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## **NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC AND THE DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION QUESTION: THE VIRTUE ETHICISTS PERSPECTIVES**

**Edoh Sunday Odum**

Department of Philosophy

Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University

Makurdi – Nigeria.

edohodum@gmail.com, eodum@bsum.edu.ng

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1696-4579>

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**Ameh Jackson Owoicho**

### **Abstract**

**T**his paper examines the dynamics of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-present) through the lens of virtue ethics, addressing the critical question of democratic consolidation. Despite the transition to civilian rule and the establishment of democratic institutions, Nigeria's democratic journey has been fraught with challenges, including corruption, electoral malpractices, and socio-political instability. By applying virtue ethics, a philosophical approach that emphasises the cultivation of moral character and virtuous behavior, this study explores how ethical considerations can influence political behavior and governance in Nigeria. Within the context of the question of how virtue ethics can contribute to altering the trajectory of democratic practice in Nigeria and lead to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, this paper argues that the role of virtuous human beings is indispensable because all recommendations toward the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria have to be implemented by human beings of virtuous character. In the final third, the paper found out and hence, argues that electoral integrity, honesty and accountability are virtues that are needed to ensure credibility in the electoral process as well as in the business of governance. These virtues, when possessed by all the actors in the democratic space and evident in the electoral process will lead to integrity in the counting of ballots and in all the processes of collation of results at the various levels leading to the final declaration of winners in elections. With these virtues, the judiciary will demonstrate a high sense of integrity and deliver the right judgments on pre and post elections matters that are brought before it regardless of who is involved. To this end, the conclusion that is reached in this paper is that, understanding and applying virtue ethics could provide valuable insights into overcoming the prevailing challenges, advancing democratic values and the consolidation of democracy in the Nigerian political space.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Elections, Virtue, Virtue Ethics.

### **Introduction**

After several decades of independence and the practice of liberal democracy in Nigeria, one will expect that democracy in Nigeria would have been stabilised with the goods of human flourishing as well as the dividends of democracy delivered to citizens. This is however, not the case in

Nigeria owing to the fact that there has been a dearth of purposive leadership and good governance in the country. Elections have been referred to as the hallmark as well as the instrument of testing democracy, in the Fourth Republic; Nigeria has witnessed seven (7) general elections. While the most part of the elections have been described uncharitably by observers and citizens alike, one can argue that the last three (3) elections witnessed some form of improvements in contradiction to the others which have been argued to be among the worst that the country has ever witnessed since independence. Darren Kew captures the chronicle of Nigerian elections thus:

Unfortunately, over the five decades since Nigeria's independence, the nation's elites have shown declining interest in clean elections. This decline has mirrored a deeper trend since 1960 that has undermined the Social Contract: a shift from traditional ethnic sources of political loyalty and organisation to a more personalised politics known as neopatrimonialism, the 'big man' or 'godfather' structure of patronage politics. After the volatile ethnic politics of the First and Second Republics, Nigerian elites built extensive networks across ethnic lines during the 1980s and 1990s, which over the last decade of the Fourth Republic have produced a remarkable level of stability at the federal level. This rogues' peace, however, bought by massive corruption and rent distribution through patronage pyramids nationwide, has exacerbated tensions at the state and local levels and produced an increasing number of political officeholders with little interest in credible elections. Civil society groups have fought this trend over the years, but the balance of resources is stacked heavily against them.<sup>1</sup>

Corroborating Kew, Unumen opined that “contrary to this expectation, the country's Fourth Republic has witnessed developments that are contrary to all known democratic ethos, including electoral malpractices, political exclusion, a tendency towards authoritarianism, human rights violations, political assassinations, intolerance of opposition by ruling political parties, attempts at intimidating and/or blackmailing both the legislature and the judiciary by the executive, resulting in lack of popular participation in politics and policies that affect the people, contrary to democratic principles and practices”.<sup>2</sup>

Closely related to the above is the rising wave of military juntas in Africa. Between 2020 and 2023, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea and Sudan have experienced some form of democratic backsliding with military coups of different magnitudes. This calls to question the stability of democracy in African in general and Nigeria in particular and the imperativeness of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This paper seeks to X-ray Nigeria's fourth republic and the

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<sup>1</sup>. Kew, D. “Nigerian Elections and the Neopatrimonial Paradox: in Search of the Social Contract”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 28:4, 2010. 499-521.

<sup>2</sup>. Unumen J. O. “Strong Institutions and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic” *Canadian Social Science*. Vol. 15, No. 1, (2019), 29.

democratic consolidation question. Following from the realisation of the fact that credible elections is instrumental to democratic consolidation, the paper will attempt to show the impediments to credible elections in Nigeria within the context of the Fourth Republic and will advance a virtue ethicist perspective to the democratic consolidation question. To fulfill this requirement, the paper proceeds from a preliminary discourse on elections and democratic consolidation to a discourse on the trajectory of virtue ethics and its propensity to cascading into credible elections and by extension, democratic consolidation in the Fourth Republic Nigeria.

### **Meaning, Determinants and Impediments of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

In accounting for the meaning of democratic consolidation, the first step, as one would expect is a clarification of democracy before showing what it means for democracy to be consolidated. Symbolically, democracy is, currently, the world's most beautiful bride. Indeed, the astonishing popularity of democracy in the world today has made it attractive to people of different ideological inclinations. Ogunsanwo as cited in Muhammed and Kinge observed that if the concept were not universally attractive; efforts to associate even the most dictatorial regime with it would not have taken place.<sup>3</sup> Democracy for Appadorai “is a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by them”.<sup>4</sup> He further argued that a state may be termed a democracy if it provides institutions for the expression and, in the last analysis, the supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy.<sup>5</sup> The institutional expressions that Appadoria meant include “equal rights of all adults to vote and to stand as candidate for elections; periodic elections; equal eligibility for executive and judicial office; freedom of speech, publication and association”.<sup>6</sup> According to Ununu as cited in Igwe, democracy is essentially a method of organising the society politically. He suggested five basic elements without which no community can call itself truly democratic. These elements are equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rule of law and liberty of the individual.<sup>7</sup> Democracy also has a normative dimension that include acceptance of a majority rule, respect for the rule of law, protection of individual and minority rights and safeguarding the interests of the disadvantaged group within the polity. Democracy is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end and that end is good governance and development.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3.</sup> Muhammad, A. A and Kinge, R. F. “An Overview of Democratic Consolidation and Regression in Africa” *Hasanuddin Journal of International Affairs*. Vol. 4, No 1, (2024), 11-12.

<sup>4.</sup> Appadorai, A. *The Substance of Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 137.

<sup>5.</sup> Appadorai, A. *The Substance of Politics*, 137

<sup>6.</sup> Appadorai, A. *The Substance of Politics*, 137.

<sup>7.</sup> Igwe, Liga E. “Democracy and Development in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges” *International Journal of Economic Development Research and Investment*, Vol. 1 Nos. 2 & 3 (2010), 118.

<sup>8.</sup> Unumen & Oghi, F. “Democracy, Development and Insurgency: The Nigerian Experience in the Fourth Republic”, *African Research Review*, 10(2), 31-46, 2016.

Schedler presents the different notions of democracy in an article in the *Journal of Democracy* under five different headings: Preventing democratic breakdown, preventing democratic erosion, completing democracy, deepening democracy and organising democracy. Roughly the first two deal with the original meaning of democratic stabilisation, the next two deal with progress towards a higher level of democracy, the last one with structural changes without progress or regress. Schedler argues that one should focus on the original meaning of consolidation as securing democracy and that the deepening or completion of democracy should be labeled as such and not as consolidation. What then is democratic consolidation for him? For Andreas Schedler, the term democratic consolidation was meant to “describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of expanding their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual “reverse waves”<sup>9</sup>.

In his contribution to the discourse on what constitutes democratic consolidation, Larry Diamond argued that democratic *Consolidation* is “the process by which democracy becomes so broadly and profoundly legitimate among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down. It involves behavioral and institutional changes that normalise democratic politics and narrow its uncertainty. This normalisation requires the expansion of citizen access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training, and other functions that civil society performs. But most of all, and most urgently, it requires political institutionalisation”.<sup>10</sup> For Mohammed and Kinge, democratic consolidation implies strengthening the process, stability, depth and practice of democracy. While democracy is a process, democratic consolidation implies the end of that process.<sup>11</sup> They were however quick to add that they should not be read as suggesting that democratic consolidation is an end in itself or that democracy will grow to an extent that it requires no further development. Rather, “it suggested that the practice of democracy would have become standardised and characterised by certain features or elements that showed growth, strength and stability in the political system”.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the determinants of democratic consolidation, it suffices to state that “the best mechanism for democratic consolidation in any democratic system is the creation of enabling environment for free and credible elections. Nigeria is yet to create this enabling environment for the consolidation of her democracy which started in 1999 after many years of military

<sup>9</sup>. Schedler Andreas “What is Democratic Consolidation?” *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 9, No. 2, (1998), 1.

<sup>10</sup>. Diamond, L. *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore: The Johns, (1999). 15.

<sup>11</sup>. Muhammad, A. A and Kinge, R. F. “An Overview of Democratic Consolidation and Regression in Africa” *Hasanuddin Journal of International Affairs*. Vol. 4, No 1, (2024), 12.

<sup>12</sup>. Muhammad, A. A and Kinge, R. F. “An Overview of Democratic Consolidation and Regression in Africa” *Hasanuddin Journal of International Affairs*. Vol. 4, No 1, (2024), 12.

dictatorship”.<sup>13</sup> Citing Linz, he further argued that democracy is consolidated when none of the major political actors, parties or organised interests, forces or institutions considered that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power and no political institution or group has a claim to veto the actions of democratically elected decision makers”.<sup>14</sup>

In the same vein, it must be noted that “the building of a consolidated democracy involves an affirmation and strengthening of certain institutions, such as the electoral system, vibrant political parties, judicial independence and respect for human rights and rule of law. Real democratic consolidation requires a demonstrable relationship between political accountability and quality governance”.<sup>15</sup> For Unumen, achieving consolidated democracy requires good governance that essentially promotes improved welfare of the people, transparency and accountability by public managers in the conduct of state affairs and reducing corruption to the barest minimum by democratic governments. It also demands upholding democratic values of popular participation, respect for the rules of law, free and fair elections and independence of the judiciary. In addition, it involves strengthening democratic institutions and systems to a point where autocratic reversions are highly unlikely.<sup>16</sup> Citing Brantigam, Unumen further argue that “in consolidated democracies, democratic processes are the only “game in town”, elections are not only won by the same party, conflicts are habitually resolved within the rules and institutions of the regime, the rule of law protects the freedom of civil society and democratic practices are deeply internalised in the expectations of citizen and rulers in the workings of society”.<sup>17</sup> What can be deciphered from the preceding discourse is that democratic consolidation presupposes the stability of a democratic process and institutions in such a manner that all anti-democratic elements like electoral malpractices, corruption and lack of accountability in governance is made unattractive and ultimately does not hold sway in a democratic political space.

Regarding the impediments of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, the position of Ebegbulem is quite instructive and this study has elected to use it as the starting point in the discourse on the impediments of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. According to him,

The most significant challenge to democratic consolidation in Nigeria involves the development of effective strategies for strengthening institutions of the state in such a manner that they will be able to withstand the shocks of the

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<sup>13</sup>. Ebegbulem, J. C. “The Imperative of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria through Credible Elections” *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*. Vol. 10, 1; (2017), 72.

<sup>14</sup>. Linz in Ebegbulem, J. C. “The Imperative of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria through Credible Elections” 73.

<sup>15</sup>. Linz in Ebegbulem, J. C. “The Imperative of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria through Credible Elections” 73.

<sup>16</sup>. Unumen J. O. “Strong Institutions and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic” *Canadian Social Science*. Vol. 15, No. 1, 2019, 30.

<sup>17</sup>. Unumen J. O. “Strong Institutions and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic” *Canadian Social Science*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2019, 30.

democratic process. This challenge is particularly important for institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the judiciary. On their part, the political actors in Nigeria have always engaged in acts that do not and cannot promote or enhance democratic consolidation, as they buy votes, rig elections and commit other infidelities designed to subvert the will of the people to choose leaders capable of leading the state towards development of enduring democracy.<sup>18</sup>

The above position coheres to the actual state of affairs if it is true that the best mechanism for democratic consolidation in any democratic system is an environment such that it is possible to conduct, free, fair and credible elections. Commenting on the impediments of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, Nyewusira argued that Nigeria's democracy in the Fourth Republic has been associated with dysfunctional electoral system, regime of contempt for the rule of law, lack of internal democracy in political parties and pauperisation of citizens.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Unumen stressed that “the country's Fourth Republic has been marred by human rights violations, corruption, cyclical crisis of legitimacy, institutional weakness and/or decay, chronic economic hardship, including youth unemployment, violence, volatility, insurgency, insecurity and terrorism”.<sup>20</sup> The above issues are key to the democratic backsliding that is being witnessed in Nigeria today.

Linz and Stephen outline two impediments to democratic consolidation. These are the threat of ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic states, and the disenchantment by citizenry which arises from the inability of democratic regimes to deliver democratic dividends to improve the living conditions of the masses.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the first impediment, the heterogeneity of the Nigerian state and the ethnic fault lines that have been expanded by the political class makes it impossible to argue against Linz and Stephen. The diagnosis of Linz and Stephen on the second front is precisely the situation in the most part of the third world and in Nigeria where there has been a growing disenchantment of the citizenry because of worsening social conditions of the people after more than two decades of uninterrupted democratic rule. It suffices to argue further that the Nigerian condition reveals that the country, despite its endowment with huge natural and human resources still have her citizens caught between the jigsaw of underdevelopment and a kind of poverty that is debilitating. Nigerian in this age, still grapples with such problems as the lack of basic infrastructural facilities, insecurity of lives and properties amongst others.

<sup>18</sup>. Ebegbulem, J. C. “The Imperative of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria through Credible Elections” *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*. Vol. 10, 1; (2017), 72.

<sup>19</sup>. Nyewusira, V., & Nweke, K. An Appraisal of Nigeria's Democratisation in the Fourth Republic (1999- 2010), *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, 6.(2012), 1.

<sup>20</sup>. Unumen J. O. “Strong Institutions and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic” *Canadian Social Science*. Vol. 15, No. 1, 2019, 31.

<sup>21</sup>. Linz, J.J. & Stephen, A. “Toward Consolidated Democracies”, in L Diamond (ed), *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies*, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, (1997), 23.

Ebegbulen also advanced a couple of impediments to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. According to him, “democratic consolidation has been a problematic endeavour over the years in Nigeria because elections have always been bereft of democratic ideal”.<sup>22</sup> He further argues thus:

Election rigging has dealt a huge blow to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Elections conducted by the country's electoral body (INEC) since 1999 when Nigeria embraced democratic rule after many years of military dictatorship have not met with the expectations of Nigerians due to various forms of electoral manipulations. These have made elections in the country far from being free, fair and credible. Election rigging has not only marred democratic consolidation in Nigeria, but has also disenfranchised many Nigerians. It has promoted the imposition of unqualified and corrupt individuals on Nigerians who have no regard and respect for the principle of democracy.<sup>23</sup>

It is doubtful how far one can sustain any argument against the above in view of the prevailing realities in the Nigerian political space and hence, this impediment is one of the greatest clogs in the wheel of Nigeria's drive towards democratic consolidation. Other factors that have threaten to ground the drive towards democratic consolidation in Nigerian include, lack of security, ethnicity, corruption, godfatherism amongst others.

To sum these factors, insecurity have perhaps, reached its highest point in the history of Nigeria with the wanton destruction of lives and properties now seeming normal. Ethnicity and ethnic politics have ruptured inter-group relations and led the conflicts of attrition which consequently leads to inter-ethnic conflicts and wars. It has also fueled cessationists and separatists movements in the country. The quit notice handed the Ibos in the recent past by Northern youths to leave their land, the attempt at declaring the Niger-Delta state and the Sovereign state of Biafra in the recent past in Nigeria are lucid examples in that regard. The mention of Nigeria seems to be synonymous with corruption as corruption seems to be rooted in the veins of Nigerians. The menace of godfathers who have commercialised elections in Nigeria and float the rules of democratic engagements with impunity have contributed to destroying any attempt at consolidation Nigerian's democracy. To this end, anyone that is abreast with the current happenings in the Nigerian political space will agree that without dealing with the factors, the attainment of democratic consolidation in Nigeria remains a mirage.

### **Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria beyond Impediments: A Virtue Ethicists Perspective**

Having accounted for the various impediment of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, this paper advances a virtue ethicist perspective to the question of democratic consolidation. To this end, a conceptualisation of virtue ethics is the starting point of the discourse. According to

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<sup>22</sup>. Egbulem, J. C. “The Imperative of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria through Credible Elections” *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*. Vol. 10, 1; (2017), 77.

<sup>23</sup>. Egbulem, J. C. “The Imperative of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria through Credible Elections”, 78.

Oluwagbemi-Jacob, “A virtue can be defined as a trait of character that is to be admired and desired because it is a constituent of human excellence. Virtues are intrinsically valuable for their own sake, but they are also valued because they promote human flourishing both for the individual who possesses it and for society in general”.<sup>24</sup> Citing Lawhead, she further argued that “the virtues are those conditions that are essential for humans to grow, blossom and flourish”. For the virtue ethicist, the question to ask about a proposed action is not “what are the consequences? Or “could I universalise the principle on which I am acting?” Instead, the virtue theorist would ask, what would this proposed action do to me in my project of becoming an admirable and worthy human being?”.<sup>25</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre seems to be thinking in the above line when he averred that:

The virtues to be understood as those dispositions, which will not only sustain practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter and will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalogue of virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of household and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical inquiry about character of the good.<sup>26</sup>

For the virtue ethicist, the question to ask about a proposed action is not “what are the consequences? Or “could I universalise the principle on which I am acting?” Instead, the virtue theorist would ask, what would this proposed action do to me in my project of becoming an admirable and worthy human being?”.<sup>27</sup> As an ethical theory, Oluwagbemi-Jacobs argue that “virtue ethics focuses primarily on the character of the person rather than the person's actions or duties. This is its point of departure from other theories that are concerned with rules or principles for deciding how to act. Though teleological and ontological ethical theories do not ignore the issue of what makes a good person, however, they define the goodness of a person in terms of either what actions they perform or what principles they employ”.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup>. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, D. “Reflections on Human Development from the Perspectives of Ethical and Unethical Leaders: A Virtue Ethicist Approach” being a lead paper delivered at the 2018 Oracle of Wisdom International Conference organised by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Tansian University, Umuaya, Anambra State, Nigeria; 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2018, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup>. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, D. “Reflections on Human Development from the Perspectives of Ethical and Unethical Leaders: A Virtue Ethicist Approach”, 18.

<sup>26</sup>. MacIntyre, A. *After Virtue*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Notre Dame, Ind; University of Notre Dame Press, (1984), 219.

<sup>27</sup>. Lawhead, William F. *The Philosophical Journey: An Interactive Approach*. McGraw-Hill, Higher Education, New York, (2003), 491.

<sup>28</sup>. Oluwagbemi-Jacobs, D. “Reflections on Human Development from the Perspectives of Ethical and Unethical Leaders: A Virtue Ethicist Approach”, 16.

In her reading of McIntyre, Oluwagbemi-Jacob can be read as intimating that virtue is crucial for human wellbeing and flourishing. Typical examples of moral virtues include generosity, compassion, honesty, fidelity, integrity, justice, conscientiousness, and courage. If we do not possess them, we must be able to acquire them by training, practice and through a personal programme of self-improvement. It is the antidote to societal ills and insecurity. Even for our family life and political communities to be successful, we need virtue.<sup>29</sup> In the same vein, she argued that building strong ethical character requires proactive approach to dealing with our dark sides. It will require going on the offensive and replacing or managing our unhealthy motivations through the development of positive leadership traits or qualities. The basic assumption of virtue ethics is: good people (those of high moral character) make good moral choices.<sup>30</sup> To this end, she concluded that there are three important features of virtues. First, virtues are woven into the inner life of leaders. They are not easily developed or discarded but persist over time. Second, virtues shape the way leaders see and behave. Thirdly, being virtuous makes them sensitive to ethical issues and encourages them to act morally.<sup>31</sup>

Virtue ethics has recently been rousing itself from a long slumber. Although twentieth century ethical theory has been primarily concerned with right and wrong action, we have lately seen a revival of interest in the virtue(s) as supplementing or even grounding our understanding of right action, and Aristotle and (to a lesser extent) Plato have had the greatest influence on these developments. Over the last few years, virtue ethicists have largely focused on the individual moral life rather than on issues of social justice, and to the extent virtue ethics is content merely to supplement other views; there may be nothing at all problematic about such an omission or de-emphasis. But most philosophers who call themselves virtue ethicists believe that (the) virtue(s) should play a foundational role in a free-standing total approach to ethics that can take its place, e. g., alongside (utilitarian) consequentialism and Kantian ethics; and they will want (one or another form of) virtue ethics to develop its own distinctive account of social morality and of social justice in particular.<sup>32</sup>

Virtue ethics is argued to be a subdivision of normative or prescriptive ethics which has such other divisions as Kantian ethics and consequentialism. Citing Hursthouse, Ikeke stressed that normative ethics has as one of its three main approaches virtue ethics, which chief concern is virtuous life or ethical character; and this makes it different from consequentialist ethics (that

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<sup>29</sup>. Oluwagbemi-Jacobs, D. "Reflections on Human Development from the Perspectives of Ethical and Unethical Leaders: A Virtue Ethicist Approach", 17.

<sup>30</sup>. Oluwagbemi-Jacobs, D. "Reflections on Human Development from the Perspectives of Ethical and Unethical Leaders: A Virtue Ethicist Approach", 17.

<sup>31</sup>. Oluwagbemi-Jacobs, D. "Reflections on Human Development from the Perspectives of Ethical and Unethical Leaders: A Virtue Ethicist Approach", 18.

<sup>32</sup>. Slote, M. "Virtue Ethics and Democratic Values" *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 24 No. 2, (1993), 5.

focuses on actions' consequences) and deontology (that focuses on rules or duties). In any situation for instance if there is a need to render help to a needy person the utilitarian thinks of the outcome, the creation of wellbeing, and the deontologist is concerned with acting in accord with the moral rule, while the concern of the virtue ethicist is that helping is the benevolent or charitable thing worth doing. Virtue ethics is concerned with examining and studying human behaviour concerning wrong and right from the perspective of what is virtuous or vice.<sup>33</sup>

Oko, A. E. *et'al* corroborates the above when they argued that “Normative ethical theory can be divided into three categories: Kantian, consequentialism, and virtue ethics. Kantian or deontological evaluate an action base on the set of moral rules (deontology) rather than the consequences of an action. On the other hand, consequentialism emphasises the effects of an action. An action that increases or brings about something that is considered good by the ethical theory is deemed to be morally acceptable. Virtue ethics emphasises the inherent moral characters (virtue) of actions. While all three approaches accommodate virtue, consequences and rules, they differ in what they considered to be fundamental.”<sup>34</sup>

They further argue that Virtue ethics is an umbrella term, covering a variety of different theories and terms, which have their roots in the works of different philosophers namely Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Nietzsche, amongst others. The virtues (except wisdom) are not primarily actions but psychological states. Virtues are not ultimately based on our social rules. Virtues are not also disconnected or incompatible with our best interest. On the contrary, it is believed that wisdom is not one virtue amongst the others but the foundational virtue that creates every other authentic virtue.<sup>35</sup> It is on the basis of the above that Oke, A. E. *et'al* citing Oakley and Cocking delineated the following as the essential features of virtue ethics.

- a) An action is right if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances. This deals with the primacy of right character in the justification of right action. Such right action is one that is in accordance with what a virtuous character would do in the circumstances; what makes the action right then is that it is what a person with virtuous character would do here. That is why the Nigerian society needs urgent restoration of peace, considering the high rate of injustices, poverty, insurgency and inequality.
- b) Goodness is prior to Rightness. That is, the notion of goodness is primary while the notion of rightness can be defined only in relation to goodness: no account can be given of what makes an action right until we have established what is valuable or good. In particular,

<sup>33</sup>. Ikeke M. O. “The Necessity of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics in Curbing Social and Ecological Vices in West Africa” NP, (ND). 106.

<sup>34</sup>. Oke, A. E. *et'al* “Virtue Ethics and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria” *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)*, Vol.7 No.1 March, (2024), 231.

<sup>35</sup>. Oke, A. E. *et'al*, “Virtue Ethics and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria” *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)*, Vol.7 No.1 March, (2024), 231.

virtue ethics claims that we need an account of human good before we can determine what it is right for us to do in any given situation.

- c) The Virtues are irreducibly plural intrinsic goods. This means that the substantive account of the good which form the foundation for virtue ethics' justification of right action specifies a range of valuable traits and activities as essential for a humanly flourishing life or as central to our view of admirable human being. The virtue here is valuable for their own sake rather than as a means to promoting or realising some other values. For example, Aristotle argued that friendship is 'choice-worthy in itself' apart from any advantages it may bestow on us.
- d) The Virtues are objectively good. This implies that virtue ethics regards the virtues as objectively good in the sense that they are good independently of any connection which they may have with desire. What the objective goodness of the virtues means in positive terms depends on the particular rationale given for them.
- e) Some intrinsic goods are agent relative. Amongst the variety of goods which virtue ethics regards as constituting humanly flourishing life, some such as friendship and integrity are held to be agent relative while others such as justice are thought more properly characterised as agent neutral. To describe a certain good as agent relative is to say that its being good of mind gives it additional moral importance in contrast to agent neutral goods, which derive no such additional moral importance for their being goods of mind.
- f) Acting rightly does not require that we maximise the good. What this means is that the core thesis of most version of consequentialism is the idea that righteousness requires us to maximise the good whether goodness is monistic or pluralistic, subjective or objective. In all virtue ethics by contrast rejects maximisation as a theory of rightness.<sup>36</sup>

Closely related to the essential features of virtue ethics accounted for above is character building. Oluwagbemi- Jacobs corroborates this fact when she argued for character building as a method of virtue ethics. To quote her, "Virtue ethics employs the method of character building. However, character building does not take place in a vacuum. It requires agencies and institutions and is more likely to take root when nurtured by families, schools, governments and religious bodies. These collectives impact values and encourage self-discipline, caring and other virtues through the telling of narratives or stories, as well as role models or moral exemplars. Worthy narratives bring out the best in the individual, encouraging such to suppress his or her dark side".<sup>37</sup> In the same vein, Daniel Statman argued for the importance of role models in character building within the context of virtue ethics when he argued that "becoming a good person is not a matter of learning or 'applying' principles but imitating some models. We learn to be virtuous the same way

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<sup>36</sup>. Oko, A. E. *et al*, "Virtue Ethics and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria" *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)*, Vol. 7 No. 1 March, (2024), 231-232.

<sup>37</sup>. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, D. "Reflections on Human Development from the Perspectives of Ethical and Unethical Leaders: A Virtue Ethicist Approach", 17.

we learn to dance, to cook and to play football-by watching people who are competent in these areas and trying to do the same. According to (virtue ethics), education through moral exemplars is more effective than education focused on principles and obligations, because it is far more concrete”.<sup>38</sup> The above quotation can be interpreted as elevating the place of exemplars and the fact that we can learn from role models, the desirable virtues and use same for our individual benefits and that of the society.

Having accounted for the meaning of virtue ethics, it remains to answer the question of how virtue ethics can contribute to altering the trajectory of democratic practice in Nigeria and lead to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. To answer this question, it is important to state that the role of virtuous human beings cannot be overemphasised and the fact is that all recommendations toward the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria have to be implemented by human beings of virtuous character.

On the imperative of a virtue ethicist dimension to the democratic consolidation question in the Nigerian democratic political space, it must be noted that virtue (*arete*) is a goodness fixed in the soul by habituation.<sup>39</sup> This means that political state actors in Nigeria who are able to acquire virtue would effectively steer the ship of state from that ingrained goodness which flows from the innermost recesses of the person's being. This innermost goodness disposes the politician properly for reasonable social engagement, constructive statecraft, sound economic decisions and effective policy making and implementation for the good of the people. To stem the tide of governance failure in African states like Nigeria, political functionaries need to constantly act in a well-disposed manner, taking cognisance of all parties involved and seeking always the well-being of the people above their own self-serving or selfish interests. The practice of virtues needs to become a habit in Nigeria, with all desires, decisions, inclinations and dispositions weeded to right reason. But for this to happen, the virtues have to be acquired habitually i.e., over time.<sup>40</sup>

Again, when one is tempted by the prevailing socio-political and economic realities in the country to show apathy towards the electoral process in the country, the underlying logic is usually the fear of expending so much energy, time and resources on something that may not be worth it in terms of value.<sup>41</sup> To this end, it is the argument of many Nigerians that there is no need for them to vote in elections because their votes would not count or amount to anything

<sup>38</sup>. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, D. “Reflections on Human Development from the Perspectives of Ethical and Unethical Leaders: A Virtue Ethicist Approach”, 19.

<sup>39</sup>. Mbukanma, J. Moral Fallibility in Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas: An Expository-Comparative Study, PhD. Thesis, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, (1986), 165.

<sup>40</sup>. Udofia, S. N. “Reinventing Moral and Political Hygiene in Africa's Governance Culture: Explorations into Aristotle's Virtue Theory” *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*: Vol. 11(9): September, 2023), 192.

<sup>41</sup>. Oko, A. E *et al*, “Virtue Ethics and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria” *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)*, Vol. 7 No. 1 March, (2024), 235.

considering the operations of the umpire body. The consequent of the above antecedent is that there is increasing voter apathy in the democratic political space in Nigeria and this does not contribute as it were to democratic consolidation. Drawing from the virtue ethicists perspective that this study brings to the discourse, “virtue ethics considers an action right because it is good, not necessarily because of its outcome”.<sup>42</sup> The expected response to the above is that, citizens should do the right by voting for the candidates that they consider as having the capacity to deliver the dividends of democracy for them and are suitable for positions in elections regardless of their perceived outcome.

Virtue ethics rejects desire as the rationale for goodness. There may be times that one's desire is anti-virtue. In such situations, one may be tempted to either sell one's vote as citizens or to buy votes as politicians. This may even play out in a situation where one is tempted to vote on tribal or religious lines. This may sound viable to both the voter and the politician because such an act will be beneficial, at least at that moment to them regardless of whether it breaks the law or constitutes a violation of basic democratic principles. The virtue ethicist perspective to this type of situation in the bid to stabilise and consolidate our democracy will be to do the right thing and to avoid the wrong. In times like that, “virtue ethics strongly recommends a detachment with the emotions and a strong inclination to the good. As people prepare for elections, it is important that they prepare to vote according to their conscience and not with any sympathy towards the emotions. As strong as family sentiment and friendship bonds are, for instance, they are not enough to determine what is right when it comes to exercising one's franchise. Objectivity, it is virtue that helps people to do things the right way, thereby enhancing the growth of the society”<sup>43</sup> and in this situation, stabilise the country's democratic political landscape.

Electoral integrity and honesty are also part of the virtues that are needed to ensure credibility in the electoral process as well as in the business of governance. These virtues, when possessed by all the actors in the democratic space and the electoral process will lead to integrity in the counting of ballots and in all the processes of collation of results at the various levels. These virtues will take care of cases of falsification of figures by adhoc and permanent staffs of the umpire body as well as all that are involved in the process. These virtues when imbibed by the judiciary in the decisions on pre and post elections matters that are brought before it would demonstrate a high sense of integrity and deliver the right judgments regardless of who is involved in the matter.

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<sup>42</sup>. Oko, A. E *et al*, “Virtue Ethics and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria” *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)*, Vol. 7 No. 1 March, (2024), 236.

<sup>43</sup>. Oko, A. E *et al*, “Virtue Ethics and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria” *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)*, Vol. 7 No. 1 March, (2024), 235-236.

Fidelity to one's words and being sure to keep them is a virtue that can strengthen the social contract that exists between the people and their elected representatives. These representatives, as part of their contract with the people have promised to protect the people and to deliver the goods of human flourishing to the people; it is response to these promises that the people voted them into power and keeping their part of the contract serves to strengthen democracy as well as the elevate the stakes of good governance which as have been argued is in short supply in Nigeria and the most part of the third world.

These virtues will push back the frontiers of poverty, insecurity through good governance; they will also push back the frontiers of election riggings as well as all kinds of electoral malpractices which impinge on the task of democratisation as well as democratic consolidation. Following from the argument that virtue ethics emphasise character building through role models, the younger generation of electorates will being build their characters through the process of seeing and learning from the older generation of virtuous politicians and citizens alike. The benefit of this is that in the near history, the most part of the citizens will be virtuous citizens and such cases of electoral malpractices, rigging, poverty and insecurity would be reduced to the barest minimum as citizens will virtuous in all their activities and action in the democratic political space.

### **Conclusion**

In the preceding paragraphs, attempts have been made to account for the Nigerian Fourth Republic and the democratic consolidation question from the virtue ethicist perspective. This attempt proceeded from a preliminary discourse on the meaning, determinants and impediments to democratic consolidation in Nigeria to a discourse beyond the impediments and the imperativeness of democratic consolidation from the virtue ethicist perspective. To this end, it must be noted that achieving good governance or ripping the dividends of good governance in Africa requires a high sense of moral consciousness and virtuous lifestyle on the part of those governing and the governed. Tackling corruption with high-quality governance is one of the most important challenges that Nigeria is currently facing. Without a reform that is value-centered or virtuous character-focused that dismantle the financial, political, and administrative structures which perpetuate corruption, Nigeria will remain in a merry-go-round and will not be able to break the cycle of electoral malpractices, lack of accountability and bad governance which constitutes a clog in the nation's march to democratic consolidation. With insights from virtue ethics, it is clear that elections and governance in Nigeria needs to be about informed character, inculcation of virtues, practical wisdom, reasoned choice and well-being of the people. This paper concludes that virtue ethics is imperative to the search for democratic consolidation in the Nigerian democratic political space.

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