



Electoral Processes in Taraba State: A Review through the Lens of Plato's Theory of Justice

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Abstract

The electoral process in Taraba State is noted to be drafted to a pattern of systemic injustice, characterized by elite dominance, institutional weaknesses, and civic disengagement. This article examines the electoral processes in Taraba State, Nigeria, through the lens of Plato's theory of justice as presented in *The Republic*. Plato's conception of justice, encompassing specialization, harmony, and the governance of philosopher-kings, serves as a criterion for evaluating the selection of leaders and the fairness of political processes. Since its establishment in 1991, Taraba State's electoral history indicates advancements in democratic engagement; however, challenges persist, including electoral violence, vote-buying, result manipulation, and ethnic and religious bias. These facts starkly contrast with Plato's concepts of meritocratic governance and equitable representation. They reveal systemic issues that undermine public trust and the credibility of institutions. Nonetheless, there exists consensus regarding the pursuit of order, legality, and equity through reforms implemented by electoral entities such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC). This study juxtaposes Platonic ideals with real-world scenarios in Taraba State to elucidate the disparities between philosophical justice and political practice, emphasizing the necessity for reforms. The analysis determines that aligning Taraba's electoral processes with Plato's principles is crucial for promoting fairness, stability, and democratic legitimacy in the state.

Keywords: Electoral process, Taraba State, Plato's theory of justice, political philosophy, reforms, tripartite

Introduction

Taraba State in North-eastern Nigeria has experienced significant political transformations since its establishment in 1991. The state experienced military and civilian regimes that have altered the structure and integrity of the electoral system of the state (Smith 23). The political history of the state has evolved from centralised appointments to the establishment of democratic government elections, which gives the right for citizens to be elected, and be voted for, through the formation of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as a regulatory body. The body, INEC, is responsible for all aspects of the election and electoral processes. The electoral process in Taraba



State is noted to be drafted to a pattern of systemic injustice, characterized by elite dominance, institutional weaknesses, and civic disengagement (Taraba State Government [TSG] 2). Despite Taraba State conducting four gubernatorial elections and elections for state house of assembly members, local government chairpersons, and councillors across its sixteen local government areas since its inception, reports indicate pervasive flaws and irregularities in these elections, casting doubt on the legitimacy of their outcomes. Complaints range from inflated voter registration to manipulation of election figures (Elochukwu 15). Because electorates are not satisfied with the electoral processes, they displayed dissatisfaction through protests, acts of aggression, and sporadic violence, underscoring the pressing need for electoral justice.

The theory of justice, propounded by Plato, characterised individuals acting in accordance with their optimal abilities, corresponds with the merit-based selection of electoral officials and the allocation of political opportunities grounded in competence rather than favouritism (Plato 433–436; Okoro 121). The theory can provide a structure to understand Taraba's electoral processes, highlighting structural equilibrium and the necessity for equitable representation among various ethnic groups and political interests, while also emphasising the significance of informed leadership in the establishment of fair electoral institutions (Taylor 56; Nnaji 79). Taraba's electoral processes and the political development can help actualize Plato's theory of Justice, where the State's electoral processes experience fairness, stability, and democratic legitimacy. Even though the electoral process faces serious impediments globally, not confined to any particular African country or region, it poses a threat to peaceful elections worldwide. However, the electoral process is addressed through the electoral justice that adheres to the law and protects electoral rights. Against this backdrop, this research evaluates the alignment of electoral practices and electoral process with Plato's theory of justice in the context of the literature review.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical map of this research work is based on Plato's theory of justice. In his book "The Republic," written around 380 BCE. "The Republic" is a Socratic dialogue that explores various philosophical themes, including justice, the ideal state, and the nature of the soul. The development of this theory is influenced by the socio-political conditions of Athens at the time, marked by political instability, moral decline, and the trial and execution of Socrates. These events motivated Plato to seek a model of a just society where such injustices could be avoided. "The Republic" is structured around a conversation led by Socrates, discussing the nature of justice and examining whether the just man is happier than the unjust man (346). Through this dialogue, Plato presents his vision of a just society and the role of justice within it. His key assumption is that reality is composed of eternal forms, with the Good being the highest form. The human soul consists of reason, spirit, and appetite, each contributing to harmony. Justice is inherently beneficial, and individual has natural aptitudes determining their roles in society. Knowledge, particularly philosophical knowledge, is essential for understanding and governing justly, underpinning the idea of philosopher-kings as ideal rulers.

According to Birch (9), Plato explained his arguments on the individual capacities of three classes and three souls. He borrows this idea from Pythagoras and pointed out that every human soul has three qualities – rationality, spirit, and appetite, with justice as the fourth virtue, architectonic in nature, balancing and harmonizing the other three qualities. In each soul, one of these qualities



will be the predominant faculty. Individuals in whom the rational faculty was predominant will constitute the ruling class, and the virtue of such a soul is wisdom. This soul, love learning, has the power to comprehend the idea of good. Those in whom spirit is the predominant quality are the auxiliaries or warriors, and the virtue of such souls is courage, implying the ability to hold on to one's convictions and beliefs even in adverse times. The two constituted the guardian class (Orji 4).

Socrates (612) compared a spirited or thymotic individual to a watchdog, capable of great bravery, public spirit, and anger while fighting strangers in defence of one's city. It indicates the willingness to sacrifice one's material desires for the sake of the common good. This is basically a political virtue necessary for the survival of a community and ought to be kept under control. Individuals whose souls are appetitive exhibited a fondness for material things (221-233). Plato's theory of justice revolves around the idea of specialization and the harmonious structure of society. He stated that justice is a mirror where individuals perform their function without interfering with others (227). First, specialisation (Division of Labour), where Plato argues that justice is achieved when everyone performs the role for which they are best suited by nature, with the assumption that individuals have different talents and abilities, and a just society allows them to exercise these in appropriate roles. Secondly, harmony is justice in a well-ordered society; different classes perform their roles without overstepping their boundaries, creating a balance similar to different parts of the soul. Thirdly, the tripartite soul is explained to be the human soul that has three parts: reason, spirit, and appetite, with each part having its function and virtue, with the idea that part of the soul is associated with wisdom and ruling, and also courage to enforce directives. Fourthly, the Ideal State where Plato extends the tripartite soul to the structure of the state, which comprises three classes: Rulers (Philosopher-Kings), those who possess reason and wisdom. Guardians (Warriors) those who embody spirit and courage, as well as the Producers (Farmers, Artisans, etc.), those driven by appetite and responsible for the economy and production. This inner harmony leads to a virtuous and fulfilling life to an ideal state, where social justice is achieved when each class performs its function without encroaching on others. Thus, the rulers govern with wisdom, the guardians protect with courage, and the producers contribute with their skills and labour. Plato viewed a state as being smoothly and efficiently in operation (326).

Criticism of Plato's Theory of Justice

Plato's theory of justice, though impactful, has encountered considerable criticism throughout history, particularly about its rigid classification of society into classes based on inherent skills, which may result in diminished social mobility and the perpetuation of inequity. From Karl Popper's standpoint, which is grounded in a humanitarian interpretation, the shortcomings of this concept of justice are evident. Karl Popper contends that Plato's political philosophy embodies not only tyranny but also anti-humanism. He further suggested that Plato's political objective was not just ethically akin to tyranny but also a manifestation of it. The Republic's depiction of his viewpoint on justice was regarded as unflattering. Plato employed the term in The Republic solely to denote behaviors that serve the best interests of the state, as he believed the state possesses intelligence and sound judgment.

The core concept of justice is the enforcement of rigid class regulations. He stated that all individuals should participate in endeavors that align with their inherent dispositions. Madntyre



(34) indicates that Thrasymachus elucidates the concept of justice, asserting that he does not equate "just" with "what benefits the stronger." Instead, he posits that historically, rulers and ruling classes have fabricated the notion and criteria of justice for their own ends, suggesting that it is, in fact, more advantageous to behave unjustly than justly.

Taraba State Historical and Electoral Processes

The historical background of Taraba could be traced to the North-Eastern State of Nigeria, which was created on the 27th May 1967, with its capital in Maiduguri. Thereafter, on 3rd February 1976, the North-Eastern State was divided into Borno, Bauchi, and Gongola States for political and administrative convenience. Gongola State comprised Adamawa and Sardauna Provinces of North-Eastern State, together with the Wukari Division of the then Benue-Plateau State. This situation continued till the military government divided Gongola State into Adamawa and Taraba States in 1991. Taraba State was created on August 27th, 1991, out of the defunct Gongola State by the then Military Administration of President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. Taraba State is the most ethnically diverse State in Nigeria, with over 80 ethnic groups, each with its distinct historical and cultural heritage, which have cohabited peacefully with one another. There are 168 Wards and 1,912 polling units in the state. Three Senatorial Zones: Northern, Central, and Southern, and six Federal Constituencies; Ardo-Kola-Lau-Karim Lamido, Jalingo-Yorro-Zing, Bali-Gassol, Sardauna Gashaka-Kurmi, Takum-Ussa-Donga, and Wukari-Ibbi respectively (Taraba State Government 5; Independent National Electoral Commission 3).

Since its creation in 1991, Taraba State has been administered by two significant types of leadership, found and practised in post-colonial Nigerian state, Military, and democratic regimes. One of the leaders, Governor Suntai, was involved in a plane crash alongside his aides on 25th October 2012, which created a vacuum and political impasse in the leadership of Taraba State. His Deputy, Alh. Garba Umar (UTC) was sworn in as Acting Governor from 2012 to 2014. In a dramatic Supreme Court judgment, the earlier impeached Deputy Governor, Alh. Sani Abubakar Danladi was reinstated on the ground that his impeachment was illegal and served for six (6) months, November 2014, May 2015, as Acting Governor (TSG 5). It is his case that justice played its role against a fight for justice.

Electoral violence remains a significant challenge in Taraba State. Historical and recent elections have been marred by incidents of violence, often fueled by political rivalry, ethnic tensions, and inadequate security measures. Addressing this issue requires a multipronged approach, including better security planning, community engagement, and strict enforcement of electoral laws (Isa & Garba 1-2). Voter apathy is another challenge affecting the political structure in Taraba State. Factors contributing to low voter turnout include distrust in the electoral system, fear of violence, and inadequate voter education. Efforts to increase voter participation should focus on building public trust, enhancing voter education programs, and ensuring the safety of voters. Corruption and electoral malpractices such as vote-buying, ballot stuffing, and manipulation of results undermine the integrity of the political structure in Taraba State.

INEC and other stakeholders must implement robust measures to detect and prevent these malpractices. This includes the use of technology, such as electronic voting systems and biometric verification, to enhance the transparency and credibility of elections (7-15). Intra-party conflicts,



often arising from candidate selection processes, pose significant challenges to the political structure in Taraba State. These conflicts can lead to party fragmentation, disenfranchisement of certain groups, and reduced party cohesion. Political parties need to adopt more democratic and transparent processes for candidate selection to mitigate these conflicts.

The 2019 general elections in Taraba State provide a significant case study of the state's political structure and electoral processes. The elections saw intense competition between the PDP and APC, with Darius Ishaku of the PDP re-elected as Governor. The elections highlighted the influence of ethnic and religious affiliations, as well as the challenges of electoral violence and voter apathy (Mkom 11-25). The Jalingo/Yoro/Zing House of Representatives bye-election held on February 3, 2024, serves as a recent example of the electoral processes in Taraba State. This bye-election was necessitated by the death of Hon. Ismaila Meihanchi, the former representative.

The election saw the participation of four major political parties: PDP, APC, SDP, and NNPP (Wikipedia n.p.). The election carried significant tribal and religious undertones. The SDP candidate, Innocent Jabayang, who is a Mumuye man from Zing, received strong support from his ethnic kinsmen in Zing and Yoro. In contrast, the PDP, APC, and NNPP candidates were all from Jalingo and were Muslims. This dynamic influenced voting patterns, with tribal and religious affiliations playing a crucial role in voter preferences (Taraba State Government 41- 55).

On election day, voting took place across the three local government areas. The process was generally peaceful, though there were reports of isolated incidents. INEC and security agencies were on high alert to ensure a free and fair election. The results saw a split in votes along tribal and religious lines, with Jabayang receiving substantial support from his Mumuye kinsmen and the Muslim candidates splitting the votes in Jalingo (Situation Room 1-5). The outcome of the bye-election highlighted the complexities of electoral processes in Taraba State, where tribal and religious affiliations significantly impact voting behavior. It also underscored the importance of addressing intra-party conflicts and ensuring that all stakeholders feel adequately represented (Taraba State Government 13).

Electoral Bodies in Taraba State Electoral Processes

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the primary body responsible for overseeing elections in Nigeria, including Taraba State. INEC's role includes voter registration, delineation of electoral boundaries, regulation of political parties, and the conduct of free and fair elections. INEC operates through state offices, which manage the electoral processes at the local level (Chul & Mohammed 196). In addition to INEC, each state in Nigeria, including Taraba, has a State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC). The SIEC is responsible for conducting local government elections. This dual structure aims to ensure that both national and local elections are managed effectively. Political parties play a significant role in the electoral processes in Taraba State. Major political parties, including the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress (APC), and Social Democratic Party (SDP), actively participate in elections. Candidate nomination processes within these parties often involve primaries, where party members select their representatives for various elective positions (Chul 10). Election campaigns in Taraba State are characterized by rallies, debates, and media engagements.



Candidates and political parties use these platforms to present their manifestos and persuade the electorate. Campaigns are regulated by INEC to ensure compliance with electoral laws and to prevent malpractices such as vote-buying and hate speech (12-13). On Election Day, voting takes place at designated polling units across the state. INEC ensures that these polling units are adequately staffed and equipped with the necessary materials, such as ballot boxes and voting screens. The voting process is designed to be transparent and secure, with measures in place to prevent electoral fraud. After voting, ballots are counted at the polling units in the presence of party agents, observers, and security personnel. Results from each polling unit are then collated at the ward, local government, and state levels before the final announcement by INEC. The transparency of this process is crucial for maintaining public trust in the electoral outcomes (Adenekan 11-14). The outcome of the bye-election highlighted the complexities of electoral processes in Taraba State. INEC and other stakeholders implement robust measures to detect and prevent these malpractices. This includes the use of technology, such as electronic voting systems and biometric verification, to enhance the transparency and credibility of elections (237).

Application of Plato's Theory of Justice in Taraba State's Electoral Processes

Plato's Ideal Justice and Leadership Selection

Plato's theory of justice, articulated in *The Republic*, centres on the principle of specialisation, harmony, and leadership by philosopher-kings. In his framework, justice exists when each class of society performs its designated role without interfering with others. The rational class, composed of philosopher-rulers, governs with wisdom and seeks the common good. The auxiliaries enforce laws with courage, while the producers contribute economically, guided by appetite. Justice, therefore, requires that rulers be wise and virtuous individuals, chosen not by wealth, birth, or popular vote, but by their ability to understand the form of the good (Plato 437). Applying this to modern electoral contexts, Plato's ideal suggests that leaders should be selected on merit, competence, and moral integrity rather than through popularity contests or ethnic considerations. However, in democratic Nigeria, including Taraba State, leadership emerges from electoral competition shaped by voter behaviour, political party structures, and socio-economic influences.

The mismatch between philosopher-kings and elected politicians is stark, as elections rarely prioritise intellectual or moral excellence. Instead, they often reflect a struggle for power among elites, influenced by tribal, religious, and financial factors (Umar 210). This contrast highlights the difficulty of reconciling Platonic justice with the democratic structures of Taraba's electoral process.

Electoral Realities in Taraba State

The electoral history of Taraba State since 1991 has been marked by significant challenges that undermine justice as envisioned by Plato. While democratic structures have been institutionalized, elections are often marred by irregularities such as vote-buying, inflated voter registers, and manipulation of figures (Elochukwu 15). Plato's insistence on harmony and specialization is disrupted when political offices are occupied by individuals not best suited for governance, but by those who navigate the patronage and ethnic dynamics of elections. For instance, the 2019 and 2023 elections revealed how tribal and religious affiliations shape voting outcomes, with candidates receiving support primarily along ethnic lines rather than on policy or competence



(Mkom 11-25; Taraba State Government 41-55). Moreover, electoral violence and voter apathy undermine citizen participation, eroding the collective trust necessary for justice in governance.

Plato envisioned justice as order and fairness, yet Taraba's political system often mirrors Thrasymachus' cynical view that justice is merely "the advantage of the stronger" (MacIntyre 34). This dissonance illustrates how the practice of elections in Taraba prioritizes power and self-interest over communal well-being and moral governance.

Mismatches Between Ideal Justice and Practical Electoral Processes

The first major mismatch lies in leadership selection, while Plato emphasized the rise of philosopher-kings through rigorous education and moral training; Taraba's leaders emerge from party primaries influenced by money politics, godfatherism, and ethnic considerations. Elections often prioritize popularity or financial clout rather than wisdom and virtue, contradicting the merit-based system Plato envisioned (Okoro 121). Secondly, Plato's justice demands harmony among classes, yet Taraba's elections fuel division through ethnic rivalry and religious identity politics.

The 2024 Jalingo/Yorro/Zing bye-election clearly demonstrated how ethnicity influenced voting patterns, with candidates supported primarily by their kinship groups rather than broader policy platforms (Situation Room 1-5). Furthermore, Plato criticized democracy for fostering instability by empowering the uninformed masses, and Taraba's experience with voter manipulation and misinformation echoes this critique. These mismatches suggest that Taraba's electoral processes not only fail to meet Platonic justice but also often institutionalize injustice by perpetuating inequality, exclusion, and elite dominance.

Areas of Alignment Between Plato's Justice and Taraba's Elections

Despite significant mismatches, some areas of alignment exist between Plato's ideals and Taraba's electoral processes. One area is the recognition of the importance of order and law. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) embody the principle of structure and regulation that Plato would value in maintaining justice (Chul and Mohammed 196). Another alignment is the aspiration for equity in representation. With Taraba being the most ethnically diverse state in Nigeria, the creation of senatorial zones and federal constituencies attempts to balance diverse interests, reflecting Plato's notion that every group should play its role within the broader harmony of the state (Taraba State Government 5). Additionally, efforts to integrate technology such as biometric verification and electronic voting mirror the Platonic ideal of applying reason and expertise in governance to minimize corruption (Adenekan 11-14). Although far from perfect, these developments indicate a slow movement toward justice in Plato's sense, where structures are designed to ensure fairness, stability, and legitimacy. Thus, while practice falls short, the existence of frameworks for electoral integrity reflects some degree of alignment with Platonic principles.

Implications of Taraba State's Electoral Processes

The implications of Taraba State's electoral processes are profound both for governance and societal stability. First, the persistence of electoral injustice undermines trust in institutions, fueling apathy and sometimes violence among the electorate. Plato argued that injustice breeds disorder and decay in both individuals and states, a truth that resonates in Taraba, where flawed elections



erode democratic legitimacy (Plato 327–335). Second, the dominance of ethnic and religious politics entrenches division, preventing the emergence of leaders committed to the common good.

These risks perpetuate inequality, exclusion, and underdevelopment. Third, the absence of philosopher-kings or leaders chosen based on wisdom means governance may continue to lack visionary policies, undermining socio-economic progress. However, the institutional reforms undertaken by INEC and civil society's push for accountability provide opportunities for gradual alignment with Platonic justice. If Taraba strengthens transparency, enhances voter education, and curbs electoral violence, the state can inch closer to Plato's vision of harmony, fairness, and competent leadership. Ultimately, the implications are clear: aligning Taraba's electoral processes with justice is not merely philosophical but essential for peace, stability, and development.

Conclusion

The analysis of Taraba State's electoral processes in light of Plato's theory of justice reveals both contradictions and partial alignments between philosophical ideals and democratic realities. Plato envisioned a society where justice thrives through harmony, specialization, and the leadership of wise and virtuous philosopher-kings. In contrast, Taraba's political experience has been shaped by tribalism, religious affiliations, electoral violence, and systemic malpractices, all of which undermine the merit-based governance Plato advocated. Leadership selection is largely determined by party politics, financial influence, and ethnic loyalty rather than competence and moral integrity, illustrating a profound mismatch with Platonic justice. Yet, some degree of alignment is evident in the institutional frameworks established by INEC and SIEC, as well as in the aspiration for equitable representation across Taraba's diverse ethnic groups. These structures reflect attempts at order and fairness, though their effectiveness remains constrained by persistent corruption and weak enforcement. The implications of these mismatches are far-reaching: they erode trust in governance, perpetuate division, and hinder socio-economic development. To move toward a more just electoral system, Taraba must strengthen electoral transparency, invest in civic education, and promote leadership based on merit and competence. Ultimately, aligning Taraba's electoral processes with the principles of Plato's justice is not only a philosophical pursuit but a practical necessity for building peace, stability, and sustainable democratic governance in the state.

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