
EFFECTIVE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: A DETERMINANT
OF SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

¹Yahaya Seriki Alhassan & ²Oluwatoyin Abimbola Sanusi

¹Department of Social Studies Education

²Directorate of Undergraduate Studies, Kwara State
College of Education, Ilorin.

Abstract

Nigeria came under the civilian rule in 1999 and it has gone through successive democratic administrations. Despite the twenty years of democratic rule, the democratic culture and values have been argued to be underdeveloped and shallow. This poor democratic culture and values have been traced to prolong colonial rule and long-standing military administrations spanning over thirty (30) years. The poor democratic culture has resulted in the death of quality leadership, unstable political systems leading to ethnic suspicions and lack of national integration, lack of rule of law, widespread corruption, monetization of the political sphere economic underdevelopment and poverty among others. These various occurrences have threatened the sustainability of our democracy that has encouraged political apathy among the populace. The paper was undertaken because of these recent happenings in Nigeria which have undermined our common existence such as insecurity, corruption, lack of rule of law and breakdown of law and order, and so on. Political

leadership is significant in uplifting the lives of the citizenry, the moribund nature of the educational sector, health care, and the economic downturn made the citizens to be dejected about the future and progress of the country; leading to individualism, materialism, personal and sectarian interest, corruption and so on among the rulers and the ruled. The paper further recommends that there should clarity in the roles of leaders and followers, followers should only elect leaders with clear cut goals and plans devoid of sentiments, rule of law as well as checks and balances should be encouraged.

Keywords: Effective Leadership, Democratic Rule, Democratic culture, Insecurity, Corruption, Rule of Law, Morality

Introduction

On May 29, 1999, Nigeria transited from military autocracy and absolutism to democracy. Before then, the country had been under firm military rule for all but twelve years since independence in 1960. Essentially, the militarization of the Nigerian society and the supplanting of constitutional provisions by decrees of the successive ruling military juntas engendered a culture of what UNDP (2001) in its report called 'executive lawlessness and human rights abuses' (Ojo, 2017).

However, since the advent of Military rule in 1999, the democratic process and culture have failed to be deepened due to Leadership defects and systemic anomalies. Some authors have blamed colonialism as the cause, for instance, In the studies conducted by Tshiyoyo and Paul, Audu and Eri (2017), they agreed that the colonial masters could be blamed for the formation of systemic anomalies, administrative apparatus which inhibit the growth of the system into a development-oriented apparatus that has created a national unity question. Other authors have attributed the leadership failure to the military. While others have attributed it to the long-standing military rule experienced in Nigeria, Kirk-Greene and Rimmer (1981); Omo-Bare (1996); Mayer et al.,

(1996); Joseph et al., (1996); Mundt and Aborisade (2005) and Paul and Edino (2015), the leadership challenge in the Nigerian political composition resulted from the dysfunctional model of long-standing military rule. Nonetheless, Abioye (2011) argues that the military themselves were not any better as experience in Africa has shown.

Although in the Nigerian context, democracy is something much talked about, greatly aspired and strenuously struggled for and a set objective pursued with apparent vigor and manifested through the stepping down of power to a democratically elected president in Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999 (Omotola, 2008). The dividends and objectives and gains of democracy which were anticipated are yet to be realized in Nigeria, despite over twenty years of continuous democratic rule, which is evident by the continuous underdevelopment, poor social amenities and infrastructure, institutionalization of corruption, lack of rule of law, sectarian politics and so on (Danwood 2015; Anyadike & Emeh 2017; Mohammed & Ayeni 2018).

In many developed nations of the world, effective leadership smoothes the progress of the high standard of living with the provision of critical infrastructures that render efficient services ensures a sense of national unity and human capital development. In line with Tshiyoyo (2015), effective leadership provides an overarching sense of direction and vision, an alignment with the environment, a healthy mechanism for innovation and creativity, and a reservoir that invigorates and lightens national development. The attainment of good governance is a function of effective leadership, especially when judging in the light of Onah's (2005) assertion that the attainment of organizational goals would be extremely difficult, if not impossible if there were no specific individuals with the authority and responsibility to plan, organize, coordinate, lead and control activities. Therefore, the need for good leadership becomes unequivocal.

Our nascent democracy which was recently established has gone through utter lack of rule of law on the part of both the government and the governed (Ejimabo, 2013), economic hardship and misery over the years because of leadership (Paul et al, 2017),

human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings (Ojo, 2006), insecurity of all kinds, Corruption, unaccountability and illegal amassing of wealth among the ruling class, breakdown of democratic processes and principles (Ejimabo, 2013; Anyadike & Emeh 2017) among others. These occurrences have threatened the existence and unity of this country and they portend danger to our growing democracy resulting from poor leadership.

Leaders must be caring, kind, helpful and must also show concern for people he or she is leading and as well respect their views so that he will have a good understanding of people he or she is leading. Leaders must be wise and can judge between persons and situation, in other words, he/she must be able to know good from bad and right from wrong. Leaders must tolerate people and situations without complaining. Leaders must be honest, trustful, and have respect for principles and rule of law. He must be fearless, able to look at facts and not persons in whatever situation he finds himself. He must always bring new ideas to develop the generality of his followers.

Leadership: According to Graig (2005:132) leadership is defined as a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates to reach organizational goals. To Jung and Sosik (2012) leadership involves a complex interaction among the leader, the followers, and the situation. Similarly, Jacobs and Jacques (1990) conceptualize leadership as the process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to a collective effort and causing a willing effort to be expended to achieve the purpose. More so, Joanne (1998) pointed out that leadership is not a person or position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good. With so many definitions of leadership, Hackman (2006) classified these conceptions into four primary definitional themes; these are; (a) Leadership is about what you are: this definitional theme focuses on leader traits and attributes and is one of the oldest ways of conceptualizing leadership. This emphasis is on identifying the characteristics that define natural or born leaders. (b) Leadership is about how you act: From this perspective leadership is defined as the exercise of influence or power. To identify leaders,

we need to determine who is influencing whom. For instance, Hersey (1984) defines leadership as “an attempt to influence the behavior of another individual or group”. (c) Leadership is about what you do: This definitional thread focuses on the role that leaders play. (d) Leadership is about how you work with others: This definitional theme emphasizes collaboration. Leaders and followers establish mutual purposes and work together as partners to reach their goals (Poulin, 2007). However, Ogbeidi (2012) described political leadership as the governing elite that coordinates the affairs and resources of a community, nation, or country by formulating and executing policies that bring about development.

Democracy: Democracy is a system of government that provides an enabling environment for citizens participation in governance. Umez (2000) described democracy as a means of achieving good governance due to popular participation. Democracy has been described as the articulation of the popular will of the democratic societies through an elected representative (Dawood, 2015). By this statement, Jega (2007) opines that modern notions of democracy evolved from several attempts to provide answers to the question of absolutism or authoritarianism and the assumptions of the sovereign power of monarchs over their people. He sampled the 17th-century mass rebellion of Oliver Cromwell (1642) against the monarchy of England which popularized sovereignty and representative government.

Reinforcing democracy and good governance, Sambo (1994) conceives that any democratic government that part ways with good governance is not *Stricto Sensu* - a democratic government. According to Jega (2007), the meaning of democracy has several scopes such as: i) contestation over policy and political competition for office; ii) participation of the citizenry through partisan, associational and other forms of collective actions; iii) accountability of rulers to the ruled through the mechanisms of representations and the rule of law; and iv) civilian control over the military.

The Challenges of Political Leadership in Nigeria

It has been argued elsewhere that Nigerian youths have enormous talents but the lack of quality education, better health care, and the gloomy state of the future of the country cripple their talents. This is due to the action and inaction of the political leadership in the country (Mohammed and Ayeni, 2018). The political leaders perceive the state as a barbeque from which anyone with a knife can cut for himself and his group. This led to corruption, lack of responsibility, and disobedience to the law, underdevelopment of the country (Danwood, 2015; Ogbeidi, 2012). Consecutive political leadership from independence both democratic and military have that have the reins of power institutionalize corruption in all agency and department of the public sector (Ogbeidi, 2012). Corruption has been pointed as the main cause of underdevelopment in Nigeria which is an offshoot of poor leadership in the political sphere (Anyadike and Emeh, 2017). Political leadership is of great necessity if Nigeria is to experience a sustainable and stable political atmosphere (Paul, Ogbole & Ojo 2017). It can be deduced that the problem which afflicts Africans and Nigeria, in particular, most is the failure of political leadership. There are of course failures in other domains, but these are traceable in the consciousness to political leadership deficiencies, hence Africa has been described as a continent of mindless and tyrannical political leadership (Abdulhamid, 2016).

African politics that is driven by lack of ideology leads the aspiring political leaders not to see a pressing need to articulate their vision for the country and in extension the continent. There is no explicit formulation of any systems' values. The framework of the Nigerian state developed a raptorial political class that concerned itself with a power struggle, consolidation, alignment, and realignment in the realm of imperial control. This can be attributed to the lack of ideology in the political space, commercialization of the political process, expand the basis of political participation and canvass alternative policy agenda (Seteolu, 2004; Obi, 2000).

Ake and Onoge (1995) opined this about the politics in Nigeria:

“Political leadership is sectarian instead of national, and perversely diverts national wealth into its project of private accumulation. Ethnic differences have been played upon to stay afloat to the hurt of national unity. There is a shambolic lack of national leaders. This failure is attributed to the exploitation of our cultural diversities by the leaders”.

Nigeria, which is the most populous country in Africa has a shortage of sincere and truthful leaders. Further, the serious note is the lack of political will. A political will is a convincing force for solid leadership quality, the capacity to do things that are right, relevant, and attainable within the confine of patriotic nationalism. Political will most times implies personal or group sacrifices. It suggests the ability to enforce policies that have a nationalistic important and relevant without allowing loads of interest to distract from what should intrinsically be of national advantage (Afegbua & Adejuwon, 2012).

Most Nigerian leaders attained political leadership with limited experience and expertise in the art and science of directing and effectively managing the affairs of a modern state (Paul, Ogbole & Ojo, 2017). The process of recruiting leaders: election and coups have been faulted for the crop of leaders that have held the reign of power (Osabiya, 2014). The military ascendancy to political leadership has been frowned at for not been democratically elected (Afegbua and Adejuwon, 2012). The challenge to African leaders is thus to develop the capacity that would enable us to strike a balance between the values of African societies and the governance that our nations must follow.

The State of Political Leadership in Nigeria

Leadership or lack of it has been said to be a major bane of Nigeria and Africa in extension. Africans have all agreed that the fundamental problem militating the development in Africa is the poor of leadership making it the key issue even in the process of democratization. Thus, Adeola (2007:107) argues that:

The history of great nations have been linked to visionary and purposeful leadership, be it in the advanced industrialized countries or developing nations. Such leaders have played significant roles in the socio-economic development and political emancipation of their countries. Closely linked to leadership is ideology. In the absence of visionary leadership to give a clear-cut ideology, a nation continues to lack orientation and commitment. Consequently, leadership has failed to harness the resources and the ingenuity of the people for national development.

The trouble with Africa is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the African character or political system in operation. The character of political leadership became a problem as most of them lost or lacked control of effective leadership. This led to the scramble and partition of state resources to suit their purpose, for instance, Seteolu (2004) summarizes the challenge from the Nigerian perspective thus;

The political elites are not a productive class but rely on the control of state structures to access economic rewards. The over politicization of the Nigerian state is also understood in the context of the unmediated struggle for power, influence, and patronage. The nature of the political contest ensured the emergence of a local governing class without ideological commitment. Rather than pursue political contests within ideological frameworks, politics became a contested terrain for shallow, self-centered political gains.

Omatola (2008) agreed with Osaghe (1999) that democratization is the process of creating, strengthening, or broadens the principles, machinery, and fundamentals that characterize a democratic government. The attributes of democracy are presumed to be facilitative of good governance whose abiding parameters are the accountability of government officials, transparency in governmental procedures, predictability in government behavior and expectation of rational decisions, openness in government transactions, free flow of information, freedom of the press,

decentralization of power structure and decision making. The expectation is that when these attributes are in a democratic system of government, that system will be conducive to development (Anger, 2011). In essence, good governance deals with how those who have the authority of the state make efforts to achieve the goals or the ends of the state –the maintenance of law and order, the provision of welfare for its citizens, and the pursuit of national interest. In the global arena, it refers to the process and quality of governance and the role of the civil society and the private sector. Western democracy insists that good governance entails institutions and values. Although Nigeria seems to have broken free from the firm and pernicious grip of military dictatorship, a democratic process that could yield the desired dividends of democracy is yet to be entrenched (Galadima, 2000) due to parochial, selfish sectorial and self-centered leaders to direct the affairs of the state (Seteolu, 2004).

Sustaining Democracy In Nigeria Through Effective Leadership

Anyadike and Emeh (2014) define an effective leader “as an individual with the capacity to consistently succeed in a given condition and be viewed as meeting the expectations of an organization or society.” This is because leaders are recognized by their capacity for caring for others, clear communication, and a commitment to persist, as individual who is appointed to a decision-making position has the right to command and enforce obedience under the authority of his position. Human rights are basic characteristics of any true democratic government because democracy relies on the ideals of human rights (Enebe, 2008). However, the current administration that came with a change mantra has been found culpable of human rights abuses, for instance, the case of El Zakzaky leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) whom the supreme court has granted bail. However, he has been refused bail by the federal government citing security reasons and national interest (Obiorah and Onwughalu, 2018). The citizenry of this country has their political rights subjugated through intimidation and assassination, the

nondemocratic imposition of candidate for political offices, and detention of rights activities and perceived opponent of the administration (Akhaine and Chizea, 2011). The recent raids on Judges houses by EFCC and DSS operator emphasize this point vividly, it has been largely condemned by the right activists because it did not follow due process, though, the government claim that they are fighting corruption. The National Judiciary Commission perceived the raid as an assault, intimidation, and crippling of the judiciary by the executive arm of government (Punch, 2016). This is because it is only the commission that is empowered to punish and reward Judges. In other words, for democracy to be sustainable in Nigeria, effective Leaders who will strengthen institutions and follow the rule of law in administering justice and policies rather than the rule of men or the body language of the president which is not sustainable.

Corruption is generally believed to be a setback to the sustainability of Nigeria's democracy, the country consistently has a poor corruption index due to the high rate of corruption in both the public and private sector (Transparency International Corruption Index, 2016; Macaulay and Michael, 2018). Widespread corruption occurs despite the different efforts by the government such as Whistleblowers policy, Treasury single account, Code of Conduct Bureau, and Tribunal among others (Macaulay and Michael, 2018). Although the government has recorded some minute success such as the recovery of funds from corrupt politicians, the strategies have been considered ineffective as corruption can only be eradicated through a complementary effort by all stakeholders involved. The stakeholders includes the accountants and auditors, anti-graft agencies, the judiciary, the National assembly among others (Okpala & Enwefa, 2018). Separation of powers and checks and balances requires that the three arms of government should provide checks and balances to each other to deepen the culture of democracy that will cripple the tendencies of tyranny and promote transparency and trust between the governed and the government. The anti-corruption fight should be anchored on constitutionality as Macaulay and Michael (2018) argued that the present administration should make the rule of law

and international best practices the hallmark in the fight against corruption and eschew witch-hunt of perceived opponents or selective justice (Ogunseye, 2015).

In many democracies, the mode of recruitment is very important as it determines the kind of leaders that will steer the affairs of the country. Election promotes public accountability amongst the leaders as it exerts pressure on those in power to conduct themselves in a responsible way (Awopeju, 2011). However, this is contrary to realities in Nigeria as leaders bribe their way through the electoral processes because of the attractiveness of political positions. Elections in Nigeria have been marred with irregularities ranging from rigging, violence, and intimidation (Aluaigba, 2016), vote-buying, alteration of results Yusuf and Zaheruddin (2016), electoral maladministration, such as ballot-box stuffing, misreporting, under-provision of voting facilities in opposition strongholds, lack of transparency in the organization of the election, the bias in the way electoral disputes are adjudicated in the courts, and so on (Birch, 2009). Election malpractices by the various players in the political sphere from post-independence to date have cost the country sincere and visionary leaders who would have to deepen the culture of democracy and development in the country. Electoral irregularities and malpractices have led to ethnoreligious politics, incessant corruption and mismanagement, weak democratic institutions, lavish commercialization of politics, lack of internal democracy, and godfatherism (Yusuf and Zaheruddin 2016). Sustaining democracy portrays not only the durability of civilian administration but the recognition and acknowledgment of democratic institutions, hence fairness and credible elections are necessary.

Consolidating democracy requires no ordinary type of leadership as tolerance, breadth of outlook, intellectual comprehension, hard work, selfless devotion, statesmanship, a burning sense of mission are some of the virtues that are necessary to make a success in this nation. Unfortunately, past administrations have lacked these virtues or at best have possessed one at the expense of the other and as such led them to grope in the dark on how to deliver good governance (Anyadike & Emeh (2014)). The

increasing fear is that today, with the legislature implicitly, involved, the current government is guilty of the same crime; as the current administration has refused to cultivate leadership qualities to clarify our problems to proffer solutions to them (Dickson, 2012).

The developed societies have been transformed due to the transformational leaders who have led them. Or instance, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore has been reputed to be a transformational leader who transformed the economic and political sphere of his country. He lifted his country from a third world country to a first world country – an attractive global city in three decades. He was reported to have vision, charisma, encourage people's development, innovative thinking, and being supportive and positive. While his leadership role includes coach and motivator, team builder, negotiator, strategic planner, and executor. Lee Kuan Yew is one great example of such a leader whose leadership style, traits, roles, and influence who was viable to change the face of Singapore immensely within just a few decades (Humei, 2017).

Furthermore, Barack Obama of the United States has been reputed to have impacted both the economic and political landscape of the United State and in extension that of the world. The Obama administration inherited an administration whose international reputation declined and its foreign policy badly damaged due to their interference in the Iraq war and the rising fear of a decline in democratic principles and processes globally. Since, his assumption of leadership in 2009, he improved the United States' diplomatic engagement with Iran, Russia, and other non-democratic governments. The US swung for more US engagement on democracy around the world. The Obama team also began to stake out its approach to democracy policy, emphasizing multilateral engagement and various initiatives to foster a broader institutional framework for democracy support (Carothers, 2012).

The crop of leaders that have attained leadership position since independence in Nigeria as opposed to countries in developed societies had in one way or the other lacked vision and most of them have been engrossed with corrupt practices and political bickering leading to the enthronement of maladministration and mismanagement of public resources, which beget economic setbacks

and abject poverty and breakdown of law and order as national heritage. This is based on the fact that the socio-economic and political development of any country depends to a large extent on the capacity of its leadership to facilitate, entrench, and sustain good governance. Good governance is seen as a manifestation of committed, patriotic, and discipline leadership. In Nigeria's fifty-nine years of independent existence, there is but little record of socio-economic development and compliance with democratic principles. This ugly trend is not unconnected with poor leadership as Achebe and others had asserted (Lawal, Imokhuede & Johnson, 2012).

Conclusion

Democracy is a culture that every Nigerian leader must acquire and exhibit by the way of leading by example. In line with Rilker and Weale "democracy is both a goal and a means. The means is essentially that of the ballot box and all that goes with it. The goal is essentially that of free individuals communing together for their common good and mutual advantage. The country is fraught with human right abuses and infractions in such a way that journalists are detained, Judges' houses are raided without due process, intimidation and assassination, institutions are weakened. Corruption is widespread both in the public and private sectors despite the effort of the government to curb it. However, it has been observed that there is no collaborative effort by the stakeholders involved and the executive arms of government do not follow international best practices in combating corruption. Election and electoral process in Nigeria are fraught with frauds and irregularities due to monetization of the process, corruption, intimidation, and godfatherism. This has led to the emergence of dubious and insincere leaders. In consolidating democracy, effective leaders with the core values of principles of self-control and self-respect are needed. This is due to the reason that leadership position requires tolerance, vision, innovation and creativity, honesty, selfless devotion and sacrifice, hard work, passion, effective communication a burning sense of purpose, transparency and accountability, and so on. Nigeria is in a dire need of Visionary and

Nationalist leaders who will use the vested power on them to consolidate the value and culture of democracy.

Way Forward

1. Leaders are a subset of the society, hence, the role of leadership and followership should be clearly understood and followed.
2. Followers should only elect into political office candidates with clear cut vision, goals, ideas, ideology, and plans to deepen our democracy.
3. There should be a reorientation from not only attaining goals but the means of the attainment of these goals, hence the rush for material things could be minimized right from the family to other social institutions.
4. The culture and value of obedience to the dictates and tenets of the constitution and other legislative acts should be imbibed both by the leaders and followers.
5. The process of selecting and recruiting leaders should not be monetized so that visionary and purposeful leaders can emerge in the process.
6. Studies that emphasize moral and national values should be made compulsory up to tertiary institutions.

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