

PHILOSOPHY, FREE SPEECH AND SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Democracy has been accepted by many as the best form of government suited to allowing people live in dignity and freedom. Its overriding objective is to promote liberty and entrench freedom and to domesticate power for the benefit of the people. Democracy is an ideal and goal based on common values shared by peoples irrespective of their cultural, social and economic differences. It is a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under conditions of freedom, equality, transparency and responsibility. It seeks to promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the citizenship, achieve social justice, foster the economic and social development of the community and create a climate that is favourable for international peace. Democracy is built on basic elements such as protection of the rights of citizens, freedom of speech and so on. For democracy to thrive, citizens must be allowed to express their views. Free speech, freedom of speech or freedom of expression demands that individuals or communities be allowed to articulate their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship or legal sanction. As Isaiah Berlin said, free speech is an end in itself which does not exist for another end. It is a human right recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), international human rights laws and constitutions of states such as the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN). While the right has been amended to carry special duties and responsibilities and therefore not absolute as previously thought, it is still a cornerstone of a free society. This paper seeks, therefore, to explore the role of philosophy in promoting free speech for sustainable democratic governance. This paper is predicated on the fact that a people who live in fear will not produce what they are best capable of.

Keywords: Free speech, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Democracy, Democratic Governance, International Community.

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Introduction

On August 15, 2025, Umaru Bago the Niger State governor according to a report by Sahara Reporters ordered journalists out of an APC stakeholders meeting stating that there is “no freedom of speech in the hall.” He was reported to have threatened legal actions against any journalist who published proceedings from the meetings without his permission. Weeks before then, the Governor had also ordered the shutdown of Badeggi FM 90.1, a private radio station based in Minna the state capital accusing the station of unethical broadcasting and incitement, insisting that its broadcast were inflaming public sentiments against his government. As expected, many people and organisations such as the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) denounced the Governor's action as executive rascality and an outright attack on democratic governance. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on its part labeled the shutdown a grave violation of press freedom and constitutional rights.

It has to be pointed out that Governor Umaru Bago's action is not an isolated case. This is because attacks on free speech particularly on press freedom in Nigeria have become commonplace. The federal government for instance, have at various times through the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) clamped down on media stations with punishments ranging from fines and shutdowns for broadcasts deemed 'offensive' and 'unethical' by the government. For example, in 2022, the NBC imposed a ₦5 million fine on Trust TV, Multichoice Nigeria Limited and two others for their broadcast on terrorism in Nigeria. Again, in February 2023, the NBC fined Arise News and Television Continental TVC ₦2 million each for allegedly breaching broadcasting codes. Similarly, in March 2023, the NBC slammed a fine of a ₦5 million on Channels TV for

broadcasting an interview with Datti Baba-Ahmed, the Vice Presidential candidate on the Labour Party in the 2023 presidential elections where he questioned the propriety of swearing in president-elect Bola Ahmed Tinubu before the conclusion of election petition.

These and many others show that free speech and press freedom are increasingly under siege in Nigeria, challenged not only by censorship, surveillance and repression but also by the political economy of news sourcing. As funding for news production becomes more precarious and media coverage of government events becomes more politicised and as the media becomes entangled in market logics and sponsor influence, the space for free speech becomes narrower. In times of terrorism and authoritarianism and democratic decline, the role of free speech becomes even more urgent.

In a country like Nigeria that subscribes to democracy as a form of government, suppressing free speech in whatever form is not only unhealthy for sustainable democracy but may lead to the eventual collapse of the State. Freedom of speech is a fundamental cornerstone of democratic societies and a crucial component of individual liberty. It allows for the expression of diverse opinions, the open exchange of ideas, and the development of well-trained citizenry, citizens who express their thoughts, beliefs and opinions without fear of censorship or punishment. It recognises the inherent dignity of the individual and his right to engage in open discourse and even to hold an opinion against the government. It ensures that citizens hold their government accountable and that institutions are transparent and accountable and functions according to democratic norms and processes and not according to the dictates and wishes of

the president or governors.

This paper explores the nexus between free speech and democratic governance and examines how philosophy can be used to promote and enhance both. What does it mean and take to think and speak freely and responsibly especially in an atmosphere of suppression and repression of thoughts? How can philosophical tools of reflective thinking and critical analysis be applied to empower people to speak freely and responsibly?

Free Speech

In philosophical discourse and literature, 'free speech', 'freedom of speech', 'freedom of expression' and 'freedom of communication' are mostly used interchangeably and this paper will follow that convention bearing in kind though, that these formulations evoke subtly different phenomena. This is a principle that demands that individuals and communities are allowed the right to express their opinions, thoughts and ideas without fear of censorship (either by the government or other individuals) and legal punishment. In Section 19, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression”. It states that the right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Freedom is enjoyment of personal liberty, a state of not being a prisoner or a slave, in other words, a situation of being free of encumbrances that hinder the enjoyment of one's liberty.² Press freedom is a derivative of free speech and is the liberty of not putting any previous restraints or restrictions on a publication and

² Okorie, P.O. Rights to Freedom of Expression and the Press, *The Melting Pot*, 4(1): Pg. 22-28

not liberty to censure when an untrue or seditious materials is published.³ It is the right to publish materials without government restrictions and subject only to the laws of libel, obscenity and sedition.⁴

Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees freedom of speech as a fundamental right. Following the UDHR, the section provides that the right includes the freedom to hold opinions, and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. The section also protects the freedom of the press which allows individuals to own and operate media for the purpose of disseminating information. However, it is important to note that the right is not absolute and can be subject to certain limitations such as laws enacted by the National Assembly especially if it conflicts with national security, public order, morality and defamation.

Democratic governance

According to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2021),⁵ democratic governance refers to the quality of a political system where it consistently generates legitimate government, elected through fair and transparent voting, capable of effectively promoting inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic and social progress.⁶ It implies that a state employs a suitable leadership to lead a process of continuous strengthening of

³. Ogu, U.K. *John Locke and Constitutional Democracy in Nigeria* (Taraba State University and Entrepreneurial Service Ltd, 2023), Pg. 213.

⁴. Blackstone, W. Commentaries on the Laws of England, Paley, R. (ed.) *Book IV- Of Public Wrongs* (Oxford University Press, 2016), Pg. 56.

⁵. Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)(2021). *Democratic Governance as an Effective and Enduring Response to the Challenges Facing Latin America*. Stockholm: International IDEA

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democracy, which is resilient, without ruptures and serious interruptions such as military coups and takes place by institutional and peaceful means on the basis of rule of law and supported by a sound and effective electoral law and responsible legislative majority.

Democratic governance involves the actions of a government capable of meeting the basic demands and aspirations of the most vulnerable sectors. It means to govern well for today while making plans for the growth of democratic institutions. High quality institutions and responsible political leaders are essential to lay the foundations for a plural, inclusive and transparent democracy that respects human rights and resilient to survive complex crises and challenges.

Democratic governance requires minimum conditions of dignity and well-being for the people in order to function fully. It is not enough for citizens to 'live in a democracy' if they do not enjoy minimum standards of living, if poverty and inequality are not significantly reduced, if the justice system continues to serve only the powerful, if people cannot travel peacefully around the country, if cities are chaotic, unsafe, and polluted, or if marginalisation and discrimination continues to be present in our societies. Indeed, democratic governance is nurtured by social and material progress, which encourages trust in democratic institutions.⁷

In the words of Dike and Onyekwelu,⁸ democratic governance is the science of organising government at all levels and the process of

⁷. Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). *Democratic Governance as an Effective and Enduring Response to the Challenges Facing Latin America*, 2021.

⁸. Dike and Onyekwelu (2018)

coordinating direct mass and popular people's participation in affairs that relate to the totality of their wellbeing. Hence, the democratic way of governance, of course, involves competitions for various government positions, people's participation in choosing political leaders as well as the guaranteeing of human rights.

In essence, democratic governance is characterised by citizen participation involving guarantees for voting rights, public involvement in government and freedom of expression, free, fair and credible elections through transparent means, rule of law involving supremacy of the law, constitutional guarantees and impartial judicial system that dispenses with justice irrespective of class or position, protection of human rights especially those of the minority and vulnerable groups, political system involving a multi-party system and political tolerance, accountability and transparency in leadership and government.

Free speech and press freedom in Nigeria: Myth or Reality?

The right to free speech was first enshrined in the 1960 Constitution and is protected under Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution. It was also included in the 1963 and 1979. All these Constitutions guarantee freedom of expression and hold that includes the freedom to hold opinions, and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. As a state to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR), Nigeria is obligated to uphold and respect people's right to freedom of expression as outlined in Article 19.

While the Constitution guarantees it as a right, its implementation

has been hampered by colonial era restrictions such as the 1909 Seditious Offences Ordinance, Amendment to the newspaper Ordinance of 1917, Amendment to the Newspaper Ordinance of 1948, Newspaper Act of 1958 which sought to restrict press freedom and the Cybercrime Act established to combat cybercrimes and protect national information infrastructure but which broad provisions have also raised concerns regarding potential restrictions to freedom of expression online.

Layefa and Johnson averred that if the press and government relations were bad in the colonial era, it became more atrocious when Nigeria gained independence. They noted that in order to meet the exigencies of the post-independence period, the various governments enacted obnoxious laws and decrees to gag the press and protected the interest of the ruling class.⁹ Some of these draconian anti-press laws are: The Newspapers (Amendment) Act, 1964, Defamation Act No. 66 of 1961, Defamation (Amendment) Act. No. 1 of 1963, Defamatory and Offensive Publications Decree No. 44 of 1966, News (Amendment) Act. No. V, Circulation of Newspapers Decree No. 2 of 1966, Newspapers (Prohibition of Circulation) Decree No. 17 of 1967, Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree No. 11 of 1976, Decree No. 4 (DN4) of 1984, Decree 6 of 1987; the Nigerian Press Council Decree No. 56 of 1988 on newspapers proscription; the Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree No. 29 of 1993 which made it an offence punishable by death for any person to utter words, display anything or publish any material which is capable of breaking up the nation or part of it or cause violence. There were also Decree No. 35 of 1993, which empower the government to proscribe

⁹ Layefa, G. & Johnson, W.A. (2016). The Quest for Press Freedom in Nigeria, *Journal of Research and Development (JRnD)* 2(10): 22-34.

publications considered offensive; the Newspaper Registration Decree No. 43 of 1993; the Newspaper proscription and publication Decree No. 48 of 1993; and The News (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree 1993, which proscribed and prohibited The News magazine from circulation.

That said, with the growing number of daily newspapers, weekly magazines and other publications, broadcast media both government and privately owned many of which carry range of opinions including strong criticisms of government policies and debates on different issues, one may get the impression that there is considerable freedom of expression in Nigeria. The reality, however, is that freedom of the press and free speech are not as common in Nigeria as there is an uncommon threshold beyond which criticism is not easily tolerated.¹⁰

In Nigeria, large sections of the populace no longer receive unbiased news and information. This is not because journalists and broadcasters are being thrown into jail but because the media in Nigeria have fallen prey to nuanced efforts by the government to throttle their independence. Common methods Ogu mentions include stiff and unfavorable regulatory and financial pressure and public denunciation of honest journalists. Governments have also offered to friendly media outlets lucrative contracts, favorable regulatory decisions and preferential access to state information. The aim here is to make the press serve the government and not the public.¹¹

Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) (Reporters Without Borders)

^{10.} Ogu, U.K., John Locke and Constitutional Democracy in Nigeria, Pg. 215.

^{11.} Ogu, U.K., John Locke and Constitutional Democracy in Nigeria, Pg. 216.

describe Nigeria as one of West Africa's most dangerous and difficult countries for journalists who are regularly monitored, attacked and arbitrarily arrested. In its 2025 annual World Press Freedom Index, Nigeria ranked 122 out of 180 countries with a score of 46.81, in which 1 is considered the freest. This is a decline from a score of 51.03 in 2024 where Nigeria ranked 112 out of 180 countries.

Amnesty International (AI) have reported that the right to freedom of expression of young Nigerians is under attack, they face the risk of arrests and detention simply for expressing critical opinions online. They wrote that attempts have been made by government authorities to restrict freedom of expression on social media. An example they gave is the Anti-Social Media Bill formerly known as the 'Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill' which was introduced by the Nigerian Senate in November 2019 and the 7 months banning of Twitter from June 2021 to January 2022 which forced many Nigerians out of the social networking site.¹²

Timileyin Omilana of The Guardian Newspaper in Ogu gave a list of journalists who have been harassed in the course of performing their duties. They include Nigerian government critic Abubakar Idris popularly known as Dadiyata who was abducted from his home in Kaduna on August 1, 2019 and has not been seen then; Fisayo Soyombo who went underground for eight days to avoid a planned arrest by the Nigerian government after his investigative reports exposed the rot in Nigeria Police cells and prisons; Steven Kefas an activists and social media commentator and a staunch

¹². See Amnesty International (2024). Stop the Criminalization of Freedom of Speech in Nigeria, Nigeria: Amnesty International.

critic of then Kaduna State governor Nasir El-Rufai who spent 150 days in detention before bail for his Facebook posts critical of the Governor.¹³ These and others highlight the precarious state of free speech and the dangerous and difficult environment in which journalists work in Nigeria.

How Democratic is Governance in Nigeria?

One may argue that governance in Nigeria is democratic since Nigeria has operated a democratic presidential system since 1999. Beyond the surface though, governance in Nigeria is anything but democratic. Attempts to enthrone true democratic governance in the country have been challenged by weak institutions often manipulated by the government to its advantage, corruption which has been elevated to a state policy, ineffective and poor electoral system, erosion of good governance leading to a lack of tangible democratic dividends for Nigerians and so on.

A report released recently by the Chandler Institute of Governance ranks Nigeria 116th on the 2025 edition of the Chandler Good Governance Index (CGGI), a global benchmark that measures the effectiveness and capability of national governments. The report reveals Nigeria's struggles across key governance indicators and deep structural governance challenges. Nigeria placed 110th in Leadership and Foresight, 112th in Robust Laws and Policies, 114th in Strong Institutions, 89th in Financial Stewardship, 114th in Attractive Marketplace, 112th in Global Influence and Reputation and 120th in Helping People Rise. These poor performance across the key indicators illustrate the steep task facing policymakers in

¹³. Ogu, U.K., John Locke and Constitutional Democracy in Nigeria, Pg. 217-218.

improving governance and strengthening public institutions.¹⁴

That Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries in the world is not contestable. In its 2024 Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Transparency International rank Nigeria 140 out of 180 countries surveyed with a score of 26, a marginal improvement from the score of 25 in 2023 and 24 in both 2021 and 2022. Amalu reported that according to the EFCC, Nigerian leaders have in the last 40 years stolen over \$400 billion.¹⁵ Leke argued that corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria and has shaken it to its foundation.¹⁶ Kolawole described the situation as so bad that the principle of public accountability and probity was observed more in disobedience than in obedience.¹⁷

The erosion of good governance by the practice of democracy has deepened the crisis of democracy in the country, when democracy is abused, good governance become elusive and the people suffer the lack of tangible democracy dividends. Darl calls it 'virtual democracy', that is, a system that shares resemblance with true democracy but lacks the basic elements of democracy. Democracy in Nigeria is characterised by among other things, insulation of economic matters from popular participation, manipulation and monopolisation of democratic process by the elites and the use of violence and electoral fraud to secure legitimacy and peripheral

^{14.} Chandler Institute of Governance. Country Rankings, (Chandler Institute of Governance, 2025), 1.

^{15.} Amalu, C. (2006): "Over N60 trillion was stolen by Nigerian past leaders – EFCC Vanguard, Lagos vanguard Newspapers Ltd. October 17.

^{16.} Leke, O. (2010). Democracy and Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, *African Research Review*, 4(3a): 31-40.

^{17.} Kolawole D. The symmetry of an Asymmetric Relationship; Nigerian Foreign Policy and military rule 14th Inaugural lecture, University of Ado Ekiti, Nigeria, (The University of Ado-Ekiti Press, 2005), 12.

participation citizens which does not have far-reaching influence on the outcome of policy choices.¹⁸ Faulty and ineffective electoral system has meant that elections in Nigeria have become a major drawback for democracy in the country. Elections in the country have developed the culture of political decisions long ethnic, religious and regional lines making the election of credible and competent leaders difficult.¹⁹

The destitution of rule of law which is perhaps the most effective indicator of a healthy democracy is best illustrated by former President Muhammad Buhari's claim while addressing the 2018 annual conference of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) that the rule of law must be subjected to the supremacy of national security. The law he said can only be optimally practiced in a Nigeria that is safe, secure and prosperous.²⁰ This dangerous mentality has given rise to series of abuses of fundamental rights of Nigerians including but not limited to unlawful incarceration of Nigerians and disobedience to judicial pronouncements.

Worthy of mention is the flagrant refusal of former President Goodluck Jonathan's to reinstate suspended President of the Court of Appeal Ayo Salami against the National Judicial Council recommendation, the refusal of Muhammad Buhari's government to release prominent political prisoners Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, Omoyele Sowore and Sambo Dasuki following the rulings of several courts of competent jurisdiction.

^{18.} Arowolo, D.E. & Aluko, O.A. (2012). Democracy, Political Participation and Good Governance in Nigeria, *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 1(3): 797-809

^{19.} Ogu, U.K. John Locke and Constitutional Democracy in Nigeria, 116.

^{20.} Ogu, U.K. John Locke and Constitutional Democracy in Nigeria, Pg. 160.

Nigeria is also plagued by weak and ineffective institutions manifested largely in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) bastardisation of the electoral process to please the powers that be. According to Ogayi and Onyebuchi, INEC, the electoral body has been the most challenged of all institutions in the hands of politicians since the return to democracy.²¹ These challenges are enormous and range from infrastructure deficit to election rigging. There are also issues of executive rascality, judicial and legislative weaknesses and ineffectiveness. The major consequences of this institutional weakness are the inability of the institutions to carry out their responsibility of checking the excesses of political office holders and 'state capture' – a situation where influential individuals and firms buy laws and policies²² and thereby shape and affect the rules of the game. These strong personalities arm twists and manipulate the law to suit their own interests. A recent survey conducted by the UK Chatham House in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) exposed a deep erosion of public trust in Nigeria's key institutions such as the Nigerian Police Force, the presidency and the federal government who emerged as the least trusted institutions in the country. The report attributes this pervasive distrust to decades of ineffective governance reforms. The report noted that political dynamics dominated by party loyalty, unchecked misconduct and selective law enforcement have severely undermined public confidence.

^{21.} Ogayi, C.O & Onyebuchi, E.M. (2024). Powerful State, Strong Leaders and Weak Institutions: The Paradox of Political Leadership in Nigeria, *Journal of Politics and Development*, 8(1): 29-43.

^{22.} See Kunicova, J. (2006). Democratic Institutions and Corruption: Incentives and Constraints in Politics. In S. Rose-Ackerman (Ed.), *International Handbook on Economics of Corruption*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Free Speech and Democratic Governance

Free speech or freedom of speech no doubt is a fundamental cornerstone of democratic governance and of democratic societies and a very important component of individual liberty. This is because it promotes the expression of diverse opinions, development of well-informed citizens who hold their leaders accountable, the open exchange of ideas and participation in public discourse which are all essential for the effective functioning of democracy and growth of the society.

While the above holds true, it is important to note that the right to free speech is not absolute, however, it is equally important to point out that government's control over the flow information should be discouraged for the fact that:

1. Freedom of speech promotes individual liberty. It gives individuals the opportunity to express their thoughts, beliefs and opinions without fear of censorship or punishment. It recognises the inherent dignity of every human person and his right to engage in open discourses and even to hold dissenting views and be different from the rest.
2. Freedom of speech fosters robust debates. When freedom of speech is upheld in any society, people are bold to debate about issues that bother the society. Robust discussions of ideas allows for the exploration of issues from different perspectives which leads to a more nuanced and better understanding of complex issues and more informed decisions being taken.
3. Advancement of knowledge and progress. A free exchange of ideas fuels innovation and societal progress. When people are allowed to voice unconventional or unpopular opinions, the doors to new discoveries and solutions to existing problems

are opened.

4. Accountability of authority. Freedom of speech serves a check on government powers and prevents the abuse of authority and power. When citizens can openly and boldly criticise the government without fear of arrest, it helps make the government responsible and accountable for their actions.

The Role of Philosophy in Promoting Free Speech and Democratic Governance

The role of philosophy in enhancing the exercise of free speech for democratic governance cannot be overemphasised. Philosophy cultivates critical and reflective thinking which enables informed public debates and discourse. Philosophy enables people to think things through by considering and examining potential effects and consequences of utterances and speech before expressing them. It develops in the people a thorough and extended mental process which facilitates the analysis of various aspects of a matter to understand it completely and make well-informed decision. It is thus, the responsibility of philosophers to continually engage issues by examining them critically and reflectively so that well-thought out opinions can be expressed. When people engage in open debate of issues, truth emerges and the society grows through the victory of the best ideas. This is the 'market place of ideas' originating from Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes and promoted by the likes of John Stuart Mills which envisions a society where diverse opinions and viewpoints are exchanged freely on their own merits, leading to the emergence of truth.

As a crucial aspect of personal development and self-discovery, free speech allows people to articulate their thoughts, express themselves in ways they freely choose insofar as they do not

conflict with the law, live according to reasons and motives that are taken to be their own and not the product of manipulative and distorting forces external to him such as the government or society.²³ Individuals are self-governing by nature, and so are able to articulate their values and forge their own identity without fear of censorship or retaliation and this leads to self-actualisation. In other words, philosophy promotes individual autonomy

Philosophical arguments support free speech as a means to challenge exiting injustices, advocate for reforms and enable citizens to participate meaningfully in the political life of the State. Philosophers have over the years adduced many theories and arguments to support free speech, such arguments include John Stuart Mill's claim that suppressing opinions even if false ones risks silencing truth and hindering the progress of human knowledge; the listeners theory which posits that censoring opinion or speech is an insult and disrespect to citizens who have a right to make up their own minds as adults. In other words, the State wrongs citizens by arrogating to itself the authority to decide what they ought to hear;²⁴ speakers' theory which justifies free speech by our interests as speakers noting that free speech is crucial for the development and exercise of one's personal autonomy – one's capacity to be the reflective author of his own life and the laws that guide it.²⁵

Philosophers like Jurgen Habermas have argued for a “public

^{23.} Ogu, U.K. (2021). Isaiah Berlin's Negative Liberty and Individual Autonomy: A Defense of Minority Religious Rights in Nigeria, *Sapientia Journal of Philosophy*, 15, 128-140.

^{24.} Strauss, D. A., (1991), Persuasion, Autonomy, and Freedom of Expression, *Columbia Law Review*, 91(2): 334–371.

^{25.} See Cohen, J. (1993). Freedom of Expression, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 22(3): 207–263 and Rawls, J., (2005), *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.

sphere” where private citizens gather to discuss issues societal issues and provide a check on the powers of the state. When citizens are allowed to exercise their rights to free expression without censorship and retaliation, the perspectives offered help to improve governance. Philosophy fosters critical thinking which encourages citizens to be self-aware and critical better equipping and providing citizens with the basis to hold their leaders and government accountable for their actions and policies, thus preventing corruption and abuse of power which are inimical to true and sustainable national development.

Philosophy also provides the ethical and normative principles that inform policies related to regulating harmful speech, promoting fact-checking and encouraging responsible journalism. Principles such as John Stuart Mill is Harm Principle which asserts that the only purpose for which power can be rightly exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will, is to prevent harm to others, his own good, either physical or moral being not a sufficient warrant; the Principle of neutrality which restricts the regulation of expressive content; Responsibility need which emphasises that freedom of speech comes with responsibility such as the need not to misinform, cause harm or division and many others are all crucial for a well-functioning governance system. Philosophical discourse, therefore should balance an individual's right to free speech with the rights and reputations of others, as well as the protection of public health and safety.

Conclusion

The centrality of philosophy in promoting free speech and democratic governance cannot be overemphasised. A society that seeks sustainable development needs to prioritise the protection of

the right to freedom of speech or of expression without censorship or retaliation, for only then will citizens be able to contribute and share ideas and perspectives to improve governance

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