

Institutional Credibility as Mechanism for Promoting Social Justice in Nigeria

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Abstract: Strong and credible institutions do not only stimulate socio-economic and political development, but makes a nation great. Advanced nations of the world with such institutions ensure the promotion of social justice, a significant determinant of good governance. In Nigeria, institutions that support good governance are not only weak but lack credibility. This is responsible for slow rate of development; a trend that has enthroned corruption, lack of accountability, exploitation, marginalisation and ethnicity, consequently breeding social injustice and continuous search for peace and security in the country. The main thrust of this paper was to interrogate how institutional credibility promotes social justice in Nigeria. To seek solution to the problem of the study, the authors posed one research question and one hypothesis based on the stated objective of the study. Data was obtained through a structured four-point Likert scale questionnaire. Data were collected from 70 lecturers in the Department of Social Science Education, Department of Political Science, Department of Private Law and Department of International Law all in the University of Calabar sampled for the study. Data collected from the abovementioned categories of scholars was subjected to statistical analysis and was analysed with the aid of Multiple Regression Analysis as the tool for data analysis. Based on the findings made from the study, it was concluded that institutional

credibility significantly predicts social justice in Nigeria. The recommendation is that government should build strong institutions through character formation, moral restoration and capacity building
Keyword: Development, Good Governance, Institutions, Peace, Security, and Social Justice.

Introduction

All social systems have established structures, organisation and modus operandi; all of which shape and determine their cultural patterns. The structure, organisation and operational patterns of social system are expressed in different context specific. These structures are founded on establishments called institutions. Institutions form the basis for the actualisation of societal goals and aspirations because they are created for specific purposes – social, educational, political, legal, economic/financial, religious or otherwise. Every national government desires a functional system of education, governance, distribution of goods and services as well as efficient system of dispensation of justice. Towards these varied ends, institutions are created. On this note, Soludo (2006) said institutions, that is, the way society is organised, including its rules, laws and enforcement processes, matter greatly. In the same manner, Etim (2017) said that institutions have been variously seen as systems of established structure where human interactions and activities are predicated on a set of implicit or explicit rules. But where institutions are susceptible to undue extraneous manipulations and influences, they become weak.

Indeed, it has been observed that most often these institutional structures have not guaranteed the translation of national aspirations to reality. This ugly state of affairs is being blamed on weaknesses in institutional structures – lack of

credibility of existing institutions. In Nigeria, institutions that support good governance, development, peace and justice are not only weak but lack credibility. This is accountable for the slow rate of development, a trend that has enthroned corruption, lack of accountability and mismanagement of national resources, exploitation, marginalisation and ethnicity, consequently breeding social injustice and continuous search for peace and security in the country (Oladele, 2016). On the strength of this, Oladele (2016, p.2) maintained that:

You cannot cause development to happen if your institutions are not functioning. If your institutions have lost their focus and values, you can't make things happen. For example, if the police cannot be made to work according to the ethics of policing, nothing meaningful can come from the force. ...somebody who has not been trained to be a police officer cannot go and be wearing police uniform. These are established values in every society.

Such an imperfect system leads to social justice crisis and so the question asked is, how can social justice be maintained? Social justice, peace and security as indices of good governance can only thrive in a society with credible institutions – institution where rules and regulations are maintained; where no single individual is greater or stronger than an institution; where procedures are followed conscientiously; where institutional values are held sacrosanct; where compromise of all

forms are eschewed; where transparency, probity and accountability are visibly in place. This justifies the assertion of Ijege (2016) that for any government to succeed, it must ensure a solid foundation for sound political, economic and social institutions to be created. No single individual can solve such problems. The solution is in sound institutions backed by strong individuals. Strong institutions are thus instrumental to the sustenance of social justice work.

This must have prompted Lettinga and Troost (2015, p. 3) to describe the work of social justice as one which:

Involves addressing economic inequality and social marginalization as if they were – in some sense – human rights violations. However, beyond that core definition, approaches to social justice can vary widely. At one end of the spectrum, the authors argue that liberals seek to achieve social justice by having marginalized groups gain access to the institutions (e.g., corporations, the military, government, etc.) that have excluded or discriminated against them. At the other end of the spectrum, radical or Marxist activists seek to remedy social inequalities by overturning or revolutionizing those very institutions that they deem unjust. As a result, social justice work could range from promoting female CEOs, to fighting against the very corporations that those CEOs may lead.

This implies that while institutional framework is necessary for social justice to thrive, the state of social justice in a society also influences the operation of social institutions. The activities of social justice workers, social crusaders, human rights activists and civil society organisations could determine the operational mode of justice institutions. This usually applies when such institutions go deviant from their norm, and perhaps pervert justice.

Burke (2015) contends that contemporary debates about global justice begin with John Rawls' *A theory of justice*, which assumes the existence of a market economy and takes as given the possibility for stable economic equilibrium in a capitalist system. Similarly, Pogge (2010) views social justice as an assessment of the social impact of institutions and rules rather than a judgment of individual behaviour. To assess the conditions and prospects for social justice, we need to ask whether the system and institutions presently in place are providing, or are capable of providing or maintaining social justice for the world's people (Enu, Unimke & Undie, 2016). Pogge (2010) further posited that current global institutional arrangements actually cause harm because they perpetuate rules, whose foreseeable and avoidable results produce poverty and result in the deaths of innocent people. The point here is that there is not perfect institutional framework even on a global scale. This deficiency and lack of credibility in the global pedestal has trickled down even to Nigeria. This was corroborated by Federal Government of Nigeria Transformation Agenda (FGNTA, 2011–2015), which attributed the inability of Nigeria to decisively address the challenges of development in all facets of political governance, economic governance, corporate

governance and effectiveness of institutions.” Buttressing this point further, Soludo (2006, p. 17) stressed that institutions drive human progress, and while some unleash, others inhibit such progress. The author emphasised that “it is evident from all over the world that wherever the rule of law prevails and property rights and contract enforcements are more effective, progress has been faster than where such conditions are absent.”

In recent times, especially beginning from 2010, peace and security have eluded Nigeria. The advent of Boko Haram with its terrorist activities that peaked with the attack of UN building, the abduction of over 200 Chibok School girls in 2014 to the 2018 kidnapping of 110 Dapchi school girls among several incessant attacks on lives and property have spelled doom for the country. The recent and highly dreaded genocide attacks of Fulani cattle herdsman on farmers in the Middle Belt of the country have given Nigeria a grave cause for alarm. This ugly trend has remained unabated in spite of the presence of security personnel and coercive apparatus deployed to the area. Justice is yet to be done to the victims of these acts of bestiality.

Notwithstanding the anti-corruption stand of the current administration and pro-economic development in Nigeria, the Transparency International Report (2018) announced that Nigeria’s corruption index is worse than what obtained three years previously. The rate of social and economic development in the country is nothing to write home

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about. President Muhamadu Buhari’s administration has taken ethnic politics to an inglorious height with the introduction of clannishness, nepotism and tribalism into politics. Enu, Undie and Odey (2019) listed among others corruption, religious bigotry, ethnicity, resource control and power shift as pervasive challenges facing the Nigerian federation currently.

Several attempts have been made by the federal government of Nigeria to solve these aching problems of the Niger Delta agitations even though now they seem to be calmness. Several institutions or agencies have been created, and so much public funds have been sunk into these projects. Many statutes have been promulgated. Conferences have been held. The research community has been busy trying to proffer solutions to these myriads of challenges the country has been grappling with. The media have been quite vociferous as well as Civil Society Organisations. However, it is regrettable to observe that it has been difficult to sustain social justice in Nigeria. Nigeria has been accused of being excellent in programmes and policy-formulation but poor in implementation (Enu & Esu, 2011).

Certain institutions of governance are entrusted with oversight responsibilities of entrenching social justice, and ensure the promotion of good governance, development and peace and security in Nigeria. For the avoidance of ambiguity, institutions referred to here cut across political institutions, legal institutions, social institutions, educational institutions, financial institutions, religious institutions and media institution. Specifically, the following institutions are considered in this paper:

- The judiciary
- The legislature (comprising both the

National Assembly and States Houses of Assembly)

- The Security agencies (Police, Department of State Security and others)
- The civil service
- Political parties

A cursory look at the above institutions within the context of governance support base viz-a-viz their mandate in the promotion of social justice in Nigeria shows outright weakness and lack of optimum capacity to deliver the social good. For example, the Judiciary that is seen as the last hope of the common man, to a reasonable extent, is nothing but theatrical even with much constitutional empowerment. Innocent people are made to suffer unduly from the instrument of the law while perpetrators of criminality are moving about the streets untouched. This is what Kukah (2011) described as injustice. It is even worse under the present dispensation that the judiciary itself has suffered the worst assault itself as the head of the judiciary; the president unconstitutionally removed Hon. Walter Nkanu Onnoghen. If the CJN can suffer this fate, how much less an ordinary man?

The legislature, on its part, has failed in its oversight legislative mandate. Serious issues of breach of the principles of social justice by the government have not been raised by the legislature and addressed. Both the upper and lower chambers of the Nigerian legislature are more involved in the welfare needs of their members than issues of public interest. For instance, in 2008, former President Olusegun Obasanjo single-handedly ceded the Bakassi Peninsular to the Republic of

Cameroon, an act done against public interest. The entire process was never presented to the National Assembly for ratification. This is a clear case of impunity against the people. The National Assembly displayed overt lack of capacity and institutional failure to protect its citizens.

The security agencies are not spared as they have gravely compromised their professional ethics. Recent happenings in the country indicate the failure of the security institutions to protect lives and properties of the citizens. Killings across the North Central Zone by criminal elements have been going unabated with the combined effort of all the security agencies proving to be helpless. So much injustice has been perpetrated against the people of Benue, Taraba, Kaduna and Plateau States, who have variously suffered physical, emotional, economic and psychological emasculations. This is further corroborated by Enu and Odey (2017), who decried the apparent application of the military architecture of the Nigerian state at presidential whims and caprice; an act that has caused untold hardship on the citizens of Middle Belt. Social justice has eluded these people as the existing institutions of governance have failed to protect them.

Both the civil service and political parties by nature are supposed to be the heartbeat of every government. Incidentally, this is not so in Nigeria. One of the most corrupt institutions in modern day governance in Nigeria is the civil service. The civil servants are engrossed in all manners of unholy practices that have compromised public service ethics of transparency, accountability and honesty in the discharge of their duties. The civil servants constitute a nest of high-

powered officials promoting corruption in the civil service.

For political parties, because they are made up of mostly men and women with low ideological orientation of what it takes to be a party member, they cannot decipher between party and government. This has a serious impact on the quality of governance and delivery of public service to the citizens.

In the light of the above, Abubakar (2011, p. 2) pointed out that:

Democratic institutions such as INEC, Legislature, Executive, Judiciary and security agencies are put in place by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to act as mechanisms for the smooth conduct of periodic elections and the enthronement of political leaders. However, these institutions lacked the capacity to perform well due to the prevailing circumstances of the environment in which they are situated— weakened moral threshold and poor ethical values.

It is therefore the considered opinion of the current researchers that with credible institutional framework, these problems bedeviling Nigeria would be solved. There have been many unanswered questions on the credibility of institutions saddled with the responsibilities of maintaining social order, peace and security and good governance in Nigeria. With recourse to the above state of affairs, it was considered imperative to examine institutional credibility as mechanism for promoting social justice

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in Nigeria.

Literature review

Societies are built on structures deliberately created to achieve certain societal deals and aspirations. They are specially established to enhance the achievement of clearly defined goals. These structures are referred to as institutions. An institution is an organisation established for a religious, educational, political, social or legal purpose. Hodgson (2006) described an institution as the kind of structures that matter most in the social realm: they make up the stuffs of social life. The author went further to define institutions as the rules of the game in the society, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. Institutions could be formal or informal. An informal institution entails social order and organisation reflecting human psychology, culture, habits and customs while a formal institution is purposely created to attain a particular objective of national interest. The term institutional credibility is a derivation of the strength or integrity of institutional framework, which refers to a set of formal organisational structures rules and informal norms for service delivery in the society. It encompasses the systems of formal laws, regulations and procedures, and informal conventions, customs and norms that shape institutional behaviour and operation. In the context of this research, institutional credibility is referred to as the strength of an institution. In other words, a credible institution is a strong institution. This entails a strict or conscientious compliance with organisational structures, processes, principles and procedures in place. It is about an institution that has the capacity and the temerity to maintain standards and follow its guiding principles without any form of compromise. A credible institution is able to

deliver on its mandate irrespective of whose ox is gored. In this kind of institution, no individual can be greater than an institution. Though men be strong and mighty, the institutions are stronger. A credible institution makes social justice and social development possible.

Rawl (1971) conceive justice as the first virtue of social institutions considered as a truth system of thought. In his theory of social justices, Rawl noted that “a theory, however, elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust” (p.5). This is a further description of the place of institutional credibility in maintaining social justice in the land. Social justice is a concept that originates in philosophical discourse but is widely used both ordinary knowledge and Social Science often without being clearly defined. By synthesising the common elements of various philosophical treatments, it is possible to offer a general definition of social justice as a state of affairs (either actual or ideal) in which:

- (a) Benefits and burdens in the society are dispersed in accordance with some allocation of principles (or a set of principles),
- (b) Procedures, norms and rules that govern political and other forms of decision-making that preserves the basic rights, liberties and entitlements of individuals and groups; and
- (c) Human beings (and perhaps other species) are treated with dignity and respect not only by authorities but also by other relevant social actors including citizens.

The Australian National Pro Bono Resource Centre (2015) viewed social justice from three perspectives:

1. Joint responsibility to address systemic/structural poverty, inequality and unfairness – emphasises responsibility of system or government to provide:
 - i. Fair redistribution of resources
 - ii. Equal access to opportunities and rights
 - iii. Fair system of law and due process
 - iv. Ability to take up opportunities and exercise rights
 - v. Protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged people
2. Individual responsibility – getting what you deserve according to:
 - i. Status (emphasises an individual’s social position as a determinant of the share of resources an individual deserves)
 - ii. Moral responsibility (emphasises the behaviour of those who are poor, excluded or disadvantaged)
 - iii. Workforce participation (emphasises workforce participation as the only legitimate way for an individual to contribute to society and be socially included)
 - iv. Individual capability (emphasises the personal characteristics that enable people to take advantage of opportunities)
3. Recognition of human value and wellbeing (emphasises human value beyond status and economic productivity)

Above are the themes of social justice. There are widely overlapping and interconnecting relationships between the various themes. These are quite complex; but the scope of this research does not cover these relationships. It should be taken that social justice is guided by the elements identified above. The attainment of these ideals would naturally give rise to peace and security and good governance in a state.

Babawale (2007, p. 9) see good governance as “the exercise of political power to promote the public good and the welfare of the people.” The author argued further that:

Good governance is the absence of lack of accountability in government, corruption, and political repression, suffocation of civil society and denial of fundamental human rights. The identified points attributes of good governance in any society include: accountability, transparency in government procedures, high expectation of rational decisions, predictability in government behaviour, openness in government transactions, free flow of information, respect for the rule of law and protection of civil liberties, and press freedom.

The absence of the above is a clear case of bad governance, characterised with pervasive corruption among others. To Oladele (2016), Corruption is a systemic issue arising from the weakness of institutions. Gbervbie (2014) equally argued that good governance and development in Nigeria can only be achieved if democratic institutions such

as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Legislature, Executive, Judiciary, the Police, political parties and the press are strengthened to carry out their functions properly.

Similarly, Ekpe (2008) as well as Enu and Odey (2018) noted that the creation of a conducive climate for political and economic development is the purpose of good governance. Particularly, Enu and Odey (2018) emphasising the place of leadership, maintained that the aim of good governance is to bring about effective implementation of development programmes in the state. Furthermore, the authors conceptualised good governance as being a characteristic of “the interplay of the best practices in the administration of a state or nation for sustainable development. The implication of this assertion is that no nation is likely to experience enhanced development without the existence of good governance in place (p.14).” It must therefore be made clear that good governance, development and social justice are the direct corollary of a credible institutional framework in the society.

Speaking for good governance and justice in the electoral process especially with respect to democracy, Odey (2012, p.48) stated:

...We know the importance of allowing the votes to count. If the votes continue to count, leaders would be more responsible and responsive to the people. They would have respect for the people, and respect for the people is the beginning of responsible leadership. But if and when votes don't count....there would be no respect for anybody....

While upholding that there are Nigerians who are not corrupt, Obodo (2012) stressed that Nigerian institutions are riddled with spies

and wolves that believe, and are secretly sponsoring different ethnic and religious ideologies. The author decried the prevalence of ethnicity and religious sentiments in play in Nigerian institutions. The author alludes to a weakness in the judicial system occasioned by political interference in the system. According to him, this is the bane of Nigeria's effort in providing social justice, peace, political and social development.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on John Rawl's theory of social justice (1971). In 1971, John Rawls' theory of social justice, was propounded, and has been described as "probably the most influential" concept of social justice (National Pro Bono Resource Centre, 2011). Rawls' conception of distributive justice provided that "all social values... are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these values is to everyone's advantage" (Rawls, 1971). The thrust of this theory is the question Rawls asked, "What particular set of rules or laws would members of a society agree to obey if they made as their goal a fair social order – one in which no one is exploited or taken unfair advantage of" (Baldry, 2010). Rawls' theory of social justice is guided by two fundamental principles, which are:

- (1) Each person has equal right to the most extensive system of personal liberty compatible with a system of total liberty for all
- (2) Social and economic inequality are to be arranged so that they are both

- (a) To the greatest benefit to the least advantaged in society (so that the least well off people are made as well off as possible, which could mean giving an unequal/greater amount to the people least well off)
- (b) Attached to positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (so that everyone in society has a reasonable chance of obtaining the positions in society that make decisions about inequalities)

John Rawls showed empathy to the socially disadvantaged and those whose inequalities are "undeserved" in the society. Rawls' "principles of redress" stress the need for this category of persons to be duly compensated.

This theory has some implications for this study. The view of John Rawl on social justice focuses on a systemic form of justice that is it is concerned with the general society holistically instead of individual persons. The theory makes an emphatic proposal for the distribution of social values and goods for individual members of the society based on their respective needs irrespective of size, class, opportunity or other mundane factors. Accordingly, the theory curries for the interest of the disadvantaged members of the society. With respect to the current study, if social justice is achieved in Nigeria, every segment of the society would benefit; justice would not be restricted only to the privileged. The national commonwealth would be distributed in such a way that even the downtrodden would benefit. This can be achieved only when institutions saddled with requisite responsibilities are strong enough to deliver on their mandate. When this is in place, development, peace and security would have been guaranteed.

Purpose of the study

This study sought to achieve one main objective, which is:

1. To investigate institutional credibility as a predictive mechanism for promoting social justice in Nigeria.

Research question

1. How does institutional credibility predict the promotion of social justice in Nigeria?

Statement of hypothesis

1. Institutional credibility does not significantly predict the promotion of social justice in Nigeria.

Method

This research was conducted in the University of Calabar (UNICAL), Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. University of Calabar is one of the second-generation universities in Nigeria. Law established it in 1975 by the federal government of Nigeria. It initially started in 1973 as Calabar Campus of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). The University has a College of Medicine, 13 Faculties, 4 Institutes and 83 Departments. The study was based on ex-post facto research design since the occurrence of the variables had preceded this study. The population of the study comprised all Social Educators and Social Scientists and Legal Educators in the University of Calabar. Specifically, this study sampled only Lecturers in the Department of Social Science Education (Faculty of Education), Department of Political Science (Faculty of Social Sciences) and Departments of Private and International Law (Faculty of Law)

presently on ground (i.e not on sabbatical or leave) in the period of this research (first quarter of 2018). The sample of the study (70 lecturers) is presented in Table 1:

TABLE 1 Sample of study

S/N	Department	Number of sample
1.	Social Science Education	18
2.	Political Science	22
3.	Private Law	12
4.	International Law	18
	Total	70

Data for this study was collected by means of structured questionnaire that measured institutional credibility and social justice in Nigeria. The questionnaire had a total of 25 items. A four-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to the subject and retrieved from them in their various offices. The data were subjected to statistical analysis using the Multiple Regression Analysis.

Result

This section presents the result of the analysis of data collected. One hypothesis was tested, which reads: Institutional credibility does not significantly predict the promotion of social justice in Nigeria. While institutional credibility is the independent variable, social justice is the dependent variable. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance using the Multiple Regression Analysis. The result is presented in Table 2. Table 2 shows that p-value of 0.001 is less than the 0.05 level of significance used for the study while the F-ratio is 4.542 at 5 and 64

degrees of freedom. This result shows a significant composite relationship between the predictor-variables and the dependent variables. The multiple R (correlation coefficient) that measures the strength of the association between the independent and the dependent variables is 0.412, a good correlation. The coefficient of determination, R^2 is 0.172, which shows the power of the independent variables in predicting the dependent variable. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, credible institutions significantly predict the promotion of social justice in Nigeria. A further analysis of the result shows that the predictive ability of each of the five predictor-variables differs. This is shown in the significance of t and p-values: the judiciary ($t=2.998$, $p=0.032<0.05$); the legislature ($t=1.886$, $p=.002<0.05$); security agencies ($t=1.971$, $p=0.005<0.05$); the civil service ($t=3.3834$, $p=0.000<0.05$); and political parties ($t=1.348$, $p=.002<0.018$). These statistics reveal that the independent variables have a positive or direct relationship with the dependent variable: this means that the stronger or more credible the institutions are, the more social justice becomes sustainable and achievable. Conversely, the weaker the institutions, the less like would the achievement of social justice be.

Discussion

The finding of this study revealed that institutional credibility significantly predicts the promotion of social justice in Nigeria. This is a negation of the null hypothesis directing the study. The finding shows that credible institutions the world over promote social justice,

Nigeria is no exception. It also proved that the level of social justice in the state is determined by the strength of justice institutions in the state commands. The weaker these institutions are, the higher the level of social injustice. This finding is in consonance with the works of Oladele (2017) as well as Ijege (2016). According to Oladele, development cannot take place in the midst of institutions that are not functioning. The author stated further that institutions that have lost their focus and values cannot make things happen. Soludo held that strong institutional framework dictates the kinds of skills and knowledge perceived to have the maximum pay-off. These go to show that institutions, especially those concerned with promoting social justice that lack credibility cannot make social justice happen or practiced in the land. By this, still, only strong institutions have the capacity to bring about social justice, development, good governance and peace and security. On his part, Ijege (2016) asserted that success by any government is determined by the presence or creation of formidable social institutions that can shoulder the responsibilities bestowed on it. The author maintained that achieving social justice or social development cannot be done where individuals are stronger than institutions. In fact, he recommended as solution to societal problems “sound institutions backed by strong individuals.”

Conclusion

There are so many challenges confronting Nigeria bothering on lack of social justice, good governance, social development as well as peace and security. The Nigerian government has never been blind to this. Several attempts have been made in terms of policymaking and creation of relevant institutional frameworks to address the

matters. Regrettably, the problem is yet to be resolved. Based on the findings made in this research, the researchers conclude that the problem lies with institutional credibility. It does not suffice to create institutions. What is of utmost consequence is the strength, the capacity, funding, transparency, accountability, human capital and relevant, enabling statutes. These are the hallmarks of credibility of an institutional framework.

Recommendation

Nigerian government should take a step beyond establishment of institutions to focusing on strengthening existing institutions by building capacity for such institutions for effective service delivery; strong institution should take pre-eminence over strong men.

TABLE 2
Multiple Regression Analysis of institutional credibility and social justice
(N = 70)

Sum of variation	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	109.013	5	21.803	4.542	.001*
Residual	307.392	64	4.800		
Total	416.405	69			

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	33.487	6.343		5.279	.000
The Judiciary	.107	.107	.090	2.998	.032
The Legislature	-.176	.094	-.166	1.886	.002
Security agencies	-.318	.161	-.184	1.971	.005
The civil service	.299	.078	.355	3.834	.000
Political parties	-.158	.117	-.120	1.348	.018

a. Dependent Variable: Social Justice

R	.412 ^a
R Squared	.170
Adjusted R Squared	.132
Std. Error of the Estimate	2.191

*p<0.05, df = 5, 64

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