, 1971, p. 118). The veil theory is crucial to in Rawls notion of justice whereby he asserts that a new society can be birthed when the citizens acknowledge or have knowledge about their personal circumstances through the veil of ignorance. The veil of ignorance in Rawls perception basically is, the citizens are assumed to be ignorant of their roles and responsibilities in the society. Until the proposed society is been defined, the veil of ignorance would be lifted; and the citizens will be aware of their roles, responsibilities, profession, and position in the society. With this, there is an adequate understanding of the principles that govern the society. For Rawls, the only way to ensure justice as fairness in the society is by the distribution and proper allocation of resources and shared responsibilities.

In towing the path of realizing justice as fairness in the society is by defining the society and the roles of the individuals. To achieve this, Rawls proposed that there is a need for members of the society knows where they belong. What this means is that “among the membership of this society are men and women of diverse gifts: lawyers, medical doctors, teachers, farmers, clerks, carpenters, drivers, mechanics, the rich, the poor, the lazy, the clever, the hardworking, leaders, politicians, etc. (Elijah, 2014, p. 15). He went further to state that “by reason of the veil of ignorance, everyone will impartially choose the principles that would be fair and favourable to all; in this way, no one will be afraid of whatever happens to one's profession afterwards” (Elijah, 2014, p. 15). Once the decision has been reached about the principles of governance, Rawls states that the veil will then be uncovered for people to know their careers and roles in the new society.

An Understanding of Nigeria and its Border Communities

Like every other nation around the globe that has borders with neighboring countries, Nigeria as a nation is of no exception in the sub-Saharan African region. Abdullahi and Gawi observes that Nigeria is placed (1497 km) to Niger in the northwest, to Chad (87 km) northeast, and Cameroon (1690 km) northeast, and Benin Republic (773km) in the west respectively (Abdullahi and Gawi, 2021, p. 442; Omojowo et al, 2025, p. 65). Undoubtedly, various communities around these Nigeria borders are regarded as the border communities. These communities encompass rural communities and hamlets that are underdeveloped infrastructural, economically and socio-politically. From the regional perspective, some of the famous communities that borders Nigeria neighboring countries include: (1) Gambaru-Ngala, Damasak, Baga, Mallam Fatori, and Kauwa communities are located in the Northeastern region of Nigeria that borders with Chad (Nigeria-Chad). (2) The Northwestern region border communities that border with (Nigeria-Niger) include but not limited to Illela, Kamba, Geidam, Damasak, and Kano-Kazaure. (3) Additionally, Boki (Cross River State), Idiroko (Ogun), and Seme (Lagos), are some of the famous communities and towns that shares border with Cameroon in the south-eastern and south-western regions of Nigeria.

Consequently, there are thousands of illegal routes in the border communities which serve as pathways and alternatives to the legal routes which the residents of border communities use to make ends meet. To this end, Omojowo et al (2025, p.66) reiterates that no fewer than 1400 illegal routes links other African countries to Nigeria. As a result of these illegal activities via the illegal routes, it has led to economic sabotage, insecurity and insurgency, and porosity in the nation's borders. It imperative to note however, that porosity in Nigeria borders overtime has, birthed crime and criminality, smuggling, cross-border crimes, terrorism and insurgency, and a pathway or narrow

escape for criminals and insurgents as it is evident in the northern part of Nigeria. Additionally, the surge in kidnappings, banditries, arms trafficking, insurgencies and herdsmen clashes in the northern border regions on the porous borders (Omojowo, et al, 2025). The root causes of porosity of Nigeria borders can be genetically traced to bribery, conspiracy and aiding and abetting by security agents and their agencies. In most cases, they fail to extend the hands of fellowship and substantial cooperation to these border residents. They also shield and protect illegality as a means of enriching themselves at the expense of national interest. As cited by Omojowo et al, GbemreZik (2016) in his article *The Need to Protect the Integrity of Nigeria Borders* contends that:

Nigeria's border buffer zones are represented by wood logs, empty barrels, and worn-out car, poorly managed by immigration officers who prefer to demand money from travelers than verify the authenticity of their passports at the point of entrance and departure. Illegal migrant especially transnational criminal groups are often able to cross these borders as far as they are willing to bribe or pay border guards.

In factual term, the population of the border residents in Nigeria may be meager. Undoubtedly, they determine largely, the economic prosperity and security success at the various borders in Nigeria. Basically, most of the contraband goods, arms and ammunitions are imported via these borders. These illegal activities cannot be done without the help of these residents. In order to have a peaceful nation that is devoid of Nnadi and Okoye (2022, p.34) contends that national security encompasses personal, community, economic, food and political security, respectively. First-hand information and intelligence sharing have been hindered by these residents to the security agents and security institutions. This is as a result of the failure on the path of the security agents and the institution to foster adequate and substantial cooperation with these residents. This also makes their works more strenuous and tasking.

State-Border Communities Relations: A Reciprocal Approach to Justice, Inclusion and Shared Responsibilities

Adequate border protection and sustainability cannot be ruled out which needs urgent attention to be efficiently managed continuously by both the residents, national government and various security agencies. These border residents, communities and hamlets play a substantial role in the strength and weakness in the protection and porosity of the borders. Eselebor and Okunade, (2020) contends that “a protected border draws strength from a secure border community; it projects strength which in itself is a measure of a nation's national security”. In harnessing a society that is devoid of chaos and unrest which brokers the peaceful coexistence amongst the residents of border communities in Nigeria, a path to fair distribution in national resources and infrastructural development need to be towed. Mohammed (2022), contends that, “most border states and communities in Nigeria have minimal government presence, while in some, governance is non-existent, making such communities easy prey for criminal elements who use them as vassals or fortresses to keep citizens in perpetual fear and anxiety”. It is imperative to state that these borders and communities are adequately ungoverned. To corroborate this, Nnadi and Okoye (2022, p. 34) asserts that:

The term 'ungoverned spaces' is used in relation to land territory i.e., land spaces or areas lacking in state presence, authority and control such as border communities. These communities are characterized typically by the lack of an enabling government presence, inadequate infrastructures, lack of basic socio-economic facilities, and most importantly - lack of a formal state security enforcement presence, and the consequent proliferation of arms and weapons, violent crimes and terrorism.

Jaja and Odigbo enumerated seven factors that causes insecurity in Nigeria which border porosity, marginalization and inequality, menace in unemployment and poverty are core factors (Jaja and

Odigbo, 2013, p. 285). These aforementioned factors are not farfetched from these border communities and residents. Consequently, the task of securing the borders to fostering economic efficiency and peace cannot be done by the national government through various security agencies alone. It is worth stating that despite the heavy presence of these security agencies across the various borders, it is evident that they are still ungoverned and secured. The government cannot do it alone without initiating a sense of belonging, fairness and true participation of these residents in decision-making process which directly make or mar them and their immediate community. What makes these borders look so ungoverned is nothing but how the residents nurture, entertain and sustain illegal activities that defy national government *modus operandi*. This makes the security agencies to lack total and substantial capacity to fully curb these illegal activities perceived to be legal by these residents. Nnadi and Okoye further reiterate that:

These 'ungoverned spaces' are known to nurture, entertain and sustain social practices that defy state authority, regulation and control. Ungoverned spaces are therefore seen or perceived in most instances, as a failure of capacity by a sovereign state to exercise effective control over a geographic area within the state or at the fringes of its borders/boundaries, which has major implications for national security (Nnadi and Okoye, 2022, p. 34).

It is perceived that the strategic place of border communities in various regions of Nigeria influences national security. Therefore, the influence of these borders and their residents cannot be overemphasized respectively. Additionally, border protection cannot be ruled out in containing potential threats to a country's territorial integrity or sovereignty, Spencer explains that, "border is the first line of defence against terrorism and last line of a nation's territorial integrity" (Spencer, 2007). A just, equitable and fair society can be achieved through a reciprocal approach whereby the residents on their paths see that it is dutiful of them to act right on the basis of rational justification supported by moral duty to fostering peace security and economic prosperity of the nation. On the other hand, the state is responsible for extending the hands of inclusion and protection to these residents in various border communities in Nigeria as enshrined in the constitution. This will not only bring solace to the residents, it will also enhance and facilitate their eagerness and readiness to work hand-in-hand with the government and security agencies in curbing series of menaces, insecurity and all form of economic sabotage rising in Nigeria via the various borders, communities and hamlets.

To foster adequate mutual relationship and further strengthen state-border relationship in curbing insecurity, trans-national border crimes, economic sabotage and terrorism, all hands must be on deck through a reciprocal approach and a consensual means. This, will not aid the decision-making process of reviving these borders and the residents towards the right direction. It will also make the constitutional mandate bestowed upon the security agencies to be easier and obvious in the process. However, justice for Rawls involves a kind of reciprocal approach. Here, the state and the people have duties of integrating justice in the society. Essentially, the state defines and establishes the citizens' rights and freedom as it relates to justice which is constitutionally enshrined. Accordingly, Rawls posits that: "taken together as one scheme, the major institutions define men's rights and duties and influence their life-prospects, what they can expect to be and how well they can hope to do. The basic structure is the primary subject of justice because its effects are so profound from the start" (Rawls, 1971, p. 7; Orji, 2023, p. 85). Rawls (1971, p. 214) asserts that the socio-political and economic importance of any society is determined by the sharing formula which is socially integrated at the advantage of the people in the society or the state. What this means is that the border communities should not be marginalized in the decision-making process, infrastructural development and upliftment in human capital development amongst the border residents. Accordingly, Rawls posits that: "taken together as one scheme, the major institutions define men's

rights and duties and influence their life-prospects, what they can expect to be and how well they can hope to do. The basic structure is the primary subject of justice because its effects are so profound from the start” (Rawls, 1971, p. 7; Orji, 2023, p. 85). In order to bring into limelight a just, fair and equitable society which is reciprocal and consensual, the paper recommends the following as probable remedy to having justice, inclusion and shared responsibilities in state-border communities' relations.

Recommendations

- The Federal government of Nigeria should allocate more resources an infrastructural development to the border communities through the Border Communities Development Agency (BCDA).
- The Federal Government and various security agencies through the Office of the National Security Adviser should extend the hands of mutual relationship and adequate partnership to various non-state actors, NGOs, Local and Regional Youth Forums and associations, as well as CDA son a need for continuous and frequent sensitization on the dangers attached to trans-border crimes, insecurity and economic sabotage.
- The Federal Government and the Office of the National Security Adviser should reserve at least, 7-10 percent of Federal Government parastatals slots aside for the purpose of human capital development to the residents of the border communities. This will serve as a paradigm shift and a point of enlightenment to these residents from abstaining from illegalities which they see as a means to an end.
- The hands of Inclusivity and sincere participation in the decision-making process should be extended to these residents. Through this approach, their plights would be heard loud and clear.
- There is need for an urgent upliftment of the 20km ban placed on the remaining border communities as it majorly affects their socio-economic practices and livelihood.
- States, Local Government Areas and Agencies closed to the borders should collaborate with BCDA to initiate and facilitate developmental projects, and mega empowerments to these border communities. This will not only bring relief to these residents, it will also reduce the rate of smuggling, terrorism, insurgencies and trans-border crimes along the corridor of these birders.
- The Federal Government should foster continuous partnership with various religious, traditional and royal leaders and institutions on the need to dialogue fervently with their people on the need to see the dangers attached to crimes in their regions respectively.

Conclusion

The paper traces the genesis of economic sabotage, insecurity and various trans-national border crimes through Nigeria borders, residents, communities and hamlets to injustice and unfairness in distribution of resources and infrastructural underdevelopment respectively. The national government needs to devote a proper attention to the plights of the residents in the border areas. As Rawls contended, justice is predicated on the basis that fairness, equality and justice should involve the unbiased distribution of goods. Additionally, justice is conceived with how social goods are distributed not according to merit, but by equality. The border residents like every other citizen deserves equal rights. To have a nation filled with peace, economic prosperity and adequate security, the hands of inclusivity, justice, equality, fairness and shared responsibility must be extended to the residents of the border communities from resources allocation to infrastructural and human capital development.

References

- Abdullahi, A and Gawi, Y. A. (2021). The Effects of Border Porosity on Nigeria's National Security: A Study of Nigeria's Northeastern Border to Cameroon. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 5(5). Pp. 442-450
- Afisi, O. T. (2023). Karl Popper's Open Society and the Neoliberal Challenge. *Al-Hikmat: A Journal of Philosophy*, 43, pp. 01 - 22. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379520938>
- Elijah, O. J. (2014). A Critique of John Rawls' Social Justice Theory and the Fate of Nigeria's Politics in the 21st-Century and Beyond. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 28. Pp. 12-28. Available at: www.iiste.org
- Eselebor, W. A., and Okunade, S. K. (2020). *Border Management and Nigeria's National Security*. Routledge.
- Jaja, N., and Odigbo, J. (2013). Security and national development in Nigeria: The threat of Boko Haram. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(4), p. 285.
- Komal, P. (2019). Concept of Justice Difficulties in Defining Justice. *IJLMH*, 2. Pp. 1-7. Available at: www.ijlmh.com
- Mohammed, A.D. (2022). *Reclaiming Nigeria's Ungoverned Spaces*. Available at: <https://dailytrust.com/reclaiming-nigerias-ungoverned-spaces/> Retrieved 20 August 2025.
- Nnadi, D. and Okoye, C. (2022). Border Communities, Ungoverned Spaces and Nigeria's National Security. *International Journal of Community and Cooperative Studies*, 10(1), pp.30-43.
- Nwagbaji, R. G. and Orji, C. P. (2024). John Rawls' Ethical Principles of Justice as a Solution to Problems of Social Cooperation and Injustice in Contemporary Democratic Societies. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 10(2), pp. 49-67.
- Omojowo, S. T., Oyekanmi, A. A., and Salako, A. S. (2025). Border Security and Herdsmen Terrorism in Northern Nigeria: A Call for a New National Security Policy. *Indonesian Journal of Political*, 5(1), pp. 46-76
- Orji, C. P. (2023). John Rawls' Theory of Social Justice and its Philosophical Relevance to Nigeria's Political Instability. *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 21(4). Pp. 81-92.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (2001). *Justice as fairness: A Restatement*. Harvard University Press.
- Sari, C. M. A. (2020). Rawls's Theory of Justice and its Relevance in Analyzing Injustice on Ethnic Phenomenon. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 7(3), pp. 210 -219. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/497>
- Spencer, M. (2007). Border and State Security. In Forest, J.F (ed) *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century: International Perspectives*, 2, Westport: Praeger Security International.
- Zik, G. (2016). The Need to Protect the Integrity of Nigeria Borders. *The National Reformer*. Available at: <https://reformeronline.com/the-need-to-protect-the-integrity-of-nigerian-borders/> Retrieved 20 August, 2025.