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The leadership quality among the elected public leaders in African states: Reflection on Plato's Ideas of a Philosopher-King and African Ubuntu Philosophy

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(Received 9th February MMXXV; | First published online 27th June MMXXVI)

Abstract

This paper accomplishes three tasks. It identifies the leadership traits of some elected African public leaders through selected cases and assesses them based on Plato's virtues of philosopher-king and Ubuntu philosophy. Reveals factors that lead some African states to be ruled by low-quality elected public leaders. Through the secondary sources of evidence, the paper indicates several unethical traits among the African elected public leaders, which suggest low leadership qualities. Some elected public leaders act contrary to Plato's ideas of philosopher-king and Ubuntu's ethics. Ethics such as generosity/selflessness and political commitment are absent or appear low. The low leadership quality among the elected African public leaders is a result of the low-level democratic elections in some states; some election candidates lack adequate training in leadership and ethics; the tendency of politicians to struggle for power to fulfill private interests; inadequate democratic civic education among the citizens and election candidates; and poverty, economic predicaments and corruption during elections. The paper recommends that social and political institutions must upscale the capacity to teach the present and future generation of public leaders the philosophical thinking skills and ethical values informed by the philosophies mentioned above. Furthermore, poverty and economic problems must be minimized since they are connected with the election of low-quality upper-level public leaders in terms of ethical conduct.

Keywords: Public leadership; ethical public leaders; African elected public leaders; Plato's cardinal virtues; Ubuntu leadership philosophy

1. Introduction

In a representative democracy, the public leaders are elected to represent specific public interests and to ensure that these interests are recognized, respected, and protected (Kihiu 2010; van Loon 2017). Thus, a public election is a crucial instrument for acquiring potential actors in various leadership positions in the government. Some African states have exerted efforts to ensure that the public election becomes democratic; however, such efforts have not made them fully democratic; hence, such states have been assigned different names such as competitive authoritarians since they permit the operation of democratic institutions and competitive elections, however they violate principles of free and fair elections and undermines the opposition parties (Levitsky and Way 2002). High-quality public leaders are expected to result from free and fair elections; however, there should be a pool of qualified individuals in every capacity needed to carry out the position they are contesting. It is believed that elected leaders are necessary to develop any country (Gesare and Syekei 2021, 21), and more so in African countries. One of the perspectives on political accountability argues that elected leaders must be more effective than unelected leaders in ensuring the delivery of local public goods (Baldwin 2017, 2); however, as suggested above, these individuals must have every capacity required to carry out the position they are contesting for.

In this paper, the case study is based on the quality of leadership behaviors of the higher-level elected political elite and public leaders who are members of parliament and the executive. Just like other leaders in every sector, public or private, these elected political elites must have a wide range of leadership qualities in order to contribute their efforts in fulfilling the missions and objectives of their institutions. In a study by Mwansa (2016), leadership qualities include, but are not limited to, honesty, courage, transparency, fairness, and hard work. Aytekin (2021, 117) categorized leadership qualities into transactional and transformational. The transactional qualities of leadership involve contingent reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception. Transformational leadership involves five main characteristics: idealized attributes, inspirational motivation, idealized behaviors, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The efforts to develop these leadership qualities must start from the beginning of education (Yusof et al. 2020), both in formal and informal social institutions.

Plato's concept of philosopher-king can well be understood through the Platonic notion of the *technē politike*, the art of ruling. He conceives ruling as an art as it necessarily involves knowing how best to control itself for the good of the polis or state (Brickhouse 1979). When Plato talked about the philosopher-king, he referred to the philosophical rulers of the ideal city described in the *Republic* (ca. 380 BC). In Plato's view, a philosopher-king who is conceived to be a quality leader must have wisdom or prudence, however, to be wise requires justice, temperance, and courage (*Republic* ca. 380 BC, 427e/2000). In addition, a philosopher-king or a ruler must be rational, demonstrate exceptional reasoning abilities, and maintain self-discipline (i.e., control self-desires and prioritize public interest rather than personal interests). In Ubuntu African philosophy, which is also regarded as a leadership model (Ncube 2010, 81), originating in indigenous African culture and ways of life, a quality leader must have the following traits. A spirit of generosity, friendship, hospitality, caring for the quality of other people's lives, self-donating, self-determining, truthfulness (Ewuoso and Hall 2019), compassion, harmony, respect, responsiveness (Nabudere 2005; Mangaliso 2001, cited in Ncube 2010), and humanity. Ubuntu leadership philosophy also emphasizes the importance of agreement or consensus (Ncube 2010, 79), collectivism (i.e., in ownership of opportunities, responsibilities, and challenges), relationship (Malunga 2009, cited in Ncube 2010), and solidarity. It discourages the theft and killing of human beings and considers a quality leader to be one who believes in hard work (Mukuka 2013), can come up with innovative ideas, and obtains the best from others (Ncube 2010).

Furthermore, based on Ubuntu philosophy, a quality leader values a shared community identity (Mukuka 2013) and inspires a shared vision that best offers direction to others (Ncube 2010). Laws

and the leadership must express the will of the people/public (Nabudere 2005). Nonetheless, Ubuntu African leadership philosophy requires leaders to recognize and acknowledge the diversity of people and cultures (Ncube 2010) and the connectedness of people/interdependent relationships (Ncube 2010; Ewuoso and Hall 2019).

The present paper's analysis of the quality of the elected public leaders in African states will reflect Plato's recommended traits of the philosopher-king and the elements of the Ubuntu African philosophy mentioned above. Plato's traits or cardinal virtues are applied because they are at a higher level than other vital ethical variables. For instance, Plato recommended that a ruler of the state must be a philosopher, and as a philosopher, he must love wisdom, which is not given but rather gained by intervening with life (Janning 2015, 4). In Plato's *Republic* (444a/2000), "wisdom is the knowledge which directs the action". It is inseparable from other virtues (i.e., self-discipline, courage, and justice). Therefore, the knowledgeable, rational, courageous, and just persons are considered to be wise, and thus, will have the power to grasp, comprehend, and follow (*Republic* 350b-c/2000; 404d/1997). Plato regards these people as good because they value wisdom, and the unwise and bad ones as ignorant (*Republic* 350c/2000). Like other scholars and philosophers, Plato also believes that wisdom is a rational faculty, which is appropriate for ruling (*Republic* 441e/2000), and understanding life and dealing with human affairs. Therefore, wisdom is a crucial virtue that significantly impacts the success of individuals, organizations, and communities (Rowley 2006).

Moreover, the philosopher-king is distinguished for his virtue of prudence, which is an extension of wisdom or practical wisdom, emphasized by Plato. Plato conceives prudence as a form of knowledge and precisely the art of guardianship which resides in those rulers who are called guardians (*Republic* 428/1941). According to him, prudence is at the higher soul, which guides what is desired and warns of danger. "It enables the guardians or rulers to take thought, not for some particular interest, but for the best possible conduct of the state as a whole" (*Republic* 427/1941). Nevertheless, prudence is a virtue that renders authority to reason and implement justice (Tentler 1959, 368). Therefore, an elected public leader with a prudent character will be able to perceive and judge what is good and morally bad, and he will be able to adopt the most useful strategies to promote the good and neglect the bad. Plato also considers a philosopher-king (an elected public leader in our case) as the one who possesses intellectual virtues, which means that he should love learning and be able to grasp many fields (*Republic* 484b/1968). They should be rational, and irrational ones should not be permitted to rule in the state and be the sovereigns of the greatest things. Thus, rulers should pay special attention to education and acquire and exercise knowledge of the form of the good (*Republic* 534d, 511c/1968). It is believed that without this knowledge, people cannot establish here on earth conventions about what is fine or just or good when they need to be established (*Republic* 484c-d/1968), and that without knowledge of this form, all other knowledge is of no benefit to people (Santas 1977, 1). Therefore, non-virtuous leaders who lack ethical knowledge are unable to form correct views and take moral actions (Gordon, n.d.).

Regarding the notion of courage as a virtue, it can be considered as the ability to confront danger, accept difficulties, and not allow oneself to have irrational imaginations and fear (Mahoney 1998, 190). This led Plato to define courage as knowing when to be afraid (Dion 2014). In his view, the virtue of courage is found in the warrior class or soldiers who are trained to fight for the city. He argued that the city must be defended under any circumstances, regardless of desires, pleasures, pains, or fears (*Republic* 429d/2000). Although Plato established that the virtue of courage resides in the warrior class or soldiers, he also encouraged the philosopher-kings or rulers of the city-state to be courageous too (*Republic* 485a-487a/2000). In leadership, courage as a virtue helps to reduce psychological hardness facing the leader; therefore, a leader's mind remains stable in times of crisis, and hence, he can trace the problem and find reasonable solutions. Nevertheless, followers can exhibit courageous behavior modelled after a courageous leader (Hannah et al. 2011). The last virtue among those discussed above is 'temperance.' However, this virtue has several interpretations;

common is 'self-control.' In the *Republic* (ca. 380 BC, 432a/2000), the virtue of temperance is also regarded as an agreement or "a natural harmony of worse and better". Therefore, a person has self-control when the "better part" of one's soul is controlling the worst part. Thus, Plato established that "the few in the city who have the better desires and wisdom must control the inferior desires of the masses" (Bauman 2018, 258). Therefore, a quality leader of any state is one who is driven by temperance preferences.

Although Plato's cardinal virtues can be perceived at a higher level than other ethical variables, as stated in the previous section, the African Ubuntu philosophy is crucial to be applied in assessing the quality of the elected public leaders in African states because it originates in Africa. Thus, it reflects the African indigenous culture and organized ways of life, which also determine the nature of leadership. It can also be applied practically (Ncube 2010, 78; Maluwa et al. 2018). Nevertheless, given that Ubuntu has been regarded as the basis of politics (Nabudere 2005), by adopting Tucker's view (1981, 1995), cited by White (2015, 38), "that all politics is leadership, evidenced by the role of the politicians in providing direction for the polis" we argue that Ubuntu is the foundation of leadership. Therefore, it is instrumental in assessing the quality of African public leadership.

Although numerous Western philosophical views are available and relevant for analyzing African phenomena, they differ from African-oriented philosophical perspectives in many respects. For instance, one of the elements of Plato's philosophical thought in the present paper insists that a philosopher-king (an elected public leader in our case) must demonstrate exceptional reasoning abilities and be well-equipped with the knowledge of the form of the good. Despite the usefulness of Ubuntu philosophy in many fields, including African leadership, it does not place a high value on the rationality aspect of the quality leader and demands exceptional reasoning ability to be part of a larger constellation of leadership qualities. Also, unlike Plato's political thought, Ubuntu's philosophical thought does not strongly emphasize the virtue of courage. However, some elements of Ubuntu philosophy, such as compassion, respect, humanity, and caring, reveal Plato's virtues of wisdom, temperance, and justice. Like Ubuntu philosophy, these ethical virtues discourage theft and killing a human (Mukuka 2013). Nonetheless, they endorse Ubuntu's philosophical view, which requires leaders to recognize and acknowledge the diversity of people and cultures (Ncube 2010). Plato's philosophical view on leadership differs from that of Ubuntu in that, unlike the former, the latter incorporates the aspects of collectivism, solidarity, shared community identity, connectedness, and interdependent relationships of people. The similarities and differences between these two philosophical frameworks do not hamper the analytical process of achieving the paper's objective; instead, they may help these frameworks complement each other and minimize each other's weaknesses.

Leadership qualities or virtues of the two philosophical frameworks presented above are crucial in every state, specifically African states, which are still fighting absolute poverty. We argue that it is important for an elected leader to possess all of them and apply them according to the situation. Applying those qualities by elected leaders will bring numerous positive impacts, including but not limited to the following. Public problems and their solutions will be well identified; laws, policies, and strategies to curb the problem will be well formulated, and principles of equality and ethics will inform the implementation; the marginalized individuals will be highly valued; there will be transparency and inclusiveness, the rate of corruption will be minimal, and the economic growth will increase and minimize poverty. The African continent will not be able to achieve all these successes if the elected African leaders lack fundamental virtues, including those proposed by Plato and Ubuntu philosophy.

We argue that most African countries are still experiencing economic problems that hinder their stability. These predicaments are inextricably connected with the quality of the elected public leaders. The elected leaders we refer to in this paper are the members of the parliament and the executive, who are democratically elected through a majority vote. These high-level political elites are

the ones who establish the vision of the country, lead state actors, and oversee the implementation of this vision. Therefore, the leadership quality of these elites deserves to be blamed for the ongoing underdevelopment conditions and absolute poverty in many parts of the African continent. Given that Plato's cardinal virtues are useful in determining the quality of the leader and that Ubuntu's philosophical and ethical knowledge originates in the African context, this paper analyses the leadership quality among the elected public leaders in African states by reflecting on Plato's proposed cardinal virtues of the philosopher-king and Ubuntu's philosophical framework of leadership.

The rationale for applying the two philosophies is that the virtues of the former (developed by Plato) are at a higher level than other ethical values. Despite such a strength, the general framework itself has several weaknesses, including deficiencies of some fundamental ethical values such as compassion and a lack of emphasis on respect, relational mutuality/interdependence, and collectivism, which are among the core dimensions of Ubuntu. Moreover, the strength of Ubuntu is that, since it originated in an African context, it reflects the indigenous African culture and the totality of an African way of life and development models at the micro and macro structures. The abovementioned limitations of Plato's ideas of the philosopher-king do not entail that the whole framework is irrelevant in Africa. One of the strengths of Plato over Ubuntu is that it places a high value on the rationality aspect of the quality leader and demands exceptional reasoning ability to be part of a larger constellation of leadership qualities, as previously stated. Furthermore, unlike Ubuntu, Plato's political thought emphasizes the virtue of courage not only to the warrior class but also to the philosopher-kings/rulers (*Republic* 485a-487a/2000). Although some scholars (Matolino and Kwindigwi 2013) advocate for the demise of Ubuntu, logically, it is hard to accept that its ethical principles are valueless. We argue that Ubuntu philosophy exists, as several scholars (Koenane and Olatunji 2017; Mokhutso 2022; Chowdhury et al. 2023) demonstrate in their works. It is a viable and desirable moral philosophical framework that can "contribute positively towards developing moral character in the contemporary sociopolitical environment in parts of Africa" (Koenane and Olatunji 2017, 263).

2. Leadership traits of the elected public leaders in some African states

The review of secondary sources has identified several leadership traits of the elected public leaders in some African states; for instance, Lohmann (2019, 9) revealed that African members of Parliament (MPs) have become political entrepreneurs who attempt to maximize their benefits and serve their economic interests. Lohmann also reported that many MPs have been moving from opposition to the ruling parties, which is an example of the MPs' political and economic entrepreneurship behavior. This is a plausible assertion since, in Africa, political parties in power have adequate resources, including financial, compared to opposition parties; hence, the likelihood of some opposition leaders moving from their parties to the ruling party to fulfil their own economic and political interests is significant. However, in some instances, the ruling party members/leaders may shift to the opposition party, hoping to fulfil their own economic and political benefits.

The study by Ibn Zackaria and Appiah-Marfo (2020, 1) indicates the increasing tendency of African MPs to engage in political clientelism associated with corruption. Taking Ghana as their case study, they found MPs employing political clientelism by providing what they called non-traditional services to their constituents. They found that such a tendency is a determinant of electoral victory, and their impact is that they reduce the legislators' effectiveness in performing their traditional roles of law-making, representation, oversight, and financial control (Ibn Zackaria and Appiah-Marfo 2020, 13). In addition, they revealed that the provision of constituency with wide services and individual constituents' services by MPs downgrades the democratic governance in Ghana.

Bolarinwa (2015, 25) exposed that some parliamentary assemblies in Africa and other parts of the developing world are distinctively characterized by lateness, absenteeism, and gangsterism behaviors mainly caused by the lack of requisite knowledge and training in the legislative process. Several

studies (Kao et al. 2022, 1; Amaechi and Stockemer 2022, 105) confirm that some politicians and members of parliament engage in corruption, such as vote-buying during elections, to be reelected. In addition, Aborisade and Aliyyu (2018) exposed the cases where presidents and governors of some African countries were reported as being richer than the entire society they govern due to their insatiable thirst for amassing wealth. Based on their secondary sources, they revealed that these leaders corruptly enriched themselves in the course of their rule to the extent that they became wealthier than their countries at some point. Hatungimana (2025, 1) associates the recent coups in West Africa and military rule with "executive violation of the law, corruption in the president's office, and the president's underperformance."

Furthermore, several kinds of literature have enumerated the following unethical traits: unwillingness to fulfil official duties and responsibilities effectively; diversion of public resources for personal interests, influencing the public for personal benefits/advantages (Fagbadebo 2021, 32); misappropriation of government funds allocated to various projects for private benefit. Lack of adequate commitment to trace the progress of government's projects (Shangarai et al. 2023, 43); misuse of public funds (Ntara 2023, 7-11); nepotism, lack of political commitment, and accountability; they are not much interested in integrating the stakeholders' opinions and feedback on how their decisions affect citizens (Acheampong et al. 2023, 12-14); they do not favor to a great extent an inclusive approach of solving public problems (Muchunguzi 2023); politicizing the appointment of sensitive public administrators, greed, lack of self-reliance, hence they seek donor funds (Galukande-Kiganda et al. 2022, 95); selfishness (Misra and Singh 2022, 107-108); inability to properly manage economies and diversities (Madu 2023, 6-8); conflicts, unwilling to promote pluralistic democracy/inclusion (Mbachu and Makwudo 2023, 71, 76); and lack of accountability (Nzimakwe 2023, 1).

The above-identified list of unethical leadership traits among the elected public leaders in some African states indicates low leadership quality; however, ethics is not the only yardstick for assessing leadership quality. Several other dimensions can be applied. The above-identified list of unethical leadership traits is not exhaustive; they are samples representing similar traits in other states. Although not all African public leaders are unethical, several scholars (Naankiel et al. 2023, 257) reveal that the leadership practice of most contemporary African leaders is insufficient; hence, they discussed issues such as how integrity criterion and public accountability of ethical and exemplary leadership models could aptly address the leadership issues in contemporary Africa. The above-observed unethical leadership traits do not mean a complete absence of elected public leaders with good quality leadership traits in Africa. It is indisputable that some elected African public leaders are morally and ethically strong and will likely be perceived as ethical role models by followers who will tend to reproduce the behaviors of their superiors and do the right things for their institutions (Mansur et al. 2020) and the nation as a whole.

3. Factors that lead some African states to be ruled by low-quality elected public leaders

The low-quality elected public leaders are those leaders elected through the general election and were marked by the leadership deficiencies mentioned in section 2. The election of leaders of this kind is associated with several factors, including the low level of democracy. The EIU report (2025) shows that the level of democracy in the majority of Sub-Saharan African countries is still low due to a lack of state capacity and government dysfunctions. When the level of democracy, for instance, during campaigns and elections is low, it entails minimal opportunities for the political parties and the majority of citizens to participate effectively in those processes. The consequence of this condition is that the election becomes less competitive, and the chance of getting a leader with high-quality leadership traits becomes minimal. Generally, the low level of democracy during campaigns and elections is one of the main factors leading some African states to be ruled by leaders with low leadership qualities, characterized by unethical traits.

Some political candidates lack training in leadership and ethics. In part, this is due to the challenges in leadership training in some parts of Africa (Ashu 2014; Chibaya 2021; Lee and Moussa 2025), as well as the unwillingness among politicians to receive the training. These challenges limit prospective leaders from acquiring adequate and relevant knowledge of the quality of leadership traits from several fields, including Ubuntu African philosophy and Platonic ideas of the philosopher-king, to mention a few. Plato considers a philosopher-king to be well-equipped with the knowledge of the form of the good and its essence (being). Therefore, he insisted that the philosopher-king had to develop a passionate love of learning and struggle to grasp the being (*Republic* 490b/1968). His argument is supported by the analogy of the captain and his ship to describe the required character of the philosopher-king, whom we refer him/her as an elected upper-level African public leader. He argued that the philosopher-king is like a ship's captain or helmsman, who recognizes that to steer the ship of state, one must have knowledge of the stars, the seasons, and the winds (Ferrari and Griffith 2000). The most common example of Plato's knowledge of the form is the knowledge of the form of justice. In Plato's *Republic*, since the foundation of the state, each person has to be a model for justice (*Republic* 443c/1968). Thus, the knowledge of the form may also involve ethical knowledge or knowledge of the moral terms (Martinez 2011). Although the notion of knowledge of the form was not incorporated in Ubuntu philosophy during its construction, this philosophy has valuable moral terms that can enhance the leader's competence. Therefore, without ethical knowledge, people (including the elected public leaders) cannot know that anything else is good and that without knowledge of this form, all other knowledge would not be of any benefit to people (Santas 1977, 1). Accordingly, elected leaders who lack ethical knowledge will be unable to form correct views of moral actions and roll out national development plans.

Lack of adequate civic and democratic education (Nyarangaa et al. 2021; Kapilima 2023, 22; Ochala 2024, 148). It is clear that democratic and civic education in Africa is a crucial ingredient in the realization of and defense of democracy and good governance (Muragoti and Gitu 2002). Nevertheless, it enables the citizens to identify leaders with potential leadership qualities to fulfill public demands. Given that some African elected leaders possess low leadership qualities, as mentioned above, it may also imply that citizens with inadequate democratic civic education elected these leaders. If African citizens had had adequate democratic civic education, they would not have been ruled by low-quality elected public leaders. Therefore, the lack of adequate democratic civic education among African citizens is one of the factors leading some African states to be ruled by low-quality public elected leaders. It should also be noted that some leaders also have a deficit in democratic civic education. For instance, the study by Ajayi (2024) asserts that the tendency of political leaders in Sub-Saharan African states to use national resources for personal advantages and perpetuate their reign in power, which impedes democratic growth and the increasing rate of political instability, indicates that those leaders lack democratic education.

Poverty, economic problems, and corruption during elections. Several studies (Fatoki 2023, 160; Mnguni 2023, 374; Foster 2023, 1) demonstrate that Africa and developing countries are still characterized by uncertain environment, poverty, and low economic growth, unemployment, and income inequality, which negatively affect the ability of the majority Africans to access adequate important social services. Electoral contestants perceive these challenges and problems as opportunities to win the election by bribing Africans who face these challenges and problems. Given that the economy supplies inadequate goods and services to the community, most citizens accept the bribe for an electoral candidate to be passed. Amaechi and Stockemer (2022, 105) provide a useful example of how some politicians engage in corruption, such as vote-buying during elections.

4. Discussion of identified Leadership deficiencies with reference to Plato's idea of a Philosopher-king and the Ubuntu African philosophy

As shown in the previous section, several studies reveal unethical traits of some African-elected public leaders, indicating low leadership quality. This observation does not mean a complete absence of elected public leaders with quality leadership traits or the cardinal virtues that Plato and Ubuntu philosophy recommend. Those with such features are few and probably are not interested in or willing to be state leaders. Those who possess those ethical values and virtues, who are few and interested in ruling the state, may be hated by the majority of elected leaders who do not possess the cardinal virtues. Given that numerous studies have reported several unethical traits among the elected public leaders in Africa, we argue that the level of leadership quality among the public elected leaders in some African states is still low. Their leadership style does not reflect Plato's ideas of philosopher-king/ruler and Ubuntu African philosophy, which implies that they practice contrary to the virtues of those philosophies in many respects. Since other human beings by nature are selfish and driven by the desire for power to protect their private interests, non-virtuous elected public leaders who do not adhere to the ethical values recommended by Plato and Ubuntu are also prevalent in other continents.

In some African countries, the dominant modern way of thinking among the politicians is the pursuit of self-interest and the attitude that politics is a business strategy (Van Wyk 2007; Murove 2020). Therefore, they struggle for power not because they are interested in developing the public sector and fulfilling public interests; instead, they struggle for power solely to fulfill their interests, such as accumulating wealth and having their wealth protected by state power. After gaining power, such politicians may become members of the parliament. Because of their selfishness, they may abuse their political position and engage in grand corruption, where they can change or design new policies and projects that favor their interests. Unlike bureaucratic corruption, in grand corruption, the implementation of policies and projects developed by the corrupt political elite is often directed to the areas where they will generate significant revenue or fulfill specific private desires (Jain 2001). Such behavior is selfishness, contrary to all cardinal virtues of Plato and Ubuntu ethical values. For instance, based on Plato's virtue of wisdom, it is believed that a politician with wisdom is expected to make sound judgments about the scale of the consequences of such acts and make rational decisions about the efficient utilization of government funds in fulfilling public demands. They are not expected to design policies and projects that favor their interests rather than the public's. Plato's virtue of wisdom, which discourages selfishness, is related to temperance virtue (Domanski 2008). The literature about virtue and the altruistic personality argues that "temperance is regarded as developing selflessness, while intemperance develops selfishness" (Jeffries 1998, 155). In this regard, a politician whose ideas and actions are focused on accumulating more wealth by using public office is selfish and possesses a greedy mentality. In that case, he is less driven by the temperance character.

Selfishness is also contrary to the collectivism and relational mutuality dimensions of the Ubuntu African philosophy. First, a leader who is guided by Ubuntu's collectivism shares a vision with others that offers direction for future development (Ncube 2010), adopts a team-thinking attitude, and exhibits solidarity; therefore, he/she engages in acts that accomplish the common goals of the community. Although he keeps his individuality and reasoning, he adopts the preferences of the community/public. Moreover, Ubuntu's collectivist principle requires that resources, opportunities, responsibilities, and challenges are collectively owned (Malunga 2009, cited in Ncube 2010). In this regard, selfishness is barred. The value of relational mutuality is closely linked to collectivism because it operates on many levels of social interaction, including collaborative work and sharing of food (Mukuka 2013) or resource sharing. Therefore, an Ubuntu-oriented quality leader is expected to strengthen communication/interaction with the community/public and collaborate effectively in designing and implementing policies and projects that bring development. In addition, he/she is

motivated by the desire to share and equally distribute resources during the implementation process. Such a leader would, therefore, be regarded as selfless and motivated not only by Ubuntu's collectivism and relational mutuality values but also by Plato's virtue of temperance, which is related to wisdom and justice.

Moreover, selfishness is inconsistent with the humanity value of the Ubuntu philosophy. It is worthwhile to state that this philosophy aims to create a community in which its members have a strong sense of humanity. Based on this philosophy, a person is regarded as a person/human being or *umuntu* in Bantu languages if he/she perform actions that honor human dignity and human rights. Therefore, an elected public leader is expected to establish a humane relationship with others/the public so that he/she can actually become a human being. For instance, he truly cares about the quality of other people's lives by performing his duties effectively. During the groundwork of Ubuntu philosophy, the ethic of caring about the quality of other people's lives was first endorsed by the value of food generosity, which insists that the *abaBemba* not refuse to share food with any person, even if unrecognized (Mukuka 2013). Therefore, since its onset, Ubuntu has been the opposite of selfish and self-centered attitudes and actions (Asiimwe 2023). These attitudes and actions degrade the humanity of others by minimizing or subverting their opportunities (mainly social and economic opportunities) and occasionally impairing public resources. In addition, selfishness impacts an entire social system and exacerbates social divisions in the community.

Furthermore, given that Ubuntu philosophy aims to preserve humanity through its values, the selfishness of some elected members of the parliament in formulating or adopting certain legislation for their self-interests of accumulating money through its implementation, as described in the previous sections, is unjust behavior and considered evil even in Plato's views (Kotsori 2018, 3). Ubuntu philosophy is contrary to unjust practices because it upholds personhood and humanness and values collectivism, which demands collective ownership of opportunities and responsibilities and equal distribution of the same. Over and above, Ubuntu's spirit of generosity, friendship, hospitality, caring for the quality of other people's lives, self-donating, compassion, harmony, and respect discourage unjust acts that are purported as evils in Plato's thoughts. Virtue must be distinguished from evil. In Plato's view, justice is established with virtue, and injustice is established with evil. Justice aims to maintain social balance, fairness, unity, and friendship (Kotsori 2018, 3–4). Therefore, a society with just souls will progress well, unlike one with unjust souls. Thus, some elected members of the parliament who deliberately formulate or adopt certain legislation for their self-interest of accumulating money through its implementation are unjust and, therefore, are non-virtuous elected leaders. These individuals continue to transcend African societies to the ladder of absolute poverty because African governments' funds and other resources are not equally distributed among the societies. The few elected political leaders at the higher levels of government take advantage of their authority and power to influence policies and legislation that would favor their interests. Since most of the elected leaders (MPs) operate at the government level concerning policy formulation and legislation, and scrutinizing administration processes, if they consider the virtue of justice in their actions, social classes can be minimal, unlike when they act unjustly.

Although several scholarly works on Ubuntu and leadership (Ncube 2010; Bertsch 2012; Laloo 2022; Asiimwe 2023), as well as those unraveling the foundation and nature of Ubuntu philosophy (Mukuka 2013; Mangena 2016; Gianan 2010; Metz 2017; Udom 2024), do not explicitly state that justice is the core dimension of Ubuntu philosophy, however, some scholars (Nzimakwe 2014, 35; Gouws and van Zyl 2015; Ndlovu 2016, 156) argue that Ubuntu can provide a better framework for achieving justice, indeed its values (i.e., collectivism, humanism, respect, and relational mutuality and unity) can illuminate practically how Plato's justice can be achieved. However, unlike Plato's philosophy, Ubuntu will likely claim the community as the source of immoral practices, including unjust acts by elected public leaders. This is because, since its inception, Ubuntu propounds "that the self or individual is constituted by its relations with others" (Louw 1998, 37). Because of this, the

community or communal relations are responsible for modeling one's personhood and humanness. Therefore, the African community facing unethical leadership challenges has to bear the burden of demonstrating the weakness of playing its role as a means of nurturing the inner lives (psyche) of its members to become *umuntu* or a human, which also implies living as per Ubuntu's prescriptions, which aim to preserve human dignity.

Unjust actions by the policymakers and implementers result from several factors, including community failure, as described above. Such actions create social classes because they involve the unfair distribution of state resources. The unjust distribution of resources is also influenced by selfishness. It may occur when the higher-level authorities (i.e., the elected leaders) neglect the role of community participation in development (Aniefiok and Udensi 2016, 23). This can also be considered an unwise decision and a lack of prudence. Kallendorf (2017) states that a lack of prudence means blurring things out, which means one does not consider his decisions and actions carefully. In Plato's view, as stated previously, prudence guides what is desired and warns of danger because it renders authority to reason and implement justice (Tentler 1959, 368). Thus, if the elected leaders had the virtue of prudence, they could have reason to formulate strategies to ensure a fair distribution of resources while considering the impact of unfair distribution of resources, which creates social classes. Prudence is a crucial virtue because it kills evil desires and destroys vice (Kallendorf 2017, 126).

Prudence, which renders authority to reason in order to implement justice, has not been outrightly established as one of the core dimensions of Ubuntu philosophy. Therefore, one can claim that Ubuntu does not consider reason, just like what Eze (2008) asserted. However, we would like to argue that the construction and application of any philosophy involves reasoning and arguments. This was the case for the development of Ubuntu. Mukuka (2013) provides useful illustrations concerning the grounds for the creation of Ubuntu, which involve the degradation of the African psyche by the Westerners during and after colonialism and the question of how Black Africans can flourish within a cultural space of the modern era that marginalizes them, their values, and their ideals (Mukuka 2013). Nevertheless, in our view, it becomes logical to question how it is feasible to practice Ubuntu's values (for instance, humanity, compassion, respect, and collectivism) with the exception of reasoning or prudence. It should be understood that reasoning and prudence enhance moral knowing and moral practice (Lewis 2008). Thus, we state here that Plato's prudence and his emphasis on reasoning strengthen Ubuntu's values.

One of the findings in the present paper concerning the quality of the elected public leaders in some African states is the lack of political commitment. Bester et al. (2021, 14) in "Nelson Mandela: A Reader On Information Ethics" consider political commitment as an ethical principle when explaining the position of Nelson Mandela, a former South African president (1994-1999), on the freedom of speech. They considered Nelson Mandela's political commitment to be an ethical commitment (Bester et al. 2021, 75). It is valid to state that political commitment is an ethical principle. Yang (2012, 33) defines political commitment as the political agents' willingness and moral obligations to act in the interests of citizens. Yang's definition connotes an ethical and moral sense of political commitment. What makes a political commitment an ethical principle in Yang's definition is that a leader is considered ethical if he/she feel obliged to act in the interests of the citizens. He does so willingly without being compelled by other authorities.

The ethical principle of political commitment described above is connected to the values of both philosophical frameworks, Plato's cardinal virtues, and the African philosophy. However, since it is based on the notion of the 'willingness' of the elected leaders to act in the interests of citizens, it must be guided by the cardinal virtues of the philosopher-king proposed by Plato – the virtues of wisdom or prudence, courage, temperance, and justice, and Ubuntu's core values (i.e., collectivism, humanity, relational mutuality/ interdependence, respect, truthfulness, and hard work). It appears that Ubuntu has a broader range of values than that of Plato. The wide range of Ubuntu's values has been controversial and raises concerns about its vagueness; however, this does not impact

its credibility as a viable philosophical framework for assessing the quality of the elected African public leaders. As stated previously, the similarities and differences between these two philosophical frameworks do not hamper the analytical process of achieving the paper's objective; instead, they may help these frameworks complement each other and minimize each other's weaknesses. The virtues highlighted above must drive the ethical principle of political commitment. Every elected public leader must demonstrate, in practice, the ethical principle of political commitment; however, this has not been done so in some African states, as the findings of the present paper suggest. Some elected public leaders lack the cardinal virtues of Plato and Ubuntu, which could drive them to become committed leaders. This means that they are neither Platonic nor Ubuntu-spirited.

If the most significant number of elected leaders in African states had been highly committed, the continent would not have been at such a low level of social and economic development. Therefore, it is clear that those elected leaders lack the cardinal virtues of Plato and Ubuntu's ethical values, which is why their level of political commitment is low. Suppose a leader is not a man of wisdom. In that case, he cannot make sound judgments regarding the outcomes of his actions and decides to exert a high level of commitment in fulfilling his duties and responsibilities. If that anomaly would bring negative consequences to the public to the extent of impairing public health, in Ubuntu philosophy, such a leader would not be considered *umuntu* in the Bantu languages or a human because he has performed actions that degrade humanity and human rights. In this regard, he also lacks Ubuntu's spirit of compassion.

A wise and politically committed leader must also have a collectivist mentality, as proposed by Ubuntu. The value of collectivism serves as a conceptual glue that binds a public leader with his followers and subordinates, and the public, such that both the leader and his subordinates are obliged to serve the public per the laws and standards set by the government. The public or community has to support the committed public leader and the officials below him when executing their duties. In addition, if a leader lacks the value of wisdom stressed by Plato, he cannot act reasonably, and his level of human authenticity would be marginal, which is incompatible with the conventional level maintained by the Ubuntu African philosophy. If the leader's level of humanity were insubstantial, his commitment to serving the public would also be insubstantial. Nevertheless, an unwise and uncommitted leader is likely to disvalue Ubuntu's ethic of respect and the spirit of hard work (Mukuka 2013), which was believed to ensure morality.

Moreover, a leader who is deficient in terms of Plato's virtue of wisdom and lacks commitment, as revealed by the present paper, cannot put his vision and moral decisions into practice because he lacks prudence. At its outset, Ubuntu demanded *abaBemba* elders who can be regarded as community leaders be the guardians and mentors of the young. These elders also offered the young guidance and protection (Mukuka 2013). This finding corroborates our argument that the *abaBemba* elders were required to be visionary leaders in order to carry out their roles successfully. In this regard, Ubuntu seems to encompass several leadership qualities, including the ability of the leader to have a sound "vision for the future that offers direction for others" (Ncube 2010, 79). However, this leadership function may not be effective if the leader lacks Plato's virtue of prudence, as stated above. Prudence provides an inner compass for decision-making amid uncertainties and confusion (Reichberg 2010). In Plato's view, prudence guides what is desired and warns of danger. Yet, it renders authority to reason and implement justice (Tentler 1959). Therefore, an elected public leader who lacks a prudent character will not be able to perceive and judge what is good and morally bad. Thus, he will not be able to develop a sound vision and adopt the most useful strategies to promote the good and neglect the bad in the course of implementing the vision.

Furthermore, since some elected public leaders do not recognize and appreciate the importance and positive outcomes of implementing justice in society, they will not bother to show a high level of commitment in their actions. As a result, their performance would be measured below the expected level. As the present paper reveals, a leader whose level of commitment to performing his duties

for the public's best interest is weak is likely to engage in corrupt acts and other immoral practices. Consequently, his moral standards, including 'truthfulness' propounded by Ubuntu, would be questionable. By considering the Platonic doctrine of cardinal virtues, one of the means to minimize immoral behaviors such as corruption and selfishness, and all other practices that degrade humanity, is to inculcate the temperance principle among the top-level African public leaders and their followers. This is because it has been believed that temperance is related to wisdom, and it guides justice and courage (Domanski 2008, 43), which shape the leadership behavior, including the commitment of the philosopher ruler. While justice and courage depend on temperance, as Domanski argues, temperance, which entails self-control, could be enhanced by collectivism, relational mutuality/interdependence, and respect values of the Ubuntu philosophy.

Some elected public leaders in the African states have a low level of political commitment because they lack knowledge of the form recommended by Plato and a deep understanding of Ubuntu's body of ethical values, despite its origin being based on African culture. The knowledge of the form suggested by Plato may involve ethical knowledge. For instance, knowledge of the form of justice would help leaders to define justice and see its limitations and deficiencies. However, Bobonich (2016) argues that such knowledge would only be sufficient if all the participants were guaranteed to have all the properties included in the definition. This is the case for applying Ubuntu's philosophical-ethical knowledge. Likewise, based on Bobonich's recommendation above, we argue that the top-level public leaders and their subordinates must fully understand Ubuntu's philosophical and ethical values. Therefore, it is clear that some elected upper-level leaders in Africa and their subordinates are in a deficit of both forms of knowledge derived from the two philosophical frameworks mentioned above, which is why they are unable to form correct views and consider political commitment as a moral action that must be fulfilled for the interest of the public. Although some leaders may have adequate philosophical and ethical knowledge of the abovementioned philosophical frameworks, they may not be highly motivated to apply them due to several factors ranging from personal and psychological aspects to problems related to social relationships, economic predicaments, and unsatisfactory working conditions.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The paper examined the quality of the elected African public leaders through selected cases and compared the leadership traits of some elected African public leaders with Plato's ideas of a philosopher-king and African Ubuntu philosophy. The paper reveals several unethical characteristics of the elected public leaders in some African states through secondary sources, which suggest low leadership qualities. However, this observation does not imply the complete absence of elected public leaders with quality leadership traits or the cardinal virtues that Plato and the Ubuntu philosophical framework recommended. Reported unethical characteristics indicate that the level of leadership quality among the public elected leaders in some African states is still low. Their leadership characteristics do not reflect Plato's ideas of philosopher-king and Ubuntu philosophical-ethical values described in the paper. The practices of these leaders are contrary to the virtues of these philosophical frameworks in many respects.

Nevertheless, it was revealed that ethical variables such as generosity/selflessness and political commitment are absent or appear to be low because implementing these ethical values requires a leader to be well-informed of Plato's cardinal virtues and those of Ubuntu. We argue so because Plato's cardinal virtues, such as practical wisdom or prudence and temperance, and those of Ubuntu African philosophy, such as collectivism, humanity, relational mutuality/interdependence, and respect, guide justice, which discourages selfishness and drives the ethic of generosity/selflessness and political commitment. Therefore, it was established that the elected public leaders who lack Plato's cardinal virtues of the philosopher-king and those of Ubuntu cannot be generous and selfless, act in a just manner, and show a high level of political commitment, which altogether are vital in ful-

filling public demands in a planned timeframe. This anomaly captures several interpretations, a few of them include inadequate knowledge of those ethical values due to several factors (i.e., an individual's unwillingness to learn moral values and the low morale and incapacity of the micro and macro institutions to teach philosophical thinking skills and ethical values to the present and future generation of leaders); the contradictions between Western values, for instance, individualism and African collectivism and relational mutuality/interdependence values; individual and institutional poverty and other unsatisfactory working environments.

Regarding factors that lead some African states to be ruled by low-quality elected public leaders, characterized by unethical traits, the paper indicates the low-level democratic elections in some states; some contestants (pre-elected leaders) lack adequate training in leadership and ethics; the tendency of politicians to struggle for power to fulfil private interest rather than public interests; lack of adequate democratic civic education among the citizens and election candidates; and poverty, economic problems and corruption during elections. Since Plato and Ubuntu's cardinal virtues guide justice, which discourages selfishness and drives the ethic of generosity/selflessness and political commitment to preserving humanity and promoting human rights, it is recommended that the formal and informal social and political institutions must upscale the capacity to teach the present and future generation of public leaders the philosophical thinking skills and ethical values informed by the abovementioned philosophies. In addition, the level of poverty must be reduced since poverty and economic problems have been linked with the low quality of elected public leaders in terms of ethical conduct.

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