

Good Governance in Islam: The Nigerian Experience

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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with an examination of the conception of good governance in Islam. The paper proceeds with a discussion on the precepts of good governance within Islamic perspectives and the role of leadership in good governance. It is against this background that the paper looks at the Nigerian governance experience over the last few years. The paper concludes with some useful recommendations.

Keywords: governance, societal development

A. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the issue of good governance has continued to dominate public discuss across the globe, especially in developing economies like Nigeria. Undoubtedly, good governance is essential for all human civilisations as it brings about the much needed human cooperation that is required to achieve positive growth and continuity in human civilisation.

However, from the Islamic viewpoint, the conceptual and operational definition of “good governance” cannot be based on rationalism or science (except for purposes of corroboration), rather, it must be based on divine guidance. This is because Islam is a complete way of life that cannot be divorced from politics, economy, social or other spheres of human endeavour.

Therefore, good governance in Islam is predicated on divine precepts that are meant to promote congruency between spiritual and mundane development. It is in this regard that the Qur'an says:

(And they are) those who, if We give them authority in the land, establish prayer and give *Zakah* and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. And to Allah belongs the outcome of (all) matters (Q22:41)

Also the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said that:

The best amongst mankind is he who benefits humanity most (Buhari 289).

That is, he who contributes most to the positive development of humanity (spiritually and/or mundanely). This entails living one's life in an orderly, prosperous and civilised

manner and finding satisfaction in one's fulfilment of his responsibilities to Allah and the society.

Good Governance in Islam

(Hashem, 2007) defines good governance in Islam as that which strives to achieve justice in society; aspires to maintain the dignity of individuals and protect group freedom, regardless of religious or national affiliation; steers individuals toward achieving a means of sustainable livelihood before aspiring for (moderate) luxuries; encourages virtue, prohibits vice, and; achieves its aims through consultation, participation, representation, accountability, transparency and through legal conventional regulations in all social formations. (Fukuyama, 2006)

This paper views good governance as a system of governance established on the ontological framework of trust and justice, guided by the fear of Allah, morality and humility, achieved through consultation, accountability, transparency and obedience to the injunctions of Allah and Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and tailored towards human and societal development. It should be noted that all the definitions have avoided the use of the terms Islamic law, Islamic Shari'ah and democracy because of the secularist connotations embedded in them. The definition adopted in the paper has four components which together capture the features of good governance in Islam. These are:

1. Trust and justice, the ontological basis of good governance.
2. Fear of Allah, morality and humility the principal guides for good governance in Islam.
3. Consultation, accountability, transparency and obedience to Allah's injunctions and those of his prophets the practical mechanisms for good governance in Islam.
4. Human and societal development the principal object of good governance in Islam.

Precepts of Good Governance in Islam

In Islam, good governance is usually predicated on precepts of *Khalifaship* (trusteeship), *Amanaship* (trustfulness), *Taqwah* (fear of God), *Fitraship* (humanness, morality), *Adalaship* (justice), *Tawadhu'/Khidmah* (humility/service/altruism), *Shurah* (consultation), *Heesab* (accountability), *Da'a* (obedience to injunctions of Allah and His Prophet), transparency and *Maslaha* (public interest).

The above precepts are the major precepts that form the basis for good governance in Islam. They are briefly explained below.

B. THEORITICAL

Khalifaship (trusteeship)

Man is created as a *Khalifa* with divine responsibilities. He is expected to act in a godly manner in the process of discharging his responsibilities to fellow beings and other creation. Hence he is endowed with grounds, physical and intellectual capabilities, knowledge and resources to enable him discharge these divine responsibilities. The relevant Qur'anic verses that support these explanations include: Q 2: 30-39; 15: 28-44; 38: 71-85; 76:1-3.

Amanaship (trustfulness)

This arises from the fact that the potentialities and resources given to man, including his own life are set to him as trust. He is thus not the absolute owner of any of them and must not misuse or abuse them or himself. Rather, he must use them to contribute to the procedure of creation and growth initiated by God and consequently facilitate human civilisation and peaceful society. Thus *Amanah* defines man's rights and responsibilities in relation to all other humans and his environment and the rest of God's creation and requires him to deal justly with them. The relevant verses of the Qur'an that address the issue of *Amanah* include: Q 4: 58; 33: 72. The prophet (SAW) said in connection with *Amanah* that: He who has no *Amanah* does not have (complete) *Iman* (Buhari 2449).

Taqwah (fear of God)

This is all embracing precept and encapsulates the absolute consciousness of Allah's power and presence. No act goes unrecorded and everyone will be held liable for his/her actions or inactions. Some few verses in the Qur'an that address this subject matter are: Q 2: 40-41, 194, 197, 278, 282, 283; 3: 76, 102, 130, 175 & 200; 4: 1, 131; 5: 3, 28, 35, 44, 94; 6:51; 8:29, 48; 9:13, 119; 13:13, 21; 16:2,49-51; 21:28,49; 22:1, 23:52, 57; 24:52, 31:33; 33:1, 39, 70; 35:18, 28; 36:11; 39:10; 50:31-33; 57:28; 58:9; 59:16, 18, 21; 64:16; 65:1-5, 10; 67:12; and 98:8. (International, 1997)

Fitraship (humanness, morality)

Man by the nature of his creation likes anything that is morally good and abhors anything that is abominable. (See Q 30:30-31). Furthermore, social organisation is vital as no man by his creation can stand alone and no established human organisation can survive unless it has universal principles that accommodate the interest of all or most members of the society in which it operates. Man has also been given the freedom to choose between an ethical life and a life motivated by selfishness, greed and evil desires. (See Q 76:1-3). However,

Shaytan negatively influences his choice. (See Q. 17:53). His challenge therefore, is to be able to conquer the negative inclinations and contribute to human civilization.

***Adalaship* (justice)**

This involves placing everything in its rightful position. It refers to equal or equitable treatment of others. It includes social justice, economic justice, legal or procedural justice, and personal justice. It is required to ensure equilibrium and balance within a society. Its absence or misuse creates anarchy and social and economic disorder in a society. It is therefore the key precept of good governance in Islam. Verse 4:58 (according to some scholars) was the last Qur'anic verse to be revealed and the most significant from the perspective of governance of society. Addressing the believers, the verse commands, "Render the trust to whom they are due; and when you judge between people, do it with justice". The verse is followed by guidance for the believers on leadership and governance of society:

O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad SAW), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger (SAW), if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination (Q4: 59).

***Tawadhu'/Khidmah* (humility/service or altruism)**

This tells us that we are not perfect; that we have many weaknesses and shortcomings. It is the opposite of arrogance, pride, and haughtiness. It can also be interpreted as one's awareness of one's real position before Allah, and letting that realization guide one's conduct toward God and with people. And one should see oneself as an ordinary, individual and part of creation, a threshold of a door, a mat spread on the floor. It requires selfless service as the Prophet was reported to have said: That the leader of a people is their servant (Al-bani).

Tawadhu' also requires us to be open-minded towards any criticisms or complaints and treat them as opportunities to improve ourselves. We should not dismiss the critics as being overly critical or to think badly of them, without reflecting on the merit of their words. When asking for feedback or in listening to criticism, we also need to be humble, and not to be obsessed with our position or status, and therefore dismissing others.

***Shurah* (consultation)**

Consultation among members of the community on issues of governance has been emphasised in the Qur'an (See 3: 159) Allah says:

And those who answer the Call of their Lord [i.e. to believe that He is the only One Lord (Allah), and to worship none but Him Alone], and perform As-Salat

(Iqamat-as-Salat), and who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation, and who spend of what We have bestowed on them; (Q. 42: 38).

This underlines the need for participation by all relevant members of the community in its affairs and decision making process. Participation is guided by laws of Allah rather man-made laws. Herein lays the distinction between the Islamic view of good governance and secularist view.

***Heesab* (accountability)**

In line with modern day management, Islam matches man's responsibility with authority in order to hold him accountable. The Qur'an says:

Indeed we created man from a sperm drop mixture that We may test him (with responsibility); and We made him seeing and hearing. We guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful (authority) (Q76:23).

It further says:

...Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart-about all those (ones) will be questioned (Q17:36).

Responsibility is *Amanah* and will not be accounted for when there is no authority. Thus the Angels, the earth and Mountains will not be called to account because they declined the exercise of authority, Allah says:

Truly, we did offer AlAmânah (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty and all the duties which Allâh has ordained) to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it (i.e. afraid of Allâh's Torment). But man bore it. Verily, he was unjust (to himself) and ignorant (of its results) (Q 33:72).

Buraidah reported that the Messenger of Allah said:

whomsoever we appoint to a post, we shall give him provisions. What he takes beyond that is breach of trust (Muslim 1836).

The initial speech of the first Caliph, Abu Bakar, describes the essential characteristics of good governance. Immediately after being selected by the community to succeed the Prophet SAW, he alleged thus:

I have been given power over you although I am not the best of you. If I do well, help me; and if I do wrong, set me right. Loyalty is to tell the truth to a leader;

treason is to hide it. The weak among you will be powerful in my eyes until I secure his rights, if Allah so wills. The strong among you shall be weak in my eyes until I get the right from him. If people do not follow in the way of Allah, He will disgrace them. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and his Prophet, and if I disobey them, you owe me no obedience. And render account to yourself (be self-accountable), before you called to account.

Sayyidina Umar was even stricter because of his close monitoring of his appointees, so much so that he made political appointment during his time highly unattractive.

Transparency

This has been divulged by Allah in the Qur'an where He says:

O you who believe! When you deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing. Let a scribe write-down faithfully as between the parties... (Q2:282)

Transparency is the necessity for openness in all public affairs and allows the public to gather information that may help demonstrate accountability. It is serious in the elimination of corruption and the promotion of responsibility in the conduct of government business. Sayyidina Abubakar has encouraged the rendition of self-accounting. He was reported to have said in the last part of his inaugural speech:

Render account to yourself before you are called to render account.

Da'a (obedience to injunctions of Allah and His Prophet)

His precept is also all encompassing. It deals with the absolute respect for, and making reference at all times to Allah's rules and instructions of His Prophet (SAW). (See examples in Q 3:32, 132; 4:13, 59, 69, 80; 5:92; 8:1, 20, 46; 9:71; 24:51-52, 54; 33:33, 71; 47:33; 48:17; 49:14; 58:13; 64:12, 16). The Shari^hah of Allah is aimed at the protection of lives, property, progeny, religion and human sense/faculty. These guarantee obedience to the rule of law.

Maslaha mursala (public interest)

Public interest must always be considered paramount over and above self, individual or group interest. It involves promoting and preserving the things that are advantageous to society and preventing the things that are harmful to it.

C. METHODOLOGY

Role of Leadership in Good Governance

Every individual is a leader in his own right. Abdullahi bn Umar reported the Prophet (SAW) as saying: Each one of you is a king, and each one of you will be asked about his subject (Muslim 1829).

Islamic perception of leadership is rooted in the institutionalization of principles rather than personalities. Individuals with embodiment of those principles are naturally recognized as leaders. The Prophet (SAW) was thus an exemplary leader as he was recognized as *al-amīn* in his community even before his prophet hood.

The term is derived from *amn*, from which *amānah* is also derived. The community of *Sahabahs* commonly established with the idea that a leader had to be qualified to lead the people both in prayers and in worldly affairs because he was answerable individually to Allah and to the community. Distinction is therefore not usually made between spiritual and temporal leadership. (Albani M. N. Silsilati Ahadith Ad-dhi'ifah, 2006)

The leader had to rule on the basis of the trust (*amanah*) entrusted to him by Allah and also the members of the community, who could publicly monitor his activities. The leader acknowledged that he was not the ruler but the servant of the people and his job was to work for the well being of all in the society; that all his decisions, actions and policies were guided by the criteria of public interest and that he was answerable to the society and to God.

Good Governance: Nigerian Experience

Governance in Nigeria is based on the secularist concept of democracy. This raises the question as to whether the Muslims should participate in Nigeria's democratic system. Contemporary scholars have encouraged the Muslims to participate in modern democracy based on the principle of *usulul fiqh: 'ittikabul akaffudh dhiraraini wajeab'*, meaning that whenever a Muslim is confronted with two evils, he must choose the lesser of them. Thus Muslims in Nigeria are left with the options of not participating at all and allowing non-Muslims to take control of the affairs of the country and participating bearing in mind that they are doing that as a matter of necessity to protect their interests and safeguard their dignity (Darwish, 2015). Undoubtedly, the latter option is the most viable option. Furthermore, western democracy shares some common principles with governance in Islam in the areas of trust, justice, service/altruism, accountability, transparency, morality and emphasis on the rule of law.

Trust

Involves having faith and confidence in the reliability and actions of someone else; it is an absolute requisite for any successful and enduring community.

Behavioural geneticists such as (Dawkins, 2006) and philosophers such as Dennett have posited that the brain is predisposed to believe and develop trust. The pertinent question that arises is whether trust is evident in Nigerian governance. The answer is an emphatic No. The mass looting of treasuries and endemic corruption reported in the mass media in recent times clearly shows why Nigerians can hardly trust their leaders. This is antithetical to the principle of trust in Islamic good governance as well as western democracy.

Justice

The sense of justice (to treat others as you want to be treated) seems to be a natural attribute of the human condition (Hunter, 2008).

(Brosnan, n.d.), evolutionary biologist and anthropologist, has suggested that the human preoccupation with being treated fairly by others has an evolutionary foundation which was tested and confirmed on brown monkeys. Is justice evident in Nigerian governance? Justice has continued to elude Nigeria because of the deeply entrenched culture of impunity in the country. There can hardly be justice where leaders have complete immunity against the laws of the land and flagrant and reckless abuse of power persists unabated. This is against the spirit of justice in Islamic good governance as well as western democracy.

Service/Altruism

Research produced by evolutionary biologists and neuroscientists attempted to provide explanation as to why human is predisposed to helping others and cooperating with them. (Hamilton, 1964), late Royal Society Research Professor at Oxford University, in a series of important papers on the evolution of social behavior, has demonstrated that the attributes of generosity and altruism lead to cooperation. He postulated that there is a gene that promotes generosity and altruism, but initially it operated successfully only in kinship groups.

Is service/Altruism evident in Nigerian governance? It is public knowledge that Nigeria has been unlucky in the recent past to have a large number of selfish and self-centered leaders. Only the few leaders and their cohorts benefit from the huge resources of the Country. Other citizens are deliberately allowed to wallow in abject poverty, hunger and deprivation. Western democracy as currently practiced by the acclaimed champions of that ideology (like UK and US), lend credence to the fact that selfishness and self-centeredness exhibited by some Nigerian leaders are not attributes of western democracy.

Accountability and Transparency

These are fundamental principles and entrenched norms which western democracy value highly.

They entail the provision of transparent feedback information about government financial transactions properly audited, as well as social and political information, competitive press, budgetary process, monetary and real economy statistics from government, political campaign finance disclosure, effective oversight role of parliament, etc.

Are Accountability and Transparency evident in Nigerian governance? The extremely low rating of Nigeria by several international transparency agencies (such as Transparency International, Global Competitiveness Reports) are clear indications of the absence or near-absence of accountability in Nigeria's governance system.

Morality

According to (Hunter, 2008), through usual choice, has evolution designed human beings to be moral, to know naturally the difference between right and wrong, and to have a predisposition to choose the right. Do humans have a natural moral disposition? The answer to this question is the concern of evolutionary psychologists and neuroscientists with many distinguished researchers in these disciplines devoting their professional careers to its answer. One of the most prolific and interesting of the researchers in these fields is Dr. Marc M. Hauser, an evolutionary psychologist, who is a member of the Harvard University Mind, Brain and Behavior Program. In his important book entitled: *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*, Hauser reports on research that demonstrates the existence of some universal moral principles that cross cultural and geographic borders. Hauser concluded that human seem to have "hard wired" for making common moral judgments. These common moral judgments seem to be independent of religious belief, philosophical differences, or cultural variety.

Moral values such as honesty, justice, trustworthiness, etc are natural values that are required for good governance. These are values that have continued to elude us in Nigeria.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Compliance with rule of law

Implies that a nation will work within a framework of a constitution and rule of law, to operate institutions and processes so that people could make joint decisions on matters of general interest, to establish a system of courts where the government and individual citizens can plead cases before independent judges who have the authority to make binding decisions (procedural justice), and to require that governors exercise authority under law and not act arbitrarily.

Although the spirit and letters of the laws in Nigeria have guaranteed the sanctity of lives and property, the arbitrariness in the application of the laws by courts in Nigeria has raised several questions with regards to the independent and impartial nature of the country's judicial system and its ability to serve as the last resort of the common man in Nigeria. The consequence of any corrupt judicial system in this world is wanton destruction of lives and property. That is what Nigeria has continued to witness over the last few years.

E. CONCLUSION

Good governance is undoubtedly a *sine qua non* for an egalitarian society and the surest means to human prosperity in this world and the hereafter. It is only an ideal governance system founded on the Islamic principles of good governance that can guarantee an enduring growth in human civilization. However, in the absence of a governance system predicated on the Islamic precepts of good governance, we can, as a matter of necessity, embrace the western democracy along with its associated value system which has the semblance of Islamic value system.

It is the candid submission of this paper that Nigeria's failure to experience good governance over time is not wholly attributable to the adoption of western democracy but the country's failure to fully adopt the value system of western democracy.

There will be a need for continuous free and public discourse, embracing an independent media. The idea of citizens discussing public policy in public forums requires each to consider the claims and attitudes of others. In the process, something close to a common good can be identified.

Those holding public trust must remain conscious of the burden of trust on them and must subject themselves to the process of accountability. They must remember that if they are not held accountable or are able to manipulate the accountability system in this world, they will render full and true account of their stewardship on the inevitable day of accounting. Indeed Allah is ever watchful.

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