

Ethics, Trustworthiness, and Democratic Institutions as Pathways to a Flourishing Society

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Abstract

A society lacking ethics has no structured institutions. Without democratic institutions, people tend to distrust the system. Patriotism shows that citizens believe in the government. How many are proud to be Nigerians? The issues of political apathy, civil disobedience, and disengagement are merely symptoms of a failed system. As a result, society will always struggle to adapt and grow. Therefore, this paper examines the relationship between trustworthiness, ethics, and democratic institutions as essential paths to national development. Through critical analysis, it evaluates Nigeria's political philosophy and its development challenges. It concludes that the decline of ethical values and the weakening of democratic institutions have caused a cycle of distrust, stagnation, and disillusionment. The study emphasizes the importance of dispelling the illusion of progress without ethical foundations. It recommends that for a society to thrive, it must actively involve its citizens and foster trust in the system.

Keywords: Ethics, Trustworthiness, Democratic Institutions, Flourishing Society, Development Predicament and Nigerian Political Philosophy

1. Introduction

We situate this inquiry within a broader reflection on societal flourishing and the role of democratic institutions in shaping trust, ethics, and civic engagement. Our attention was drawn to the question of how societies cultivate integrity and social cohesion in contexts where governance is often contested and trust is fragile [1,2]. This reflection emerged not from abstract theorizing alone, but from lived experience in Nigeria, a nation marked by both resilience and chronic institutional challenges. At the heart of this inquiry is a deeper question: what constitutes a flourishing society, and under what conditions can it be sustained? This question moves beyond critiques of specific governments or ethnic experiences and engages with the universal aspiration for societies where citizens' rights, dignity, and well-being are protected. Philosophers like Plato dreamed of ideal states.

In his *Republic*, he outlines a vision of a just society ruled by philosopher-kings, where each class performs its appropriate role without conflict. Yet history compels us to ask: did any of these blueprints ever fully succeed? Can human beings, with all our flaws, truly replicate perfection in society? Today, when we call a society ideal, it is not because it is flawless. It is because it is com-

mitted to the welfare of its people. Trust is its foundation. Citizens believe in their government because they know their lives, their rights, and their hopes are protected. Did the Igbo proverb not say, a people who do not move in unity cannot survive the test of time? Trust is the glue that holds any society together. Was it not John Locke who insisted that the state exists to secure life, liberty, and property? In America and many other First World countries or the Global North, citizens are fiercely proud of their nation.

Why? It is because their government has made them a priority. Contrast this with Nigeria and any country in the Global South. How many of them are proud of their country? Was it not here in Nigeria that the American government flew in and rescued its citizen (Walton) kidnapped by a Terrorist group in

Niger state in a matter of seconds? Meanwhile, the same insurgency continues to overwhelm the Nigerian government year after year. How, then, can citizens trust their government when it has blatantly failed to protect their fundamental human rights? The question begs to be answered. Trustworthiness is not merely a virtue; it is the soul of nationhood. It is what compels citizens to pay taxes, obey laws, and respect authority. In turn, governments owe

citizens protection, justice, and dignity, which are the true dividends of democracy. Without ethics, society becomes rudderless. Without trust, patriotism withers.

Without strong democratic institutions, hope fades. Thus, this paper sets out to critically examine the intricate relationship between ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions. Using critical analysis, we will first explore whether a meaningful connection exists among these concepts. Then we will x-ray the corpus of Nigeria's ethical failures and her developmental predicaments. Finally, we will scrutinize the urgent need for the revitalization of ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions in Nigeria. In the end, we shall delve deeper into the crux of this study — Trustworthiness, Ethics, and Democratic Institutions as Pathways to a Flourishing Society — and offer a critical evaluation of how they can truly transform the fate of nations. The study will employ a systematic rigor that examines both theoretical frameworks and practical examples, applying an analytical lens to scrutinize Nigeria's political philosophy. By investigating the interplay between these vital components, this paper seeks to identify the fundamental ways in which the revitalization of trustworthiness, ethics, and democratic institutions can lead to societal flourishing.

1.1 Is There a Relationship Between Ethics, Trustworthiness, and Democratic Institutions?

A society without ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions is unthinkable because these elements are what animate society. They form the nervous system of the state. Without them, a nation is a body without a soul, a machine without an engine [3]. These three principles ensure the survival, stability, and prosperity of any political community. Before delving deeper into their relationship, it is appropriate to first spell out their meanings. Ethics is etymologically rooted in multiple traditions. It derives from the Latin word *ethica*, the Greek *ēthikē*, meaning the study of character and moral behaviour, and the French *éthique*, emphasizing moral philosophy.

In Igbo, ethics is called *omume oma* — meaning "good conduct" or "righteous behaviour". To the layman, ethics is the body of rules that distinguish right from wrong. To an institution, ethics is the code of conduct that governs interactions and expectations. Philosophically, ethics is the systematic study of morality, referred to by the Latin phrase *philosophia moralis*. Trustworthiness, on the other hand, finds its roots in the Greek word *pistis* (πίστις), meaning "faith" or "trust", and the Latin *fides*, meaning "faithfulness" or "reliability". It is the substance of belief in something or someone. Trustworthiness is what makes promises meaningful [4]. Without it, relationships, whether personal or political crumble. Democratic Institutions refer to structures that uphold democracy — a system where power belongs to the people.

"Democracy" itself comes from the Greek *dēmokratía* (*dēmos*, "people", and *kratos*, "power"). "Institution" stems from the Latin *institutio*, meaning "arrangement" or "established order". Thus,

democratic institutions are organized structures — courts, parliaments, electoral commissions — that safeguard people's participation, rights, and liberties within a society. They (ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions) are not just bureaucracies; they are the guardians of freedom. Given the above, the relationship between ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions is a tight-knit one [5]. Each nourishes the other. Their connection is like the bond between heart, blood, and body: the heart pumps blood, blood sustains the body, and the body protects the heart.

Without ethics, democratic institutions rot from the inside. Without trustworthiness, the public loses faith in governance. Without functional democratic institutions, both ethics and trustworthiness become empty slogans. Let us illustrate this with a thought experiment. Imagine a village called Nnobi. In Nnobi, there is no rule against stealing [6]. There is no expectation that leaders should be honest. There are no courts, no council of elders, no mechanism to enforce fairness. At first, life continues normally because old habits linger. But soon, people began to steal openly. Friend betrays friend. Neighbour cheats neighbour. In the absence of any institutional structure, there is no remedy, no justice, no stability. Fear replaces trust. Violence replaces dialogue. Finally, the village collapses into anarchy.

This simple analogy shows that when ethics (rules of conduct) vanish, and trustworthiness (faith in each other) disappears, democratic institutions (structures for fairness) disintegrate. The three are not just related; they are mutually sustaining. Philosophers across history have affirmed this truth. Plato argued that a just society is one where rulers are virtuous and where ethical education is foundational. For Plato, ethics is the blueprint for governance. Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, emphasizes that trust is essential for friendship and community life. In his view, trustworthiness is a virtue that knits society together [7,8]. John Locke insisted that governments must protect life, liberty, and property, or they lose the trust of the governed.

Thus, for Locke, trustworthiness is the foundation of political legitimacy. Montesquieu, in *The Spirit of the Laws*, highlighted the importance of institutions that check power through ethical norms and structural balance. For him, democratic institutions embody ethical principles [9]. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *The Social Contract*, asserted that democracy rests on the "general will", which is only possible when citizens trust each other and share common ethical values. Immanuel Kant, in *Metaphysics of Morals*, argued that the idea of a civil society is rooted in mutual respect and the categorical imperative — acting in a way that treats humanity always as an end. Without ethics and trust, Kant believed, no rational polity could exist. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, showed chillingly how the destruction of trust, ethics, and democratic institutions opened the door for tyranny.

For Arendt, when these three collapse, the very possibility of freedom vanishes. Returning to our analogy, imagine now that the peo-

ple of Nnobi decide to rebuild. They form a council of elders who are chosen not by wealth or violence but by reputation for honesty. They establish rules forbidding theft and deceit. They form courts to enforce these rules impartially. Slowly, trust returns. Farmers lend each other tools again. Merchants offer goods on credit [10]. Songs of joy return to the night. What changed? Not merely the structures, but the spirit animating them: ethics. Trustworthiness.

Democratic Institutions. This illustrates the deep truth: a flourishing society is impossible without the active interplay of these three elements. Analytically, we can map the relationship as follows: a) Ethics provides the norms. b) Trustworthiness provides the personal and communal adherence to those norms. c) Democratic Institutions provide the systemic enforcement and protection of those norms. Each reinforces the others [11]. A society where citizens are ethical but institutions are corrupt will eventually see citizens despair. A society where institutions are ethical but citizens are corrupt will see institutions hollowed out from within. A society where both ethics and institutions exist, but trustworthiness is lacking, will collapse under suspicion and apathy.

Thus, the health of any society depends on all three thriving together [12]. The relationship between ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions is not a casual one. It is a necessary one. Like pillars holding up a house, their strength determines the durability of the whole structure. As the Igbo say, it is by mutual understanding that true friendship is known. In the same way, it is by ethics, trust, and strong democratic institutions that a nation becomes more than a group of people — it becomes a flourishing society.

2. Nigerian Ethical Failure and Her Development Predicament

Ethical failure is the collapse of public trust. It is a breakdown of the moral codes that guide a society. Ethical failures manifest in different ways: corruption, injustice, dishonesty, abuse of power, tribalism, and disregard for human rights [13]. These failures produce what we call a development predicament — a situation where a country struggles to progress despite abundant resources and human potential. Development predicament is the paradox of a nation that ought to flourish but remains trapped in cycles of poverty, instability, and underdevelopment. It is the haunting inability of a society to move forward because its ethical foundations have been eroded.

Since Nigeria gained independence from Britain on October 1, 1960, the nation has struggled to heal from the traumatic experiences of colonization. Instead of moving steadily towards progress, Nigeria plunged into deeper crises [14]. Barely six years after independence, Nigeria fell into chaos with the first military coup on January 15, 1966. That event set off a chain of instability. The counter-coup in July 1966, followed by the horrific Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), battered the young nation. These events permanently wounded Nigeria's political and ethical structure. During the Civil War, trustworthiness between ethnic groups disintegrat-

ed. The dream of unity collapsed into tribalism, suspicion, and hatred. As Chinua Achebe would later write, "There was once a country".

Following the war, Nigeria experienced a brief period of economic optimism with the oil boom of the 1970s. Oil became the backbone of the economy, replacing agriculture. Before the boom, Nigeria was a major exporter of groundnuts, cocoa, and palm oil. By the late 1970s, agriculture had declined sharply. The sudden wealth from oil could have transformed Nigeria. Instead, it deepened the ethical failures. Public officials embezzled funds meant for development [15,16]. Corruption became entrenched as a way of life. Looting of public resources was normalized. As a result, basic sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure deteriorated. Military regimes dominated for much of Nigeria's post-independence history: General Yakubu Gowon (1966–1975), Murtala Muhammed (1975–1976), Olusegun Obasanjo (1976–1979) (military era), Muhammadu Buhari (1983–1985), Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) and Sani Abacha (1993–1998).

Each regime promised reform but left behind deeper ethical wounds. Babangida, for instance, annulled the 1993 presidential election, widely regarded as free and fair. Abacha's reign was marked by extreme human rights abuses and unprecedented looting of national wealth. Ethical failure thus became institutionalized. Democratic institutions were not allowed to function independently. The principle of the separation of powers, so essential to democracy, collapsed. Courts became tools of the executive. Parliaments rubber-stamped the wishes of military leaders. Civil society was crushed. As ethics receded, trustworthiness died a slow, quiet death — without mourning and without burial [17]. Today, Nigeria continues to bear the consequences: Kidnapping has become rampant, from the Niger Delta to the North-East. Extrajudicial killings by security forces occur with alarming regularity. Ethnic profiling fuels tension between communities.

Political brigandry undermines elections, with ballot box snatching and voter suppression becoming normal events. Gender inequality persists, with women facing barriers in politics, education, and employment. Avoidable poverty afflicts millions despite Nigeria's oil wealth. This reality is not merely accidental [18]. It is the result of decades of ethical failure. Chinua Achebe, in his small but powerful book *The Trouble with Nigeria*, wrote that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership". Achebe argued that leaders failed to inspire ethical behaviour, failed to foster trust, and failed to strengthen democratic institutions. Modern thinkers like Kwame Gyekye similarly emphasize that African development cannot succeed without rebuilding ethical foundations. Ethical governance is the bridge between resources and prosperity. Without it, a nation floats without direction.

Nigerians today distrust the government at almost every level. According to a Transparency International report in 2022, Nigeria ranked 150th out of 180 countries in perceived corruption. This

means that public trust is at an all-time low [19]. The EndSARS protests of 2020 revealed this ethical collapse vividly. Young Nigerians demanded an end to police brutality, only to be met with violence and official denials. The Lekki Toll Gate massacre on October 20, 2020, when soldiers opened fire on unarmed protesters, shattered whatever fragile trust remained between citizens and the state. This is the true meaning of ethical failure — when the state no longer serves the people, and the people no longer believe in the state. Philosophically, one can say Nigeria's problem fits what Thomas Hobbes feared: a return to the "state of nature" where life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short". Without ethics and trustworthy institutions, society collapses into violence and fear.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau warned that when social contracts are broken, people either revolt or sink into despair. Nigeria today stands at that critical junction. But it is not too late. History shows that ethical revival is possible. Post-war Germany, post-apartheid South Africa — these societies rebuilt their ethics from the ashes. For Nigeria to overcome her development predicament, the solution lies not merely in better policies or more resources. It lies in restoring ethical standards, reviving trust, and strengthening democratic institutions [20]. In the words of Frantz Fanon, "Each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it". Nigeria's mission is to rebuild a nation where ethics are honoured, trust is sacred, and democracy is genuine. Until then, development will remain a dream deferred.

3. The Need for Revitalization of Ethics, Trustworthiness, and Democratic Institutions in Nigeria

Given the ethical failures and development predicaments in Nigeria, there is a need for a revitalization of ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions. Nigeria's crisis is not merely one of poverty or insecurity; it is a collapse of values. When a society's moral compass is broken, development becomes elusive. Ethics is the soul of any nation [21]. It is the invisible force that regulates action even when no law threatens punishment. In societies like Norway and Canada, ethical behaviour is not merely a legal expectation; it is a cultural norm deeply embedded in the people's consciousness. Citizens trust their courts, their electoral commissions, and their leaders. In contrast, many Nigerians doubt the very existence of justice in their own country. One example that captures this moral decay is how the courts have been weaponized.

In Nigeria today, when someone is wronged and told, "go to court", it is not said with hope but with sarcasm. Courts, once described as the "last hope of the common man", have become the nemesis of justice for ordinary citizens [22]. The judiciary, instead of standing as a neutral arbiter, has often been turned into a tool of the executive, who appoints many of the judges and controls their careers. The situation of the legislature is no better. Rather than acting as a check on the executive, legislators frequently "dance to the rhythm of the executive to partake in the national cake". This betrayal of public trust erodes faith in democracy and creates fertile ground for tyranny. Citizens are left disillusioned, feeling alienated from a

system that was supposed to empower them.

The importance of ethics, trustworthiness, and robust democratic institutions cannot be overstated. They are the bedrock of social order. When people trust their institutions, they are more willing to make sacrifices for the greater good. When they believe the judiciary is fair, they are more likely to resolve disputes peacefully. Without these, society drifts into chaos. Consider how rarely citizens of first-world countries like Germany or Japan appear on international television to denounce their state. It is not because these countries are perfect, but because their citizens fundamentally trust that wrongs will be corrected through proper channels. In Nigeria, on the other hand, skepticism toward the state is widespread and justified. A vivid example of systemic ethical collapse is seen in the recent suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan by Senate President Godswill Akpabio. Senator Natasha, a vocal advocate for marginalized communities, was suspended ostensibly for "unruly behaviour".

However, many observers recognize it as an act of gendered suppression aimed at silencing women who dare to challenge the male-dominated political establishment. Such actions are not only undemocratic but poisonous to national unity. Democracy thrives on dissent and the competition of ideas, not the silencing of critical voices. Similarly, the ethnic tensions between the Igbo and Yoruba people reveal a deeper rot. These tensions, inflamed by historical grievances and political manipulation, have led to growing mistrust and occasional violent confrontations. Rather than promoting reconciliation, some political actors exploit these divisions for personal gain. The consequences are grave. Without inter-ethnic trust, national cohesion remains an illusion.

The political rivalry in Rivers State between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and former Governor Nyesom Wike further illustrates how personal ambitions often supersede governance. Fubara's six-month suspension, amid a power struggle with Wike, destabilized governance in the state and deepened public cynicism about politics. Citizens are increasingly convinced that public office is about personal enrichment, not service. Another ethical and environmental failure can be seen in Nigeria's riverine areas. Years of oil exploitation without accountability have led to ecological disasters. The people of Ogoni land, for instance, have suffered immense environmental destruction, resulting in loss of livelihoods, forced displacement, and chronic health crises. This environmental injustice is a form of violence against marginalized communities. It reflects a broader societal disregard for justice, love, and mutual respect.

From a philosophical standpoint, a society without ethics and trust is a society hurtling toward disintegration. Aristotle taught that politics is a branch of ethics. Good governance, therefore, is impossible without virtuous citizens and leaders. If virtue collapses, so too does the polity. John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, emphasized that justice is the first virtue of social institutions. A nation

that tolerates injustice at its core erodes the very basis for civil cooperation. In Nigeria, restoring ethics and trust requires systemic reform. It starts with the judiciary. Judges must be appointed based on merit, not political loyalty. The National Judicial Council must be made truly independent.

Legislative reform is also urgent. Lawmakers must be made to answer directly to their constituents, not to party godfathers or the executive. Moreover, Nigeria must invest in civic education. Citizens need to understand their rights and obligations in a democracy. They must also recognize that ethnicity should never supersede common citizenship. Nigeria's motto—"Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress"—must be lived, not just recited. Gender justice must also be a priority. The suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan is not an isolated incident; it is a symptom of a broader societal disdain for women in power. Empowering women through political education, legal protections, and affirmative action is critical for building a more inclusive democracy.

Environmental justice must not be ignored. The people of the Niger Delta deserve reparations and genuine remediation. Environmental degradation is not just a local issue; it is a moral scandal that strikes at the heart of national development. Finally, Nigeria must cultivate a culture of love, justice, and mutual respect. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". The failure to protect the rights of the marginalized ultimately endangers everyone. National survival demands a shift from selfishness to solidarity. Hence, the revitalization of ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions is not a luxury but a necessity. Nigeria stands today at a crossroads. One path leads to deeper chaos; the other, to renewal. Only through a radical moral awakening can the nation hope to heal its wounds and realize its vast potential. The time to act is now.

4. Trustworthiness, Ethics, and Democratic Institutions as Pathways to a Flourishing Society

The prosperity of any society is not fundamentally determined by its material wealth, natural resources, or population size. Rather, it hinges on intangible foundations: trustworthiness, ethics, and strong democratic institutions. These values create an environment where individuals, groups, and states interact productively, peacefully, and purposefully. Without them, even the most resource-rich society will descend into dysfunction and underdevelopment. Trustworthiness is the lifeblood of social and political relations. It refers to the consistent expectation that individuals and institutions will act reliably, honestly, and in good faith. Francis Fukuyama has described trust as "the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour".

In societies where trustworthiness prevails, economic transactions flourish, political participation is high, and interpersonal cooperation becomes natural. Nigeria's economic landscape provides a clear contrast: the informal economy thrives not because formal structures are strong, but often because trust within small ethnic

or regional groups substitutes for systemic trust. However, such localized trust is insufficient for national flourishing. It leads to fragmentation rather than unity. Moreover, ethics provides the normative framework that guides human behaviour. Ethics transcends personal morality; it structures public life by defining what is permissible, honourable, and just. The Greek philosopher Socrates insisted that "the unexamined life is not worth living", highlighting that ethical reflection is essential for both individual fulfilment and collective progress.

Where ethics are absent, governance becomes predatory, business becomes exploitative, and communities become fractured. In Nigeria, everyday acts of corruption from bribing traffic officers to manipulating election results stem from ethical decay that permeates every layer of society. Without a shared ethical commitment, laws lose their moral authority and citizens lose their civic motivation. Democratic institutions, finally, are the organizational structures that mediate power and enforce accountability. Democracy is not merely the act of voting; it is a system where power is limited, rights are protected, and leaders are answerable to the people. Strong institutions—such as an independent judiciary, a free press, a functional legislature, and credible electoral commissions—are the safeguards of liberty and development. The philosopher Montesquieu warned against the concentration of power, arguing that "power should check power".

In Nigeria, the repeated subversion of democratic institutions—such as the manipulation of electoral commissions or the partisan control of the police—has prevented true democratic consolidation. Without autonomous institutions, democracy becomes a facade rather than a lived reality. Critically, the interaction between trustworthiness, ethics, and institutions is dynamic and mutually reinforcing. Trust cannot flourish where institutions are corrupt. Institutions cannot endure where ethics are absent. Ethics cannot be sustained where public trust is consistently betrayed. A flourishing society, therefore, must cultivate all three simultaneously. First, rebuilding trustworthiness requires intentional transparency and accountability. Citizens must observe consequences for betrayals of trust. In Scandinavian countries, the resignations of public officials over minor scandals reinforce public faith that misconduct has consequences.

In Nigeria, by contrast, public scandals are often followed by impunity, eroding trust even further. Real progress demands a reversal: a culture where public trust is sacred and its violation carries inevitable penalties. Second, ethics must be institutionalized through education and public service reform. Ethical behaviour must move beyond religious sermons and enter secular civic spaces. National youth service programs, civil servant training, and political party curricula should all be infused with ethical education rooted in civic virtue rather than mere personal piety. Aristotle's notion of virtue ethics teaches that good character is cultivated through habit and community practices, not isolated acts of heroism. Therefore, a national ethos of service, honesty, and fairness must be intention-

ally constructed.

Third, democratic institutions must be insulated from political capture. One of the tragedies of Nigeria's post-independence history is the personalization of institutions: electoral commissions serve incumbents; anti-corruption agencies target opposition figures; police forces operate as political tools. Institutional autonomy requires not just legal independence but cultural legitimacy. Citizens must come to see these institutions as their own, not as weapons of the elite. South Africa's experience with its Constitutional Court offers a lesson: through consistent impartiality, the Court built a reputation that even politicians hesitate to openly defy. Nigeria's institutions must aim for similar credibility.

A flourishing society is not merely about economic success or infrastructural development. It is about human flourishing, what Aristotle called *eudaimonia*—living well and fulfilling human potential. A society that neglects trust, ethics, and institutions condemns its citizens to a life of frustration, fear, and stagnation. Furthermore, the Kantian imperative that human beings must be treated as ends in themselves, not as means to other ends, is a moral principle crucial for governance. In Nigeria, politicians frequently use citizens as instruments for achieving power, only to discard them once elections are won. A genuine democracy, guided by Kantian ethics, would recognize the intrinsic dignity of every person, ensuring policies that prioritize the common good over personal ambition.

Amartya Sen's "development as freedom" thesis emphasizes that development is not merely the expansion of wealth but the expansion of human capabilities and choices. Trustworthy relations, ethical conduct, and strong democratic institutions are necessary for such freedoms to materialize. Without them, economic growth, even if achieved, would remain hollow. In the digital age, trustworthiness, ethics, and democratic institutions face fresh challenges. Fake news, cyber manipulation, and algorithmic biases undermine public trust globally. Nigeria's 2023 elections saw widespread misinformation campaigns across social media platforms, confusing voters and delegitimizing results. To sustain democracy today, digital literacy, cyber ethics, and technological regulation must be added to the traditional pillars of civic education. Similarly, globalization has heightened exposure to different value systems, sometimes eroding local ethical norms without replacing them.

A flourishing Nigerian society must thus negotiate a creative synthesis: maintaining the integrity of indigenous ethical systems while embracing universal principles of human dignity and democratic governance. Trustworthiness, ethics, and democratic institutions are not optional luxuries; they are the oxygen of a flourishing society. Nigeria's quest for national greatness will remain a mirage unless these foundations are urgently strengthened. The journey will be long and difficult. It will require sacrifices from leaders and citizens alike. Yet, no other path leads to true freedom, true prosperity, and true national glory. As Plato warned, "The price good

men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men". Nigeria cannot afford such indifference any longer.

5. Critical Evaluation of Nigerian Ethics, Trustworthiness, and Democratic Institutions

Can a country like Nigeria, without strong ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions, truly be willing to flourish? This question lies at the heart of Nigeria's developmental conundrum. The reality in Nigeria is one of deep institutional rot, where the absence of robust ethics, poor trustworthiness between the government and the governed, and weak democratic institutions have resulted in a system that reproduces the very problems it was designed to avert. The Nigerian government itself lacks internal trust. The judiciary, which should serve as a check on executive power, has instead become an arm of the executive. Judicial independence is a farce, with judges often appointed based on political affiliations rather than merit, rendering the courts unreliable for delivering justice. The executive, in turn, views the judiciary and legislature not as independent entities, but as tools to further its own interests.

The legislature, which is meant to represent the will of the people, often dances to the whims of the executive, compromising its role as a watchdog. This systemic dysfunction fosters cynicism, as citizens lose faith in the efficacy of their democratic institutions. In such a scenario, it becomes difficult to envision a country thriving. Instead, Nigeria is caught in a cycle of misgovernance where institutions meant to uphold the law and protect citizens are weakened, allowing corruption to flourish unchecked. The example of Prof. Dora Nkem Akunyili illustrates this point. As the Director-General of NAFDAC, Akunyili was a beacon of integrity and reform in the fight against fake drugs in Nigeria. However, after her death, NAFDAC's operations began to regress, and the agency's commitment to its mission weakened.

This demonstrates a fundamental flaw in the Nigerian system: the reliance on individuals rather than institutions. Similarly, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which was once seen as a pillar in the fight against corruption under its pioneer chairman, Nuhu Ribadu, has experienced a decline in effectiveness after his tenure. These examples reveal the danger of focusing on strong men instead of strong institutions. When the strong man leaves, the system crumbles. A strong institution, built on ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic processes, is the bedrock of a flourishing society. It is only through the strengthening of these institutions that Nigeria, and similar countries, can hope to flourish as required.

The country cannot parade the ideals of progress when its foundational structures are built on sand. The restoration of ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions is not just necessary—it is imperative for Nigeria's future prosperity. A country without these values cannot flourish because, as the saying goes, you cannot parade what you don't have. It is only through institutional strength, rather than the fleeting influence of individuals, that sustainable

change can be achieved.

6. Conclusion

The role of ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions cannot be undermined. They remain the surest pathways to societal development and prosperity. No society can thrive without strong institutions rooted in ethical values and mutual trust. Throughout this discussion, it has become evident that there is a strong, inseparable relationship between ethics, trustworthiness, and democratic institutions. The Nigerian experience clearly shows that the erosion of ethical values and the weakening of democratic structures have produced a vicious cycle of distrust, stagnation, and widespread disillusionment. This critical evaluation vaporizes the illusion that a society can achieve meaningful progress without ethical grounding.

It reveals that when institutions fail to embody integrity and accountability, they cease to serve the public good, leading instead to deeper societal decay. For Nigeria and any society aspiring toward flourishing there is no alternative but to re-engage the citizenry, rebuild the moral fabric of the nation, and inspire genuine trust in public systems. A strong ethical culture, trustworthy leadership, and resilient democratic institutions are not luxuries; they are foundational necessities. Only by restoring these pillars can Nigeria hope to break free from its developmental deadlock and march confidently toward a flourishing future.

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