



An Analysis of John Rawls' Justice As Fairness Vis-À-Vis Nigerian Democracy

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's democratic experience presents a striking contrast between constitutional ideals and lived political realities. While democracy is expected to guarantee fairness, equal participation, and just distribution of social goods, the Nigerian context continues to reflect persistent inequality, weak institutional accountability, electoral disputes, and elite dominance in governance. These contradictions raise fundamental concerns about whether democracy in practice aligns with its philosophical justification as a system rooted in justice. This paper asks a central question: can Nigerian democracy be truly described as fair when examined through John Rawls' idea of justice as fairness? Using analytic method, the findings showed that although Nigeria has democratic structures such as elections, courts, and representative institutions, fairness is not evenly experienced. Political influence, wealth, and connections often shape access to opportunities more than merit or equal rights. Elections are sometimes disputed, public resources are unevenly shared, and many communities still struggle with basic needs despite national wealth. These realities reveal a clear gap between democratic ideals and actual outcomes. The paper concludes that Nigerian democracy is still developing and has not fully achieved the standard of justice as fairness. It recommends stronger accountability in governance, more transparent elections, fairer distribution of national resources, and policies that reduce inequality across regions and social groups.

Keywords: Justice as fairness; Nigerian democracy; inequality; electoral integrity; corruption; political legitimacy; Rawls; social justice; governance

INTRODUCTION

The question of justice has persistently occupied a central position in political philosophy, largely because every society, regardless of its level of development, is confronted with the challenge of how to distribute rights, opportunities, wealth, and political power in a manner that is widely regarded as fair. In modern democratic systems, this concern becomes even more pressing, as democracy is often justified on the basis that it guarantees equality, participation, and protection of citizens' fundamental rights. However, the reality in many societies, particularly in developing democracies such as Nigeria, reveals a widening gap between the ideals of democracy and the lived experiences of citizens. Nigeria, since its return to democratic governance in 1999, has continued to grapple with structural inequalities, political corruption, electoral manipulation, ethno-religious tensions, youth marginalisation, poverty, and uneven distribution of national resources. These challenges have raised critical questions about the extent to which Nigerian democracy reflects the true spirit of fairness, equality, and justice that democratic governance is supposed to embody. While elections are conducted periodically and institutions of governance exist, many citizens still perceive the system as one that disproportionately benefits a privileged political elite, often at the expense of the wider population.

In attempting to provide a normative framework for evaluating such political realities, John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness becomes highly relevant. Rawls, one of the most influential political philosophers of the twentieth century, proposes a conception of justice that is grounded in fairness, equality of basic liberties, and the arrangement of social and economic inequalities in ways that are to the advantage of the least privileged members of society. His idea of the *original position* and the *veil of ignorance* serves as a thought experiment designed to ensure impartiality in the formulation of principles of justice, thereby eliminating bias, privilege, and self-interest from decisions about social structure.¹ This

paper therefore situates Rawls' theory within the context of Nigerian democracy, with a view to critically examining the extent to which the Nigerian political system aligns with or deviates from the principles of justice as fairness..

Nigerian Democratic Development

The development of democracy in Nigeria is a complex and uneven historical process shaped by colonial legacies, military interventions, ethnic diversity, and struggles for political stability. From the period of independence in 1960, Nigeria adopted a parliamentary system inherited from the British colonial administration, which was expected to lay the foundation for representative governance and political accountability. However, the early years of independence were marked by intense regional rivalry, weak political institutions, electoral disputes, and growing mistrust among political elites, all of which contributed to the collapse of the First Republic in 1966. The subsequent military era significantly altered the trajectory of democratic development in the country. Military regimes, while often justified as corrective responses to civilian misrule, entrenched authoritarian governance structures, weakened democratic institutions, and centralised political power. During this period, civil liberties were frequently suspended, political participation was restricted, and decision-making processes became highly hierarchical. Although some military governments introduced economic and administrative reforms, their long-term impact was largely the erosion of democratic culture and institutional continuity.

The transition to the Fourth Republic in 1999 marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's political history. It was widely welcomed as a return to civilian rule and an opportunity to rebuild democratic institutions such as the legislature, judiciary, and electoral bodies. Since then, Nigeria has conducted several general elections and experienced peaceful transfers of power at the federal level, which are often cited as indicators of democratic consolidation. However, beneath these formal achievements lies a persistent set of structural challenges that continue to undermine the quality of democracy in practice. Electoral malpractice, vote buying, political violence, and the dominance of money politics have consistently raised questions about the credibility of electoral outcomes. In addition, weak institutional accountability, corruption within public offices, and the perceived capture of state resources by political elites have contributed to widespread public distrust in governance. The principle of popular sovereignty, which is central to democratic theory, is often weakened by elite manipulation and limited citizen participation in decision-making processes beyond periodic elections.

Furthermore, Nigeria's democratic development is deeply affected by issues of inequality and social fragmentation. Ethno-religious divisions and regional disparities continue to influence political appointments, resource allocation, and access to opportunities. The federal character principle, designed to promote inclusion, has itself become a subject of debate, as it is sometimes seen as reinforcing identity politics rather than fostering genuine merit-based governance. Despite these challenges, Nigeria's democratic experience has also witnessed gradual improvements in civil society engagement, media freedom, judicial activism, and youth political awareness. These developments suggest that democracy, though imperfect, is still evolving and remains a contested but resilient system in the Nigerian context.

Justice as Fairness

John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness stands as one of the most influential contributions to modern political philosophy, offering a normative framework for understanding how a just society ought to be organised. At its core, Rawls' conception is built on the idea that the principles governing social and political institutions should be chosen under conditions of fairness, where no individual has an unfair advantage in determining the structure of society. This approach is not merely descriptive but deeply evaluative, aiming to provide a rational basis for assessing the justice of institutions and social arrangements. Rawls introduces a hypothetical situation known as the original position, in which individuals are imagined to come together to decide the principles that will govern their society.² In this position, they operate behind what he calls the veil of ignorance, a condition that deprives them of knowledge about their personal identities, such as their social class, economic status, ethnicity, gender, religion, or natural abilities.

From this original position, Rawls argues that rational individuals would agree on two fundamental principles of justice. The first principle guarantees equal basic liberties for all citizens, including freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, political participation, and the rule of law. These liberties are considered

inviolable and cannot be sacrificed for economic or social advantages. The second principle addresses social and economic inequalities, stating that such inequalities are only justifiable if they are arranged to benefit the least advantaged members of society, and if they are attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. What makes Rawls' theory particularly significant is its attempt to reconcile liberty with equality in a structured and balanced manner. Unlike utilitarian approaches that may justify inequality for the sake of overall welfare, Rawls insists that justice requires protecting the rights and dignity of every individual, especially those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.³

Core Principles of Rawls' Theory

The foundation of John Rawls' theory of justice is built on a set of interrelated principles that seek to define what a fair and well-ordered society should look like. These principles are not arbitrary; they are derived from a hypothetical agreement made in the original position under the veil of ignorance, where individuals are assumed to be rational and equally situated. In such a condition, Rawls argues that people would choose principles that protect them against unfair disadvantage, since they do not know their future social status.⁴ The first and most fundamental principle is the equal basic liberties principle. This principle holds that every individual is entitled to an equal set of fundamental freedoms that cannot be violated or traded off for economic or political gains. These liberties include freedom of speech, freedom of thought and conscience, the right to vote and hold public office, freedom of association, and the protection of the rule of law. Rawls insists that these liberties must be guaranteed equally to all citizens, as they form the basis of human dignity and democratic participation.

The second principle is the difference principle, which addresses how social and economic inequalities should be structured. According to this principle, inequalities are only justifiable if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, particularly the least advantaged members of society. In other words, any distribution of wealth, income, or opportunities must work to improve the condition of the most vulnerable groups rather than widen existing gaps between the rich and the poor. This principle places a strong moral demand on institutions to prioritise social justice over mere efficiency or profit maximisation.

Corruption and the Question of Fair Distribution

In Nigeria, corruption is not an abstract political idea; it is something people experience in very practical and sometimes frustrating ways. It shows up in the potholes that remain unrepaired for years despite repeated government announcements, in public hospitals where patients are asked to buy basic supplies, and in schools where facilities fall far below acceptable standards even though budget allocations continue to increase on paper. For many citizens, corruption is not a headline it is part of everyday life. At the heart of the problem is how public resources are distributed and managed. Ideally, government funds are meant to improve collective welfare by providing infrastructure, education, healthcare, and social support. However, in many instances, these resources are not used for their intended purpose. Contracts are sometimes inflated beyond reasonable costs, projects are abandoned halfway, and funds meant for development are diverted into private hands. The result is a system where the appearance of development exists, but the reality on the ground tells a different story.

This imbalance becomes even clearer when comparing the conditions of ordinary citizens with those in positions of political or economic power. While many Nigerians struggle daily with unemployment, rising living costs, and limited access to basic services, a small group within the political and administrative structure enjoys disproportionate access to state resources. This creates a sense of deep injustice, especially when citizens observe a clear gap between public hardship and private wealth accumulated through public office. What makes the situation more painful is that corruption does not only take away money it takes away opportunities. When funds meant for education are mismanaged, students learn in overcrowded classrooms without proper materials. When healthcare budgets are diverted, hospitals become ill-equipped and patients suffer preventable consequences. When infrastructure projects are compromised, entire communities remain cut off from meaningful development. In this sense, corruption does not just distort distribution; it reshapes people's chances in life.

Over time, this pattern affects how citizens perceive fairness in society. Many begin to feel that success is less about merit or effort and more about who one knows or how well one is connected. This perception weakens trust in public institutions and creates a quiet resignation that the system does not

work equally for everyone. It also fuels frustration, especially among young people who feel excluded from meaningful participation in national life. In a society where resources are limited and needs are high, fair distribution becomes a moral question as much as a political one. When public wealth consistently fails to reach those who need it most, the idea of justice itself is called into question. This is why corruption is not only an administrative failure but also a direct challenge to the principle of fairness in governance and social life.

Regional Imbalance and Development Inequality

In Nigeria, regional imbalance is not something people need statistics to understand. It is something they see, travel through, and sometimes live with all their lives. The experience of development in the country is not evenly spread. Some areas feel constantly connected to national progress, while others feel like they are always catching up, no matter how long they wait. A simple journey across the country reveals this difference. In some cities, roads are smooth, electricity supply is relatively stable, businesses are active, and infrastructure keeps expanding. In other places, a short drive can turn into hours of navigating bad roads, unreliable transport systems, and communities that seem cut off from steady development. This contrast is not just about geography, it shapes how people experience life and opportunity. Education reflects this gap very clearly. In more developed regions, schools are better equipped, teachers are more available, and learning environments are more stable. In less developed areas, students often face overcrowded classrooms, shortage of teachers, and limited access to learning materials. The difference shows in outcomes as well, as students from disadvantaged regions often have fewer opportunities to compete on equal footing, even when they have similar potential.

Healthcare tells a similar story. In some parts of the country, people can access well-equipped hospitals and specialist care within a reasonable distance. In other areas, clinics are far apart, understaffed, and poorly supplied. In emergencies, this difference becomes life-changing. A simple illness in one region can be treated quickly, while in another, it may become serious due to delays and lack of facilities. Economic opportunities also follow this uneven pattern. Urban and industrial centres naturally attract more investment, jobs, and private sector activity, while many rural and less developed regions depend heavily on subsistence farming or informal work. Over time, this pushes young people to leave their communities in search of better prospects elsewhere, creating crowded cities and increasingly empty rural areas. Security challenges have made the situation even more difficult in some parts of the country. Where there is conflict or instability, development slows down or stops altogether. Schools close, businesses relocate, and government presence becomes limited. Even when peace returns, rebuilding takes time, and the gap between regions continues to widen.

What makes regional imbalance particularly sensitive is how it is felt emotionally. Many people do not just see it as a development issue, but as a question of belonging and fairness. When some regions consistently appear more developed than others, it raises quiet but persistent questions about inclusion and equal treatment within the national space. At its core, regional imbalance in Nigeria is about uneven experience. It is about how two citizens of the same country can live completely different realities depending on where they are born or where they happen to live.

Political Power and Elite Capture in Nigeria

In Nigeria, political power is often seen less as a public trust and more as access to influence, wealth, and control over national resources. This perception has shaped the character of politics over time, where elections, appointments, and governance decisions are frequently influenced by networks of powerful individuals who operate behind the formal structures of the state. The result is a system where a relatively small group continues to dominate political and economic life, while the majority remain at the margins of decision making. A clear illustration of this pattern can be seen in the idea of “godfatherism” in Nigerian politics. In Lagos State, the long-standing political influence of figures such as Bola Tinubu has often been discussed in relation to how political candidates emerge and how administrations align after elections. In Anambra State, the rivalry between political actors such as Chris Uba and Peter Obi at different points in time also reflected how powerful individuals can shape electoral outcomes, candidate selection, and governance direction. These examples show how political authority is sometimes negotiated within elite networks rather than purely determined by popular choice.

Elite capture is also evident in the management of national resources, particularly in sectors such as oil and infrastructure. Over the years, major contracts and economic opportunities have frequently been linked to politically connected businessmen and firms. Figures such as Aliko Dangote, while widely recognised as an industrialist, also reflect how economic success in Nigeria often intersects with strong access to state policies, incentives, and elite networks. In the oil sector, debates around subsidy regimes and import licences have repeatedly involved allegations that a small group of influential actors benefit disproportionately from state arrangements, while public resources meant for wider development are heavily concentrated.⁵ Electoral politics further demonstrates how elite influence shapes participation. Campaign financing in Nigeria is extremely costly, and this limits real competition to individuals with access to significant financial backing or political sponsorship. During the 2023 general elections, for instance, the presidential campaigns of major candidates such as Bola Tinubu (APC), Atiku Abubakar (PDP), and Peter Obi (Labour Party) highlighted how political contests are heavily driven by resource mobilisation, elite alliances, and institutional backing. In many cases, smaller parties struggle to compete meaningfully due to limited access to funding and national structures.

At the state level, elite capture can also be observed in budget implementation and constituency projects. There have been repeated public concerns about inflated contracts and duplicated projects in various ministries and agencies, where individuals within political circles are alleged to benefit from state spending. These patterns contribute to situations where public funds circulate within a narrow network of contractors, politicians, and intermediaries, rather than being fully translated into public services. The consequences of this structure are visible in everyday life. While political elites move between offices of power, business opportunities, and influential appointments, many citizens continue to face unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to quality public services. This creates a growing perception that political participation does not always translate into equal benefit, and that access to national resources is unevenly distributed.

Poverty and the Problem of Social Justice in Nigeria

Poverty in Nigeria is not only a condition of low income but a reflection of deeper structural inequalities that shape access to opportunities, resources, and dignity. Despite being one of Africa's largest economies, Nigeria continues to record high levels of poverty, with millions of citizens struggling to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education. What makes the situation more troubling is not only the presence of poverty, but its persistence alongside significant national wealth. In many parts of the country, poverty is visible in everyday life. Rural communities often lack access to clean water, functional schools, and reliable healthcare facilities. In urban centres, informal settlements continue to expand, with residents living in overcrowded conditions and depending on unstable forms of income such as petty trading, daily labour, or small-scale transport services. These realities show that economic growth does not automatically translate into improved living conditions for the majority of citizens.

One of the key drivers of poverty in Nigeria is unemployment, particularly among young people. Each year, thousands of graduates enter the labour market with limited job opportunities available to them. This situation has led to widespread underemployment, where individuals are forced to accept jobs that do not match their qualifications or provide sufficient income for a decent standard of living. In some cases, the frustration associated with unemployment has contributed to social problems such as crime, migration, and youth restiveness. Another major factor is inequality in access to education and healthcare. In wealthier urban areas, families can access private schools and better-equipped hospitals, while in poorer communities, public services are often underfunded and overstretched. This creates a cycle where children born into disadvantaged backgrounds have fewer opportunities to improve their circumstances, reinforcing poverty across generations.

Government intervention programmes have been introduced over the years to address poverty, such as social investment schemes, conditional cash transfers, and youth empowerment initiatives. While some of these programmes have provided temporary relief for certain households, their impact has often been limited by issues such as poor implementation, political interference, and lack of continuity. As a result, many citizens remain unaware of these programmes or unable to access them effectively. The problem of poverty in Nigeria is closely tied to questions of social justice. In a society where resources are not fairly distributed, and where opportunities are shaped by location, connections, or social status, poverty becomes more than an economic condition. It becomes a reflection of exclusion from the benefits

of national life. This raises difficult questions about fairness, especially when national wealth exists alongside widespread deprivation.

Federal Character and the Question of Fairness

The principle of federal character in Nigeria was introduced as a response to deep concerns about imbalance, exclusion, and domination among different ethnic and regional groups. It was designed to ensure that appointments, recruitment into public service, and distribution of opportunities reflect Nigeria's diversity, so that no group feels permanently excluded from national participation. In theory, it is meant to promote unity by guaranteeing that all parts of the country have a visible presence in governance.⁶ In practice, however, the application of federal character has remained controversial. While it has succeeded in increasing representation across ethnic and regional lines, it has also raised questions about whether fairness is truly achieved or simply redistributed in a symbolic way. In many cases, appointments into key public institutions are carefully balanced across states and zones, yet concerns persist about whether competence, merit, and efficiency are sometimes compromised in the process.

A practical illustration can be seen in recruitment into federal agencies and ministries. It is common for selection processes to be structured in a way that ensures every state has representation. While this approach aims to prevent domination by a few groups, it sometimes results in situations where candidates are chosen primarily to satisfy geographic balance rather than strictly based on performance.⁷ This tension between representation and merit continues to generate debate among policymakers and citizens. The same issue appears in political appointments at the federal level. Ministers, heads of agencies, and other senior officials are often selected to reflect Nigeria's federal structure, ensuring that all states or geopolitical zones are included. For example, cabinets are usually formed with careful attention to regional balance between the North, South, East, and West. While this promotes inclusion, it does not always guarantee that the most qualified individuals are selected for specific roles, leading to ongoing debates about effectiveness in governance.

At the state level, similar dynamics can be observed in how local government positions and civil service jobs are distributed. In some cases, indigene-settler tensions also complicate the idea of fairness, as individuals who are resident in a state but not considered "indigenes" may face limitations in accessing certain opportunities. This creates another layer of inequality within the broader attempt to balance representation. The question of fairness becomes more complex when viewed from the perspective of national development. While federal character aims to ensure inclusion, it sometimes produces outcomes where representation is achieved but inequality in capacity and performance remains. This raises a deeper concern about whether fairness should be understood primarily as equal representation or as equal opportunity based on merit and competence.

Electoral Justice and Democratic Legitimacy

Electoral justice in Nigeria is closely tied to how citizens perceive fairness in the entire democratic process. It goes beyond simply holding elections; it is about whether the process is transparent, whether votes genuinely count, and whether outcomes reflect the will of the people. When these conditions are questioned, the legitimacy of democratic governance is also placed under scrutiny. In Nigeria's recent democratic history, elections have often been accompanied by disputes, court cases, and public disagreement over results. A notable example is the 2023 presidential election, where Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar, and Peter Obi were central figures in a highly contested race. After the Independent National Electoral Commission declared Tinubu as the winner, both Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi challenged the outcome in court, raising concerns about irregularities, vote transmission issues, and overall transparency. These legal battles reflected not just political rivalry but deeper questions about whether the electoral process fully captured the will of the electorate.

At the institutional level, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has introduced reforms such as the BVAS system and electronic result transmission to improve credibility. However, during the 2023 elections, delays and inconsistencies in result uploading in some polling units created public suspicion. In certain areas, results were disputed at collation centres, and observers reported cases where logistical challenges affected voter confidence. These experiences shaped how many citizens interpreted the fairness of the election, regardless of the final legal outcome.⁸

Electoral justice is also affected by voter behaviour and on-the-ground realities. In some communities, reports of vote buying have become common during election periods. Small cash incentives or material items are sometimes used to influence voter choices, especially in economically vulnerable areas. This reduces voting to a short-term exchange rather than a reflection of long-term political preference, weakening the moral foundation of democratic participation.

Security challenges have further complicated electoral legitimacy in certain regions. In parts of the South-East, incidents of violence and enforcement of sit-at-home orders during election periods have, at times, discouraged voter turnout. When citizens are unable to safely participate in elections, the representativeness of the outcome becomes limited, even if the process is officially completed. Court judgments also play an important role in shaping perceptions of electoral justice. The Nigerian judiciary has become a key arena for resolving electoral disputes, with election tribunals often determining whether declared results stand or are overturned. While this provides a legal pathway for addressing grievances, it also reflects how contested elections have become within the political system.

In everyday experience, electoral justice is ultimately judged by trust. When citizens believe that elections are fair, they are more likely to accept outcomes and engage with governance. When they believe otherwise, participation becomes weaker, and political legitimacy is reduced. This tension between procedure and perception continues to define Nigeria's democratic experience.

Critical Evaluation of Nigerian Democracy through Rawlsian Lens

When Nigerian democracy is examined through the ideas of John Rawls, especially his concept of justice as fairness, a clear tension emerges between democratic form and social reality. On the surface, Nigeria operates a democratic system with elections, constitutional rights, and representative institutions. However, when these structures are tested against Rawlsian standards of fairness, equal liberty, and justice for the least advantaged, several contradictions become visible. Rawls places strong emphasis on equal basic liberties, where every citizen is expected to enjoy the same political and civil rights without interference. In Nigeria, these liberties exist in principle, but their practical expression is often uneven. During elections, for example, citizens in some regions are able to freely vote and participate, while others experience intimidation, insecurity, or voter suppression due to violence or political tension. In areas affected by unrest in parts of the North-East or political tensions in some South-East communities, participation has at times been disrupted, raising questions about whether political liberty is truly equal for all citizens.

Another key Rawlsian concern is fairness in opportunity. Rawls argues that individuals should have a fair chance to access positions and resources regardless of their background. In Nigeria, however, access to political and economic opportunities is often shaped by factors such as ethnicity, political connections, wealth, and regional affiliation.⁹ For instance, political contests frequently require enormous financial resources, limiting serious competition to wealthy individuals or those backed by influential sponsors. This reality reduces the openness of democratic participation and creates barriers that are not based on merit alone. The difference principle, which requires that inequalities should benefit the least advantaged members of society, also raises serious concerns in the Nigerian context. Despite significant national revenue, especially from oil and taxation, poverty remains widespread. Many rural communities still lack basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and healthcare facilities, while a small political and economic elite continues to benefit disproportionately from state resources. This imbalance suggests that inequality in Nigeria does not always work to improve the condition of the poorest, but often reinforces existing disparities.

Political corruption and elite dominance further complicate the Rawlsian evaluation of Nigerian democracy. Public resources are frequently perceived to be concentrated among political actors and their networks, while ordinary citizens experience limited access to the benefits of governance.¹⁰ This weakens the idea of a system designed to serve the least advantaged, as institutional decisions often appear to favour influence over fairness. Even electoral processes, which are central to democracy, reveal gaps when viewed through Rawls' idea of fairness under impartial conditions. Issues such as vote buying, disputed results, and inconsistent implementation of electoral procedures reduce confidence in whether outcomes truly reflect the will of all citizens equally. The fact that election results are often contested in court further shows the level of uncertainty surrounding fairness in political competition. Despite these challenges, Nigerian democracy still shows elements of progress, particularly in judicial intervention, media

engagement, and increasing political awareness among citizens. However, when assessed through Rawls' standard of justice as fairness, the system reveals significant structural inequalities that continue to limit equal participation and fair distribution of opportunities across society.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of John Rawls' idea of justice as fairness in relation to Nigerian democracy reveals a clear tension between democratic ideals and political reality. While Nigeria operates a constitutional democracy with elections, institutions, and formal guarantees of rights, the practical experience of many citizens shows persistent inequalities in political participation, access to opportunities, and distribution of national resources. From a Rawlsian perspective, these challenges become more significant when measured against the principles of equal liberty, fair equality of opportunity, and the difference principle. In many cases, political influence, economic power, and social connections continue to shape access to leadership positions and state benefits more than merit or fairness. This creates a situation where democracy exists in structure, but fairness in practice remains uneven. Electoral processes, governance practices, and resource allocation in Nigeria also reflect gaps that affect public trust and democratic legitimacy. Issues such as electoral disputes, corruption, regional imbalance, and elite dominance further weaken the extent to which the system can be described as just in Rawls' sense. Although institutions exist to promote fairness, their effectiveness is often limited by structural and systemic constraints. At the same time, Nigeria's democratic experience is not without progress. There is growing political awareness among citizens, increased use of legal channels to resolve disputes, and continuous reforms aimed at improving governance and electoral integrity. These developments suggest that democracy is still evolving, even if it has not yet fully achieved the standard of justice as fairness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the issues discussed in this paper and the gaps identified between Rawls' idea of justice as fairness and the Nigerian democratic experience, the following recommendations are made:

1. Strengthening electoral institutions such as INEC through improved transparency, effective use of technology, and strict enforcement of electoral laws in order to enhance credibility and public trust in elections.
2. Promoting fair equality of opportunity by reducing political and economic barriers to participation, especially through reforms that address the high cost of elections and limit the influence of money in politics.
3. Intensifying the fight against corruption by ensuring accountability in the management of public resources, with stronger sanctions for mismanagement and improved monitoring of public spending.
4. Ensuring more balanced regional development by prioritising equitable distribution of infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities across all geopolitical zones.

Endnotes

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