

CITIZENS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE: EXAMINING ROLE REQUIREMENTS AND RESPONSES

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Abstract

This research explored the nexus between citizenship and good governance in Nigeria through the lens of social contract theory, focusing on the theoretical perspectives of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The primary objective is to analyze how the principles of social contract theory illuminate the challenges and opportunities in Nigerian governance and citizenship. The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics. The analysis revealed that the legitimacy of Nigerian governance is significantly undermined by corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of accountability, aligning with Locke's emphasis on the protection of individual rights and the rule of law. This breach of the social contract has led to a legitimacy crisis, as evidenced by widespread public dissatisfaction and demands for reform. Additionally, Rousseau's concept of the general will highlight the need for more inclusive governance and active citizen participation. The findings suggested that Nigeria's governance practices often fail to reflect the collective interests of its diverse population, exacerbating social inequalities and political disenchantment. Furthermore, the study underscored the importance of strengthening civic education to enhance public awareness and engagement in democratic processes. In essence, the research identified three critical areas for improvement: addressing the legitimacy crisis through anti-corruption measures, promoting inclusive and participatory governance, and investing in civic education. These recommendations aim to restore public trust and align governance practices with the principles of the social contract, ultimately contributing to a more effective and legitimate political system in Nigeria.

Key words: Citizenship, Good governance, Accountability, Transparency, Nigeria

Introduction

The relationship between citizens and good governance is foundational to the functioning of any democratic system. In Nigeria, this relationship is shaped by the historical, socio-political, and economic dynamics that have influenced both citizen engagement and governance processes. The concept of good governance broadly refers to the effective, transparent, accountable, and equitable management of public resources and affairs, while citizens are expected to fulfill certain roles, such as active participation in the democratic process, demanding accountability, and contributing to societal development (Aina, 2019). Understanding these roles and how Nigerian citizens have responded to governance challenges is critical in evaluating the state of governance in the country. Nigeria's post-colonial governance structure has been fraught with challenges, from military dictatorships to flawed democratic transitions. The lack of consistent and effective governance has perpetuated corruption, weakened institutions, and eroded public trust in the government. According to Ake (1981), the failure of the Nigerian state to deliver on its social contract has led to a disconnect between the government and the citizens. This situation has significantly affected the nature of citizen responses, with apathy and disillusionment becoming pervasive.

The role of citizens in ensuring good governance is not limited to participation in electoral processes, although this is a critical aspect. Beyond voting, citizens are expected to hold elected officials accountable, demand transparency, and participate actively in civic spaces (Ojo, 2020). In Nigeria, however, the role requirements are often impeded by systemic barriers such as poverty, lack of education, and inadequate access to information. These factors have limited the ability of many Nigerians to engage meaningfully in governance. According to Omotola (2014), the absence of widespread civic education has also contributed to a passive citizenry, which often fails to understand its rights and responsibilities within the democratic system. Citizen responses to governance in Nigeria have been varied. On one hand, there has been a resurgence of activism and civic engagement, particularly through movements such as the #EndSARS protests, which exemplified a growing frustration with police brutality and governmental inefficiency (Akinwale, 2021). Such movements highlight the potential for citizens to demand better governance and to challenge the status quo. On the other hand, a significant portion of the population remains disengaged, largely due to economic hardship and political disillusionment (Eme, 2022). This duality in citizen responses underscores the complexity of the relationship between the governed and the governors in Nigeria.

Moreover, the Nigerian state has not always been receptive to citizen demands. The repression of protests and the lack of responsiveness from public institutions have often demoralized citizens. This reactionary stance from the government, as argued by Nwosu (2018), has fostered a climate where civic engagement is discouraged, further weakening the prospects of good governance. Nevertheless, scholars like Osaghae (2006) argue that the strength of any democratic system lies in the resilience of its citizens, and Nigeria's evolving civil society offers hope for future improvements in governance. In examining the role requirements of citizens in achieving good governance in Nigeria, it is important to recognize that both the government and the citizenry must fulfill their respective responsibilities. Good governance thrives in an environment where citizens are empowered to actively participate in decision-making processes, challenge corrupt practices, and demand accountability. Conversely, the government must create enabling conditions—such as the rule of law, transparency, and the protection of civil rights—that allow citizens to perform their roles effectively (Afolabi, 2015). Without these mutual obligations being met, the prospect of achieving sustainable good governance in Nigeria remains tenuous.

Thus, this examination of citizen role requirements and responses reveals complex dynamic where systemic barriers, historical legacies, and contemporary socio-economic challenges intersect to shape the nature of governance in Nigeria. Whether the current trends of civic activism will lead to more substantial governmental reforms remains an open question, but the continued engagement of citizens is essential to realizing the goal of good governance in the Nigerian context.

Conceptual Clarification

A conceptual analysis of "citizenship," "good governance," and "Nigeria" offers a foundation for understanding the complex relationship between these key concepts, especially within the Nigerian context. Each concept has distinct implications for the political and socio-economic landscape, yet they are intricately intertwined, particularly in post-colonial states like Nigeria, where the consolidation of democracy remains an ongoing challenge. By analyzing these concepts in depth, we can better understand how citizenship and governance intersect, and how these intersections impact Nigeria's trajectory toward democratic stability and development.

Citizenship

Citizenship is a broad and multi-dimensional concept that extends beyond the legal status of being a member of a state. Traditionally, citizenship is defined as the legal recognition of individuals as members of a sovereign state, granting them specific rights and obligations (Marshall, 1950). These rights typically include civil, political, and social rights, which enable individuals to participate fully in the life of the state. However, in political theory, citizenship also entails active engagement in civic life, emphasizing the role of individuals not only as recipients of rights but also as active participants in governance (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). It is this dual role of rights and responsibilities that places citizenship at the heart of democratic governance. In many societies, citizenship also embodies the idea of belonging and identity, linking individuals to the state and to each other within a collective national community. This social aspect of citizenship is critical because it determines who is included or excluded from the benefits of state membership. In post-colonial states like Nigeria, the notion of citizenship is complicated by historical, ethnic, and religious divisions that often challenge the idea of a unified national identity (Osaghae, 1999). Citizenship, therefore, is not only a question of legal status but also of social integration and political participation. The capacity of citizens to engage in the political process, demand accountability, and challenge governance failures is essential for the consolidation of democracy.

The political theorist T.H. Marshall (1950) outlined three core components of citizenship: civil, political, and social rights. Civil rights refer to individual freedoms such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the right to own property. Political rights involve participation in the political process, including voting and running for public office. Social rights pertain to economic well-being and access to social services, such as education, healthcare, and housing. For Marshall, the realization of these rights is key to the full development of citizenship. However, in countries like Nigeria, the extent to which these rights are available to all citizens is often constrained by structural inequalities and governance deficits. In the Nigerian context, the question of citizenship is particularly pertinent because of the country's multi-ethnic and multi-religious makeup. The legal definition of citizenship in Nigeria is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, which grants citizenship based on birth, descent, and naturalization. However, in practice, access to full

citizenship rights is often mediated by ethnic, religious, and regional considerations (Ekeh, 1975). This has led to situations where certain groups feel excluded from the political and economic benefits of citizenship, contributing to tensions and conflicts that undermine national unity. Thus, citizenship in Nigeria is not just a legal concept but a deeply political one, shaped by the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

Good Governance

Good governance is a relatively modern concept in political science and public administration, gaining significant attention in the late 20th century as a response to governance failures in developing nations. It is broadly defined as the effective, transparent, accountable, and equitable management of a country's resources and institutions in a manner that is responsive to the needs of the population (World Bank, 1992). The concept of good governance emphasizes not only the mechanisms of governance but also the outcomes, particularly in relation to human development, poverty reduction, and the promotion of democratic values. Good governance is based on several key principles, including participation, accountability, transparency, rule of law, and responsiveness. Participation refers to the active involvement of all citizens in decision-making processes, which strengthens the legitimacy of government actions (UNDP, 1997). Accountability ensures that those in power are answerable to the citizens for their actions and decisions. Transparency, closely linked to accountability, means that governmental processes and decisions are open and accessible to the public, reducing the space for corruption and mismanagement. The rule of law ensures that all citizens are treated equally under the law, and that justice is administered fairly and impartially. Finally, responsiveness refers to the government's ability to meet the needs and aspirations of its citizens in a timely and effective manner. In the Nigerian context, the discourse on good governance has been primarily shaped by the challenges of corruption, weak institutions, and poor public service delivery. Despite Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999, the country continues to face significant governance challenges, particularly in the areas of accountability and transparency (Ogundiya, 2010). Corruption has become a defining feature of Nigerian politics, undermining the capacity of institutions to function effectively and eroding public trust in governance. According to scholars like Achebe (1983), corruption in Nigeria is systemic, permeating all levels of government and society. This has created a governance environment where public resources are misappropriated, and citizens are denied the benefits of good governance.

For good governance to be realized, citizens must be active participants in governance processes. The role of civil society, media, and grassroots organizations in holding government officials accountable and ensuring transparency is crucial. However, the success of these efforts often depends on the political will of those in power and the strength of institutions that can uphold the rule of law and protect citizens' rights (Azeez, 2009). The judiciary, for instance, plays a key role in maintaining the rule of law, but in Nigeria, it has often been criticized for being slow, inefficient, and subject to political interference (Ibrahim, 2003). Therefore, good governance in Nigeria requires not only institutional reform but also a rethinking of the relationship between the state and its citizens.

NIGERIA

Nigeria, as a post-colonial African state, presents a unique context for analyzing the interplay between citizenship and good governance. With a population of over 200 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and has the largest economy on the continent. However, despite its economic potential, Nigeria faces significant challenges in governance and development. The country's governance issues are deeply rooted in its colonial history,

where British rule established a system of indirect governance that prioritized resource extraction over the development of inclusive political institutions (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This legacy has contributed to a centralized, authoritarian state structure that persisted long after independence. The post-independence era in Nigeria has been marked by political instability, military rule, and authoritarian governance. Between 1960 and 1999, Nigeria experienced multiple military coups and only brief periods of democratic governance. The military regimes that dominated Nigeria during this period often undermined democratic institutions and further entrenched corruption (Joseph, 1991). The return to civilian rule in 1999 marked a new chapter in Nigeria's political development, but the country continues to grapple with the legacies of its authoritarian past. Democratic consolidation has been slow, and issues such as electoral fraud, political violence, and governance failures remain prevalent.

Ethnicity and religion also play a significant role in Nigerian politics. Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, with the three largest being the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Igbo in the southeast. These ethnic divisions have been exacerbated by the country's federal system, which allocates political power and resources along regional and ethnic lines (Osaghae, 1999). Religion is another divisive factor, with the population being almost evenly split between Muslims and Christians. These ethnic and religious cleavages have often been exploited by political elites to gain power, leading to conflicts and violence, particularly in regions such as the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt.

The federal structure of Nigeria's political system also has significant implications for governance. Nigeria operates a federal system of government, with powers shared between the central government and 36 state governments. While federalism was intended to accommodate the country's ethnic diversity and promote regional autonomy, it has often led to tensions between different levels of government and exacerbated issues of resource allocation (Suberu, 2001). Corruption and inefficiency at both the federal and state levels have further weakened the capacity of the government to deliver services to the people.

Nigeria's resource wealth, particularly in oil, has also been a double-edged sword. The country is one of the largest oil producers in the world, yet the benefits of its resource wealth have not been equitably distributed. The oil sector has been a source of corruption and mismanagement, with revenues often siphoned off by political elites rather than being used to improve the living conditions of the population (Watts, 2004). This has contributed to widespread poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment, despite Nigeria's vast economic potential.

In essence, the concepts of citizenship and good governance are deeply intertwined in the context of Nigeria. Citizenship, as a legal and political construct, defines the relationship between individuals and the state, while good governance determines how effectively the state responds to the needs of its citizens. Nigeria, with its complex history, diverse population, and governance challenges, provides a unique case for understanding how these concepts intersect. Addressing the governance issues in Nigeria will require not only institutional reforms but also the active engagement of citizens in the political process. Only through a combination of strong institutions, accountable governance, and an informed and engaged citizenry can Nigeria achieve the democratic consolidation and development that has long eluded it.

Gap in Literature

In the exploration of citizens and good governance in Nigeria, particularly in the context of role requirements and responses, there is a noticeable gap in the literature that this research seeks to address. The relationship between citizens and governance has been widely studied, with many scholars focusing on the responsibilities of the state and the failures of the government in promoting transparency, accountability, and social welfare. However, the literature tends to underplay the active role of citizens in promoting or hindering good governance. While scholars have examined the importance of civic participation, the nuanced roles citizens must play in fostering and sustaining good governance have not been fully explored. Specifically, the literature does not deeply engage with how citizens perceive their responsibilities within the democratic framework and how their actions or inactions impact governance outcomes. One significant gap is the limited research on the dual role of citizens as both enforcers of accountability and potential obstacles to good governance. Most existing studies tend to cast citizens solely in the role of victims of bad governance or passive participants in the political process. This approach overlooks the active and potentially transformative role that citizens can play in holding leaders accountable and fostering governance that is responsive to public needs. It also fails to consider the ways in which citizens, either through apathy, complicity, or direct actions such as corruption or vote-buying, contribute to the persistence of poor governance.

Moreover, while the literature has discussed the role of civil society organizations, political activism, and grassroots movements in demanding better governance, there is little analysis of how every day, ordinary citizen behaviors and choices impact governance structures. The individual-level responsibility of citizens in a democratic society is often overshadowed by discussions of institutional weaknesses or government failures. There is a gap in understanding how citizens' day-to-day actions—such as their engagement with local governance, their responses to corrupt practices, and their participation in community decision-making processes—contribute to the broader framework of governance in Nigeria.

The literature also lacks a detailed analysis of the societal and cultural factors that shape citizens' responses to governance issues. While there is recognition that historical, social, and economic factors influence governance structures, less attention has been paid to how these same factors shape citizen engagement and expectations of governance. For example, in societies where patron-client relationships or ethnic loyalties dominate political engagement, the role requirements for citizens in promoting good governance become complicated, yet this is rarely analyzed in depth. Another gap is the insufficient exploration of how citizens' understanding of their rights and duties under democratic rule influences their responses to governance challenges. While scholars have focused on the lack of governmental accountability, there has been little investigation into how well citizens understand the mechanisms available to them for demanding better governance, such as the judicial system, anti-corruption agencies, or political participation through elections and protests. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the knowledge, perceptions, and actions of citizens in relation to governance, exploring how their roles and responses shape the effectiveness of governance practices.

Furthermore, while there is considerable attention given to government failures, less research focuses on how citizens perceive and respond to successes in governance. The assumption often made is that citizens are reactive to governance failures, but the literature does not sufficiently explore whether and how citizens engage with and sustain instances of good governance. Do citizens demand more from their leaders when they see positive outcomes, or

do they become complacent? The role of positive citizen engagement in consolidating good governance practices is an area that has been largely overlooked in existing research. In summary, this research aims to fill the gap in the literature by analyzing the active role of citizens in fostering or hindering good governance in Nigeria. It will explore how individual and collective actions, cultural expectations, and societal dynamics shape the roles citizens are expected to play in a democratic context. It will also investigate how citizens' responses to governance—both good and bad—impact the broader framework of governance, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between citizens and the quality of governance in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The social contract theory, particularly as articulated by John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, provides a fundamental framework for understanding the relationship between individuals and the state, as well as the origins of legitimate government. Both Locke and Rousseau offer distinct interpretations of the social contract, yet they converge on the notion that political authority must be derived from the consent of the governed. Their theories underscore the idea that government exists to serve the people and that the legitimacy of any political system is contingent on fulfilling the terms of this contract, ensuring that citizens' rights and freedoms are preserved. This theory has been central to the development of democratic governance, influencing modern political thought and practice.

John Locke's formulation of the social contract theory, presented primarily in his "Two Treatises of Government" (1689), centers on the protection of natural rights. Locke's work emerged during a period of political upheaval in England, where debates over the nature of authority, monarchy, and the rights of individuals were at the forefront. For Locke, the state of nature—where individuals are free and equal—precedes the formation of political society. In this state, people possess natural rights to life, liberty, and property. However, Locke argued that the state of nature, while embodying freedom, also contains inherent risks and insecurities, particularly regarding the enforcement of these rights. The absence of a common authority to adjudicate disputes and protect individual rights leads to the formation of a social contract, where individuals consent to create a government that will protect their rights more effectively than they could in the state of nature (Locke, 1689). Locke's social contract is built on the premise of consent, emphasizing that individuals voluntarily enter into a compact with the government. The government's legitimacy is derived from its role as a trustee, acting on behalf of the people to protect their rights. Locke posits that political power is limited in scope; the government cannot arbitrarily infringe upon the rights of individuals because its authority is conditional upon its ability to safeguard these rights. If a government fails to uphold its responsibilities or becomes tyrannical, Locke maintains that the people retain the right to overthrow it and establish a new government that better serves their interests (Laslett, 1960). This notion of the right to rebellion has been particularly influential in shaping modern democratic revolutions, including the American and French Revolutions. Locke's conception of the social contract, therefore, centers on the protection of individual rights and the limitations placed on government authority. His theory places significant emphasis on the rule of law, arguing that laws must be made by a representative legislature and must be consistent with the preservation of natural rights. Locke's vision of government is fundamentally democratic and participatory, grounded in the belief that political authority should always be accountable to the people. His ideas represent a shift away from monarchical absolutism and laid the intellectual foundation for constitutionalism and liberal democracy. In Locke's view, government exists not to rule over people but to serve their interests, with the primary goal of preserving life, liberty, and property (Simmons, 1992).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's articulation of the social contract theory, found in his work "The Social Contract" (1762), presents a more radical departure from Locke's liberal conception. While both Locke and Rousseau agree on the idea that political authority must be based on consent, Rousseau's interpretation of the social contract is rooted in the notion of collective sovereignty. For Rousseau, individuals in the state of nature are not only free but also morally autonomous, guided by their innate sense of justice. However, like Locke, Rousseau recognizes that the state of nature is unsustainable in the long term due to increasing competition, conflict, and inequality among individuals. The solution to this problem, for Rousseau, is the formation of a social contract in which individuals give up their natural freedom in exchange for civil freedom, which is realized through their participation in the general will (Rousseau, 1762).

Rousseau's concept of the general will is central to his understanding of political legitimacy. Unlike Locke, who focuses on the protection of individual rights, Rousseau emphasizes the importance of collective decision-making and the common good. The general will, which represents the collective interest of the people, is sovereign, and individuals, by participating in this will, achieve true freedom. For Rousseau, freedom does not mean the absence of constraints but the ability to live under laws that individuals have a role in shaping. Rousseau's theory of the social contract thus calls for a direct form of democracy where citizens are actively involved in the legislative process, ensuring that the laws reflect the general will and the common good (Bertram, 2004).

Rousseau's vision of the social contract presents a more egalitarian and communal form of governance compared to Locke's individualistic approach. While Locke's theory emphasizes individual rights and the protection of private property, Rousseau is more concerned with social equality and the prevention of social inequality that can lead to political domination. Rousseau argues that private property is the source of inequality and that a legitimate government must work to balance individual interests with the needs of the collective. In this sense, Rousseau's social contract aims to create a more just society by aligning individual freedom with the general will, ensuring that no individual or group dominates others (Wokler, 1995).

The contrast between Locke's and Rousseau's social contract theories reflects different philosophical understandings of human nature and the role of government. Locke views individuals as primarily motivated by self-interest and property, and his social contract aims to protect these interests by limiting the scope of governmental power. Rousseau, on the other hand, views humans as naturally good but corrupted by society, particularly by the institution of private property. For Rousseau, the social contract must aim to restore the moral and civic virtues that enable individuals to live in harmony with one another, governed by the general will. Rousseau's emphasis on collective sovereignty and participatory democracy presents a more radical vision of political community, where freedom is understood as collective self-rule (Cohen, 2010). In the context of modern political theory, both Locke and Rousseau's interpretations of the social contract continue to influence discussions of democracy, citizenship, and governance. Locke's theory has had a profound impact on the development of liberal democracy, particularly in terms of constitutionalism, the protection of individual rights, and the limitation of governmental power. His ideas about the consent of the governed and the right to rebellion remain central to democratic theory, particularly in contexts where governments fail to uphold their duties to the people. Locke's influence is evident in the political systems of many modern democracies, where individual rights are enshrined in

constitutions, and governments are held accountable through representative institutions (Grant, 1987).

Rousseau's social contract theory, while less directly influential in terms of modern political institutions, has had a significant impact on theories of participatory democracy and social justice. Rousseau's emphasis on the general will and the common good has influenced socialist and communitarian political thought, which advocates for greater collective decision-making and the reduction of social inequality. His ideas continue to resonate in debates about how to balance individual freedom with the needs of society, particularly in contexts where economic inequality and social division threaten democratic governance. Rousseau's critique of private property and his vision of a more egalitarian society remain relevant in contemporary discussions of social justice and democratic reform (Neuhouser, 1993).

In sum, the social contract theories of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau provide foundational insights into the nature of political authority, the role of the state, and the relationship between individuals and the government. Locke's theory emphasizes the protection of individual rights and the limitation of governmental power, offering a framework for liberal democracy. Rousseau's theory, by contrast, emphasizes collective sovereignty and the pursuit of the common good, presenting a more radical vision of participatory democracy. Both theories remain highly influential in modern political thought, shaping discussions of citizenship, governance, and the legitimacy of political authority. Their contrasting views on the nature of freedom, equality, and the role of government continue to inform debates about the future of democracy and the relationship between citizens and the state.

Application of the Theory

The social contract theories of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau offer a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between citizens and the state, particularly in the context of good governance. These theories propose that government authority is derived from a contract, either explicit or implicit, between the people and those in power. By applying the concepts of Locke and Rousseau to the Nigerian context, we can better understand the expectations and responsibilities of both citizens and the government in achieving good governance.

John Locke, in his "Second Treatise of Government", argues that individuals have natural rights to life, liberty, and property, and that the formation of a government is based on a mutual agreement among free and equal individuals to protect these rights. Locke posits that individuals enter into a social contract to establish a government that will safeguard their rights, and when the government fails to do so, the citizens have the right to withdraw their consent and challenge its legitimacy (Locke, 1690). This concept of mutual responsibility between citizens and the state is crucial in the Nigerian context, where corruption, governance failures, and a lack of accountability have long undermined the social contract between the government and the people.

In Nigeria, Locke's idea of a social contract can be seen in the expectations citizens have of their government to provide security, enforce the rule of law, and ensure equitable access to resources. However, the pervasive levels of corruption, inefficiency, and the concentration of power in the hands of political elites have often rendered these expectations unmet (Akinwale, 2021). The Nigerian state has repeatedly failed to protect the rights of its citizens, particularly in the areas of security and economic stability, which are foundational to Locke's conception

of governance. For instance, the rise of terrorism, kidnapping, and the inability of the government to address the root causes of insecurity reflect a breakdown in the social contract. Citizens, in turn, have responded through protests, activism, and, at times, disobedience, which Locke argues is a legitimate response when the government breaches the social contract (Eme, 2022).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conception of the social contract, outlined in "The Social Contract" (1762), offers a different but complementary perspective. Rousseau argues that individuals enter into a social contract not only to protect their natural rights but to form a collective "general will," whereby the interests of the community as a whole take precedence over individual self-interest. For Rousseau, true freedom is achieved through participation in the formation of laws and governance, where each individual's will is expressed through the collective decision-making process. This notion of active citizenship is especially relevant in the context of good governance in Nigeria, where citizen participation in governance is crucial to holding the state accountable and ensuring that public policies reflect the general will of the people.

In Nigeria, Rousseau's concept of the general will and collective responsibility can be applied to understand the role of citizens in shaping governance. However, the challenge lies in the extent to which Nigerian citizens are empowered to express their will and participate in governance processes. Nigeria's democratic system, though formally representative, has often been criticized for being largely controlled by political elites, with limited avenues for meaningful citizen participation. This has led to widespread disillusionment and apathy among the populace, who feel disconnected from the decision-making processes that affect their lives (Ojo, 2020). Rousseau would argue that without active and continuous citizen participation in governance, true good governance cannot be achieved, as the government would no longer reflect the general will of the people. Rousseau's notion of the social contract also emphasizes the moral obligations of both the citizens and the government. The government must act in the interest of the public good, rather than serve the narrow interests of a ruling class or political elite. In the Nigerian context, the lack of accountability, transparency, and public engagement has often led to policies that serve the interests of political and economic elites rather than the broader population (Omotola, 2014). This imbalance represents a failure of the Nigerian government to fulfill its role in the social contract, as conceived by Rousseau. Moreover, Rousseau's theory emphasizes that when the government no longer represents the general will, it forfeits its legitimacy, and citizens are justified in challenging its authority. This theoretical perspective helps to explain the rise of civic movements in Nigeria, such as the #EndSARS protests, which reflected a collective demand for accountability and justice from the Nigerian state (Akinwale, 2021).

Furthermore, Rousseau's insistence on the need for moral leadership and governance speaks directly to the issue of corruption in Nigeria. Corruption is widely recognized as one of the major impediments to good governance in Nigeria, undermining the delivery of essential public services and eroding public trust in institutions (Eme, 2022). Rousseau's argument that a legitimate government must be based on moral and ethical principles suggests that the Nigerian government's failure to address corruption systematically constitutes a breach of the social contract. When the government's actions contradict the collective interests and violate the public good, the social contract is effectively broken, leaving citizens with little recourse but to either disengage from the system or actively resist it.

Locke and Rousseau also provide insights into the role requirements of Nigerian citizens in achieving good governance. According to Locke, citizens are not passive subjects but active

participants in governance. They are expected to be vigilant, to hold their government accountable, and, if necessary, to challenge or replace it when it no longer serves their interests. Similarly, Rousseau insists that citizens must actively participate in the shaping of laws and policies, as this is the only way to ensure that the government reflects the general will. In Nigeria, these role requirements have been inconsistently met, as systemic barriers such as poverty, illiteracy, and political repression have often hindered active citizen participation (Nwosu, 2018).

In conclusion, the social contract theories of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau provide a robust framework for understanding the role of citizens in achieving good governance in Nigeria. Both theories emphasize the reciprocal responsibilities of citizens and the state, where citizens are expected to engage actively in governance, and the government must act in the best interest of the people. In Nigeria, the failure of the government to uphold its end of the social contract—evidenced by corruption, insecurity, and lack of accountability—has resulted in citizen disillusionment, resistance, and activism. Locke's advocacy for resistance to unjust governance and Rousseau's insistence on the general will as the basis for legitimate governance are critical in understanding the evolving dynamics between citizens and the Nigerian state. Ultimately, the prospects for good governance in Nigeria rest on the ability of both the citizens and the government to fulfill their respective roles within the social contract.

Analysis Backed By Contemporary Examples

The relationship between citizens and good governance in Nigeria, especially regarding role requirements and responses, is shaped by various historical and contemporary factors. One significant case that highlights this dynamic is the #EndSARS protests of 2020 (Ochi & Mark, 2021). The protests were driven by widespread discontent with the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian police force, which had long been accused of abuse, extortion, and extrajudicial killings. Citizens, particularly the youth, demanded police reform, accountability, and better governance (Ochi & Mark, 2021). The movement reflected the critical role citizens play in holding the state accountable and promoting good governance. As argued by Ajayi (2021), these protests were a clear sign of citizens demanding the protection of human rights, transparency, and adherence to the rule of law, all of which are fundamental tenets of good governance. However, the violent crackdown by the state, culminating in the Lekki toll gate incident, where peaceful protesters were shot at, underscores the challenges citizens face when engaging with governance in Nigeria. This state response demonstrated a governance failure, where institutions designed to protect citizens instead turned against them (Iwilade, 2020).

In addition to protests, the phenomenon of voter apathy in recent Nigerian elections, particularly the 2019 general elections, further illuminates the complex relationship between citizens and governance. Voter turnout in that election was remarkably low, with only 35% of registered voters participating, one of the lowest turnouts in Nigeria's democratic history (INEC, 2019). This voter apathy reflects a growing disconnect between citizens and the political system, where many feel disillusioned with the ability of elections to produce meaningful change. Scholars like Ojo (2019) have noted that low participation rates are often driven by a lack of trust in the electoral process, perceived corruption of political elites, and the dominance of two major political parties—APC and PDP—that offer little ideological distinction. This apathy demonstrates a critical gap in citizen engagement, as electoral participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance. When citizens fail to vote, they weaken the democratic process, allowing elected officials to become less accountable. The failure of citizens to actively engage in elections signals a breakdown in the democratic

contract between the governed and the government, as argued by Omotola (2020), highlighting the importance of citizens fulfilling their role in promoting good governance.

Conversely, positive examples of citizen engagement in governance can be seen in the rise of community-led initiatives aimed at addressing gaps in social service delivery, particularly in regions where government intervention has been weak or absent (Mark & Iweama, 2023). In parts of Northern Nigeria, where insurgency and government neglect have left many communities without access to education, citizens have taken on the responsibility of building schools, training teachers, and providing materials for students (Audu, 2021). These grassroots efforts underscore the active role citizens can play in promoting governance when state institutions fail. By stepping into the gap left by the state, citizens contribute to the welfare of their communities and highlight the importance of collective action in governance (Mark & Iweama, 2023); (Ibrahim, 2022). Such initiatives demonstrate that governance is not solely the responsibility of the state; citizens also bear a responsibility to contribute to the common good, as noted by Abegunde (2021). These examples demonstrate the complex interplay between citizens and good governance in Nigeria. In the case of #EndSARS, citizens demanded accountability but were met with repression, highlighting the challenges of fulfilling their role in a hostile political environment. Voter apathy, as seen in the 2019 elections, reveals the consequences of disengagement, where the lack of citizen participation undermines the foundations of democratic governance. However, grassroots initiatives in Northern Nigeria show how citizens can actively promote good governance by filling critical gaps in service delivery when state institutions are absent. As Abubakar (2021) points out, the success of these community-led initiatives also highlights the importance of state-citizen partnerships in achieving sustainable governance outcomes.

In summary, the role of citizens in fostering good governance in Nigeria is multifaceted. From protests and electoral participation to grassroots mobilization, citizens play an active role in shaping governance outcomes. However, the effectiveness of their engagement is often dependent on the state's responsiveness to their demands and the broader political environment. This dynamic relationship underscores the importance of citizens not only in holding the state accountable but also in contributing to governance through active participation in democratic processes and community initiatives.

Findings

Research on the relationship between citizens and good governance in Nigeria has revealed critical insights into the complexities surrounding role requirements and citizen responses. One significant finding is that the interaction between citizens and governance is shaped by deep-rooted historical, political, and socio-economic factors. The legacy of colonialism, military rule, and elite dominance in Nigeria has created an environment where the government is often viewed as distant from the people. This historical context has left citizens disillusioned with governance systems, perceiving them as instruments for advancing elite interests rather than addressing the needs of the wider population. Consequently, the role of citizens has been constrained by a lack of trust in the government, which affects their participation in governance processes. While citizens are expected to play an active role in holding the government accountable, this expectation has been complicated by a long history of governance failures and repression.

Another key finding is that citizen engagement in Nigeria is often fragmented, reflecting the socio-economic and political diversity of the country. While there is a growing movement of civic activism, particularly among the youth, participation in governance varies significantly across different regions and socio-economic groups. The urban elite, educated middle class,

and civil society organizations tend to be more engaged in governance issues, while the rural population and the economically disadvantaged are often left marginalized. This disparity in participation is partly driven by socio-economic factors, such as poverty, limited access to education, and a lack of political awareness. These barriers hinder meaningful engagement, leading to a situation where only a small segment of the population actively participates in governance, while others remain disengaged or passive. This disconnect between citizens and the state exacerbates governance challenges, as the voices of the marginalized are often excluded from decision-making processes. Finally, the research highlights the critical role of institutional frameworks in either facilitating or obstructing citizen participation and good governance. In Nigeria, weak institutions, such as the judiciary, legislature, and law enforcement agencies, have often failed to uphold accountability and transparency. These institutional weaknesses limit the ability of citizens to demand and secure good governance. While the constitution provides for citizen participation and governmental accountability, the lack of effective implementation and enforcement of laws has resulted in widespread corruption, inefficiency, and the abuse of power. The institutional failures in Nigeria thus create a cycle in which citizens are disempowered, unable to fulfill their role requirements effectively, and are often left with few avenues for redress. This undermines the prospects for sustainable good governance, as the necessary checks and balances between citizens and the state remain underdeveloped.

Together, these findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to strengthening the relationship between citizens and governance in Nigeria. It is not enough to expect citizens to demand good governance without addressing the systemic barriers that prevent them from doing so. Ensuring broad-based citizen engagement, improving institutional accountability, and overcoming the legacy of historical governance failures are essential steps toward fostering an environment where both citizens and the state can fulfill their respective roles in achieving good governance.

Conclusion

The paper underscores the complex interplay between citizens' responsibilities and the state's obligations in the quest for effective governance. It emphasizes that the attainment of good governance in Nigeria hinges on a mutually reinforcing relationship where both the citizens and the government actively engage in fulfilling their respective roles. This involves not only citizens demanding accountability, transparency, and justice but also the government creating an enabling environment where citizen participation is encouraged, valued, and effective. The paper concludes that, in Nigeria's context, historical legacies of authoritarianism, political repression, and elite dominance have eroded the foundational elements of the social contract. As a result, citizens often perceive governance as distant and unresponsive to their needs, leading to widespread disengagement, apathy, and at times, resistance. These dynamics create a cycle of poor governance, where citizens feel powerless to influence the state, and the state, in turn, fails to uphold its responsibilities, particularly in ensuring equitable service delivery and upholding the rule of law. Moreover, the conclusion highlights the significance of addressing structural inequalities and socio-economic disparities that limit broad-based citizen engagement. The unequal participation of various socio-economic groups in governance reflects the deep-rooted divisions in Nigerian society, where those with access to resources and education are more likely to engage, while the marginalized remain disenfranchised. This exclusion further undermines the prospects for good governance as the needs and interests of a large segment of the population are overlooked.

At the institutional level, the paper concludes that systemic reforms are essential to strengthening accountability mechanisms and fostering a more participatory governance model. Weak institutions not only inhibit the effectiveness of citizen participation but also embolden corruption and impunity, thus perpetuating governance failures. The need for reforming Nigeria's political and legal frameworks is paramount if citizens are to play a meaningful role in holding the state accountable and ensuring the government meets its obligations.

In essence, the conclusion calls for a rethinking of governance models in Nigeria, emphasizing the necessity of rebuilding trust between citizens and the state. For good governance to be realized, it is essential that citizens are empowered and actively involved in the political process, while the government must be responsive, transparent, and accountable. Without this balance, the enduring governance challenges in Nigeria will continue to undermine both democracy and development, with citizens remaining detached from the mechanisms that should ideally serve their interests.

Recommendations

In light of the analysis of citizenship and good governance in Nigeria through the lens of social contract theory, several recommendations emerge to enhance the relationship between the state and its citizens and improve governance outcomes. These recommendations are informed by the principles articulated by John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, aiming to address both the protection of individual rights and the promotion of collective engagement.

Firstly, strengthening institutional integrity and accountability is crucial for restoring public trust and reinforcing the social contract. According to Locke's theory, a government's legitimacy is contingent upon its ability to uphold the rule of law and protect individual rights. In Nigeria, this entails addressing the systemic corruption and inefficiency that plague public institutions. Reforming the legal and judicial systems to ensure that they are impartial and effective is essential for restoring confidence in government institutions. Initiatives such as enhancing transparency in public procurement processes, implementing stricter anti-corruption measures, and ensuring that public officials are held accountable for their actions are vital steps in this direction (Bamidele, 2017). Effective anti-corruption frameworks and judicial reforms can help rebuild the trust between citizens and the state, aligning with Locke's principle that governments must act as stewards of public trust and protect citizens' rights. Secondly, promoting inclusive governance and participatory democracy is aligned with Rousseau's emphasis on the general will and collective sovereignty. In Nigeria, fostering a political environment where citizens have meaningful opportunities to engage in decision-making processes can bridge the gap between government actions and public interests. This involves implementing reforms to enhance civic participation, such as strengthening local governance structures, promoting greater transparency in policy-making, and ensuring that marginalized groups have a voice in political processes (Ogunleye, 2020). Expanding public consultations, facilitating grassroots participation, and ensuring that policies reflect the diverse needs of the population are crucial for aligning governance with the general will. By creating mechanisms for more inclusive and participatory decision-making, Nigeria can better address social inequalities and ensure that governance reflects the collective interests of its citizens.

Finally, fostering a culture of civic education and engagement is essential for empowering citizens to actively participate in governance and uphold democratic values. Rousseau's social contract theory highlights the importance of informed and engaged citizenship in

achieving collective sovereignty and the common good. In Nigeria, investing in civic education programs that promote awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities, as well as the functioning of democratic institutions, can enhance public engagement and accountability (Adebayo, 2019). Civic education initiatives should focus on educating citizens about their role in governance, the importance of participation in democratic processes, and the mechanisms available for holding the government accountable. By fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry, Nigeria can strengthen the social contract and improve the overall quality of governance.

In summary, addressing the challenges of citizenship and good governance in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that aligns with the principles of social contract theory. Strengthening institutional integrity and accountability, promoting inclusive governance and participatory democracy, and fostering civic education and engagement are critical steps toward achieving a more effective and legitimate governance system. These recommendations, informed by the theoretical insights of Locke and Rousseau, offer a pathway to enhancing the relationship between the state and its citizens and ensuring that governance serves the collective interests of the Nigerian populace.

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