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## **Political Leadership and National Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria has practised democratic leadership for decades yet, the country has continued to suffer various social problems like; poverty, unemployment, insecurity etc. which has overtime, impeded national development possibly because the country has the wrong people in strategic positions of leadership. This has made it pertinent to investigate the nexus between political leadership and national development in Nigeria and the leadership challenges that impedes national development in Nigeria. The study anchored on the circulation of elite theory by Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto. It adopted a descriptive research design and a systematic random sampling technique. Data was derived through non-participant observation and questionnaire. A sample size of 3221 was derived using a sample calculator. Data derived were afterwards, presented in tables and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that the political leadership has failed to facilitate national development judging from the rate of poverty, insecurity and unemployment in the country. Based on this, the study recommends that corruption be tackled and that the rule of law, patriotism and nationalistic consciousness be upheld to curb the leadership challenges in Nigeria and facilitate national development in the country.

### **Keywords:**

Corruption, Democracy, Economic Growth, National Leadership, Political Leadership, Poverty, Unemployment.

### **Introduction**

The political leadership in Nigeria has been bedevilled with lots of ills which has by implication affected the socio-economic development of the country and thus, the overall national development. Vroom and Yetton (1973) describe political leadership as a process of decision making but in reality, political leadership tends to go beyond decision making to the management of national affairs and resources. Ogbeidi (2012) noted that political leadership has to do with how the ruling class manages the affairs and resources of a country through different policies that are aimed at fostering national development. Ogbeidi (2012) on the other hand, referred to the ruling class as the governing elites who manage the affairs and resources of the country by formulating and implementing policies that propels development.

It has been argued that the ruling class or governing elites may be democratically elected or undemocratically elected like in the case of coup de'tat. Mohammed and Ayeni (2018) however, streamlined their definition of political leadership to capture democratic leadership. According to them, political leadership are elected to represent citizens and rule within the ambit of the law. This is at

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variance with the undemocratic political leadership that rule by decree and are not elected as representatives by citizens.

Chukwurah, Desmond and Nduba (2020) explained that, the outcome of political leadership is measured by the well-being of the masses in terms of the gross domestic product, literacy rates, and availability of healthcare, social welfare and in all, the national progress and development. National development can be defined as the ability to tackle social challenges and improving conditions in the country. Fultado (1964) referred to it as an increase in the country's National Products that is triggered by a viable productive sector which enables citizens to access basic goods and services that enhances their social wellbeing. This also, involves the eradication of social problems like; poverty, unemployment, inequality, deprivation as well as other problems that threatens the well-being of citizens.

In the same vein, World Bank World Development Report (WB-WDR) (1991) opined that national development is determined by; professionals, innovative and motivated public bureaucrats and efficient and effective bureaucracy. It is characterized by; quality education, adequate and functional social and economic infrastructures; quality healthcare and nutrition and increased and equal opportunity, the fundamental human rights and freedom, the involvement of citizens in decision making, accountability of decision-makers, equality, satisfying the needs and aspirations of the citizenry and improved standard of living (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report, 2002).

Ojukwu (2019) opined that Nigeria has overtime, suffered twin challenges: good political leadership and development despite the long years of independence. He stated that since independence, Nigeria has lacked visionary leaders who are not committed to national development but to their self-interests. Ojukwu (2019) further stated that these crop of politicians are; corrupt, inefficient, and are mere replacements for the colonial masters. They are more interested in power and wealth than in liberating the citizens from the numerous challenges that bedevil them and ensuring national development. In addition, Odusanya (2013) stated that Nigeria's democracy is characterized by elected officials, corrupt practices by public officials, insensitivity and intolerance of opposing views and perspectives (Odusanya, 2013), electoral misconduct (Amundsen, 2010) and weak state structures (Ihonvbere, 2014).

This form of leadership constitute threat to achieving good political leadership and national development in the face of democracy even as democracy continues to foster national development and national development facilitates democracy (Siegle, et al., 2005). While economic development may sometimes be likened to national development, economic development remains a crucial part of national development and national development goes beyond economic development to include; social and political development. Though, each influences the other having established a cyclic relationship, it is pertinent to examine the impact of the political leadership in Nigeria on national development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria no doubt, is a democratic country and has practiced democratic leadership for decades. Yet, the country has continued to suffer various social problems like; poverty, unemployment, insecurity etc. which has overtime, impeded national development. A recent report by the World Bank in its macro poverty outlook for Nigeria, affirmed to this by projecting that about 13 million Nigerians would fall below the national poverty line by 2025 (Leadership News, 2023). The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) further projected that Nigeria's unemployment rate increased to 37 percent by 2023 (Abuchi, 2023). These and many more national challenges impede national development in the country.

The political leadership is charged with the responsibility of making decisions that tackles these social problems and manages the resources of the country effectively. However, the country seems to have the wrong people in strategic positions of leadership. These people who seem to have gotten into power as a result of nepotism and corrupt practices like electoral misconducts, in most cases tend to lack the required

competence to manage these national challenges thereby plugging the nation into severe hardship and thus, further underdevelopment.

More worrisome is the cost of governance which seems to have made politics the most lucrative profession in Nigeria. This has also caused politics to be highly competitive; where individuals perpetuate all forms of evil to get into political positions for selfish reasons. Thus, political interests are in most cases based on selfish interests and not on competence.

Therefore, while it could be said that Nigeria is a democratic country, Nigeria seems not to have taken cognizance of the main crust of democracy which is an elected representative. Basically, Nigeria has practiced a dictatorial form of democracy under a constitutional decree which seem not to have augured well for socioeconomic development. This system of government allows the imposition of individuals as elected representative on citizens. This has also influenced the level of incompetence in the country's political leadership which directly influences the socioeconomic policies in the country and thus, manifests into underdevelopment.

Similar studies have focused on the political leadership and the democratic rule in Nigeria. However, very few studies have tried to create a nexus between the political leadership and national development. In view of this, this study sought to bridge this gap in knowledge.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following questions. They are;

1. How has political leadership affected national development in Nigeria?
2. What are the leadership challenges that impede national development in Nigeria?
3. How can the leadership challenges in Nigeria be tackled to ensure sustainable national development in the country?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Political Leadership and National Development in Nigeria**

Political leadership is the act of leading a political entity or occupying a political position. This according to Morrell and Hartley (2006) describes democratically elected representatives who are vulnerable to reselection, and operate within, as well as influence a constitutional and legal framework. They have the mandate to govern the state by the electorates. Though, this definition is restricted as it favours only political leaders who are elected; excluding those appointed and those emerged through coup, in the case of the military, Ogbeidi (2012) noted that the political leaders are ruling class who have the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources in a political entity (country) by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision-making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory.

However, Anekwe (2020) opined that this is the major challenge confronting Nigeria and other developing countries of the world. According to Anekwe, the issue of getting the right leadership to propel good governance has been a recurring challenge in Nigeria and developing countries in general as present and past leaders of Nigeria seem to have failed to provide quality leadership capable of addressing numerous challenges confronting the country. Anekwe asserts that the governments have been unable to set in place transparent and accountable institutions capable of securing economic progress, governing effectively, and protecting their citizens. This lack of capacity is amplified by recourse to authoritarianism and repression, dramatic economic decline precipitated by indiscriminate corruption, and the adoption of exclusive (ethnic) policies to assure self-succession tendencies.

Adejimi (2005) stated that in Nigeria, most of the policy makers as well as those involved in decision making are engaged in bribery, egoism, power, and trade liberalization. Fagbadebo (2007) stated that the Nigerian State is a victim of high-level corruption, bad governance, political instability, and a cyclical legitimacy crisis. The country's authoritarian leadership faced a legitimacy crisis, political intrigues, in an ethnically differentiated polity, where ethnic competition for resources drove much of the pervasive corruption, and profligacy. Furthermore, Onodugo (2016) noted that corruption and lack of vision among past and present leaders of Nigeria culminate to hamper any meaningful effort in the quest for development in Nigeria.

In view of these, the challenges facing development in Nigeria is the attitude and behavior of Nigerian political leaders. These leaders who are corrupt, nepotistic, egoistic and visionless have deteriorated the Nigerian economy and have thus, led to numerous socioeconomic challenges in the country like; insecurity, poverty and unemployment. Obviously, Nigeria may not grow beyond the crop of political leaders as these leaders tend to make tangible decisions on behalf of the country but, while different studies have focused on identifying the leadership challenges in Nigeria, this study tried to create a link between the political leadership in Nigeria and National development.

### **Challenges of Leadership Impeding National Development in Nigeria**

**Lack of Rule of Law:** The rule of law is a principle or system where a society or nation is governed by a set of legislation instead of by an individual making the whole decision. Rule of law makes it impossible for one person to have the unrestrained exercise of power over a society or nation. It applies and puts a limit or check to the behaviour of everyone including government officials. A lot of people live in ignorance of their constitutional rights which makes it easy for people to infringe their rights. Nigerian leaders do not show respect to the rule of law, especially, judicial decisions. This hinders the judiciary from discharging its duties effectively. The political elites still undermine the independence of the judiciary through patronage appointments, and judicial administration is marked by weak enforcement capacity (Lawal and Owolabi, 2012).

**Absence of Accountability and Transparency:** lack of openness and accountability remain a frightening legacy of the Nigerian leadership since 1960 to date. Anekwe (2020) stated that a country where corruption is entrenched can never have a transparent and accountable system. Anekwe explained that an accountable government is one that is responsive to the demands of the citizen. Accountability is best enforced through the instrument a judiciary and the rule of law. But, unfortunately the Nigeria judiciary seem to have lost her independence and the rule of law in Nigeria is worse than epileptic.

**Corruption Challenges:** no doubt, corruption is endemic in every society but, currently, Nigeria ranks very high in the league of corrupt nations. The ex-British Prime Minister David Cameron also affirmed to this by stating that, Nigeria is a “fantastically corrupt”, with corrupt leaders. Iyoha, et al (2015) stated that, Corruption is one of the greatest threats to good governance today and have hampered in the country. It socioeconomic growth Okeyim, Ejue, and Ekanem (2013) especially as economic growth and development in Nigeria for over twenty years has been stalled with misappropriation and embezzlement of funds even with the return of democracy (Abullahi 2009).

**Lack of Ideology:** The lack of ideology is the tragedy of our politics since 1999. An ideology is a collection of ideas or beliefs shared by a group of people. Anekwe (2020) stated that in Nigeria, the political elites constitute a nonproductive class who 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 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-centred political gains.

All these and more are factors impeding national development in Nigeria. According to Ojukwu (2019) Nigeria struggles for sustainable democracy, good governance, and development have been so daunting that all previous attempts at democratic transition have been futile. It is unbelievable that despite the long years of independence, Nigeria in the midst of giant is still battling with the problem of good governance. The crop of leaders that have attained leadership position since independence had in one way or the other lacked vision and sense of commitment to development

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study anchored on the circulation of elite theory by Italian Sociologist Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) because it effectively explains the process of political leadership. This theory postulates that, elites are thought to come from the upper classes and often have access to more resources than others do and controls key decision-making areas such as politics, economics, education and media (Pareto, 1935).

Pareto argues that people are unequal physically, as well as intellectually and morally and that, the elite class can be categorized into two; a Governing elite, comprising individuals who directly or indirectly play a part in government, and a non-governing elite who are not connected with administration but occupy such a place in society that they somehow influence the administration (Pareto, 1935).

In view of this, the political elites take charge of the decision making and policy making in various areas of the society thereby, influencing the happenings and level of development in every sphere of the society. Also, the political leadership in Nigeria can be categorized into the Governing elite; those who are part in government, and the non-governing elite, who are not connected with administration but can influence the administration through the position they occupy.

Therefore, similar to Pareto, the Nigeria political leadership focus on the governing elites. These elite certainly have varying physical, intellectual and moral capacities which tend to reflect their leadership style and the outcome on national development. However, politicians with similar moral, intellectual and physical characteristics have continued to flood Nigeria's political leadership. This has made it difficult for the country to progress and achieve development over the years.

This theory has been criticized for not providing measurement and distinguishing between the qualities that makes elites superior to the masses. Same also, it is difficult to affirm that the Nigeria political elites are superior to the masses as evidence has shown that, Nigeria governing elites are made up of crop of politicians that are physically, intellectually and morally weak to handle any political position and drive the country into development.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Scope of the Study**

The study focused on assessing the effect of political leadership in Nigeria on national development and the leadership challenges that impede national development in Nigeria. It focused its analysis on the political and socio-economic development of the country so as to effectively assess national development. The study adopted a descriptive research design to enable the researchers describe the phenomenon under study.

#### **Area of the Study**

Nigeria is ascribed as the giant of Africa; blessed with natural and human resources. But the country is plagued with various challenges impeding the general development of the state. There have been successions of various political administrations yet, these problems have continued to increase. Therefore, it is important to investigate the relationship between the political leadership in the country and national development.

Thus, the study area was divided into 6 strata; North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East and South-South based on the geographical zones in Nigeria. Taraba was selected to represent North East, Niger to represent north central, Sokoto to represent North-West, Ebonyi to represent South-East, Ondo to represent South-West, Bayelsa to represent South-South based on the level of development in these states (Oyekanmi, 2022). This is because, the standard of living thus, underdevelopment as proven statistically is more than majority of the states in the zone.

### Sampling Technique

The study adopted a probability sampling technique as this sampling technique helped the researcher to generate inference from the research. Also, the non-probability technique was used to reach respondents so as to ensure that, the actual target of this research was reached. In all, the study adopted a stratified random sampling technique and a chain referral sampling technique.

### Population and Sampling Size

Worldometer (2023) asserts that as at 9<sup>th</sup> August 2023, the population Nigeria was at, 224,369,317. Thus, the study used a sample population of 3258 that was derived using a sample calculator of 98% confidence level, a margin of error of 2, a population proportion of 40 and a population size of 224,369,317. The research questionnaire was therefore distributed; 543 in each of the states through a goggle form. The goggle forms were administered in village groups through WhatsApp, with the help of a group member or group admin.

### Methods of Data Collection

Data were derived through the use of a research questionnaire. Closed-ended responses were used to properly guide respondents towards the research objectives.

### Data Analysis

Data were presented in tables and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

### Research Findings

**Table I: Distribution of Questionnaire**

S/N	States	Number of Questionnaire Distributed	Number of Questionnaire Returned	Total (%)
1.	Taraba	543	538	16.7%
2.	Niger	543	541	16.8%
3.	Sokoto	543	535	16.6%
4.	Ebonyi	543	537	16.7%
5.	Ondo	543	534	16.6%
6.	Bayelsa	543	536	16.6%
<b>Total</b>		3258	3221	100%

**Source:** fieldwork, 2023.

The above table shows that, the sample size of this study was 32213. Also, the table showed that the highest response was derived from Niger while the least response was derived from Sokoto, Ondo and Bayelsa.

**Table II: Effects of Political Leadership on National Development in Nigeria**

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
1.	Has the political leadership alleviated the rate of poverty in Nigeria?	197 6.1%	3001 93.2%	23 0.7%	3221 100%
2.	Has the political leadership ameliorated the rate of unemployment in Nigeria?	507 15.7%	2703 83.9%	11 0.3%	3221 100%
3.	Has the political leadership in Nigeria protected the lives and properties in Nigeria?	392 12.2%	2820 87.6%	9 0.3%	3221 100%
4.	Has the political leadership encouraged economic growth in Nigeria through their policies and decisions?	1021 31.7%	2095 65%	105 3.3%	3221 100%
5.	Has the political leadership encouraged entrepreneurship and innovation in Nigeria through their policies and decisions?	324 10.1%	2892 89.8%	5 0.2%	3221 100%

**Source:** fieldwork, 2023.

The table above revealed that the political leadership in Nigeria has failed to alleviate poverty, reduce the rate of unemployment, secure lives and properties, and encourage economic growth, entrepreneurship and innovation. All these show that, the political leadership has failed to facilitate national development in Nigeria.

**Table III: Leadership Challenges that Impede National Development in Nigeria**

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
1.	Corruption is one of the leadership challenges that has impeded national development in Nigeria	3104 96.4%	117 3.6%	-	3221
2.	Electoral misconduct is one of the leadership challenges that has impeded national development in Nigeria	2689 83.5%	501 15.6%	31 1%	3221
3.	Incompetence is one of the leadership challenges that has impeded national development in Nigeria	2185 67.8%	1024 31.8%	12 0.4%	3221
4.	Lack of patriotism and nationalistic consciousness is one of the leadership challenges that has impeded national development in Nigeria	2229 69.2%	983 30.5%	9 0.3%	3221
5.	Overdependence on oil is one of the leadership challenges that has impeded national development in Nigeria	3047 94.6%	174 5.4%	-	3221

**Source:** fieldwork, 2023.

The above table showed that the leadership challenges that impede national development in Nigeria are; corruption, electoral misconduct, incompetence, lack of patriotism and nationalistic consciousness and the overdependence on oil.

**Table IV: How Leadership Challenges in Nigeria can be tackled to Ensure National Development in the country**

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
1.	Tackling corruption will facilitate national development in Nigeria	3158 98%	63 2%	-	3221 100%
2.	The rule of law can curb the leadership challenges in Nigeria and propel national development	2211 68.6%	999 31%	11 0.3%	3221
3.	Patriotism and nationalistic consciousness can curb leadership challenges and propel national development in Nigeria	2816 87.4%	405 12.6%	-	3221
4.	Diversification of the country's economy can propel national development in Nigeria	2470 76.7%	751 23.3%	-	3221

**Source:** fieldwork, 2023.

The above table shows that in a bid to tackle the leadership challenges and ensure national development in Nigeria, corruption should be tackled; the country should uphold the rule of law, Patriotism and nationalistic consciousness and diversify the economy.

### Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the political leadership has failed to facilitate national development in Nigeria. Judging from the research finding, the political leadership in Nigeria has failed to ensure the security of lives and properties, ameliorate the rate of poverty and unemployment and ensure economic growth in the country. Also, entrepreneurship and innovation has not been given a conducive environment to thrive due to the available infrastructure and the policies that are formulated and implemented.

The study found out that the leadership challenges that impede national development in Nigeria are; corruption, electoral misconduct, incompetence, lack of patriotism and nationalistic consciousness and the overdependence on oil. While some forms of electoral misconduct can be subsumed as corruption, not all electoral misconduct can be subsumed under corruption. Same also, not all corrupt practices are electoral misconduct except they are carried out to put individuals at an advantage to win political positions.

This is in line with the assertions of some researchers who opined that the leadership challenges that impede national development in Nigeria are; corruption (Anekwe, 2020; Abullahi, 2009; Iyoha, et al., 2015 & Iyoha, et al., 2015), lack of rule of law (Lawal and Owolabi, 2012).

In view of this, it was revealed that tackling corruption, upholding rule of law, patriotism and nationalistic consciousness will curb the leadership challenges in Nigeria and facilitate national development in the country. This is because, it will encourage equity, accountability, transparency and in all, good governance in the country. Also, there is need to diversify the country's economy to create jobs, strengthen the export market and the nation's currency (Naira).



## Conclusion

The political leadership in Nigeria has evolved from military to democratic leadership. This system of political leadership revolves around the constitution, allows for the rule of law and the representation of the citizenry through periodic elections. But, in the crust of Nigeria's democracy, Nigeria has not upheld the rule of law even as the constitution remains in existence in the country's democracy.

One of the problems facing the leadership of the country is the independence of the legislatives and the judiciary. No doubt, the arms of government should work together but, they are as well expected to maintain a significant amount of independence to ensure check and balances. More worrisome is the fact that the executive arm of government has failed to obey court orders and the compromise of the judiciary. These boils down to the lack of patriotism and national consciousness; where political leaders put their personal and selfish interest above national interest.

Another problem in the country's democracy is the lack of political representation. There is no gainsay that Nigeria's elections have been bedevilled with various forms of electoral misconducts which has made it impossible for electoral results to depict the people's choice. These leaders who get into political positions through dubious means tend to lack the mental and physical competence and, in most cases, amass as much wealth as possible while doing little or nothing to improve the quality of life in the country.

This by implication has made Nigeria the capital city of poverty, increased the rate of unemployment and healthcare and security challenges. Overtime, the country has continued to experience dwindling economic growth which has worsened over the years and threatened national development.

## Recommendations

In view of the above findings, the study recommended that;

1. There is need for government to enforce strict punishment on electoral offenders so as to serve as deterrent.
2. All hands should be on deck in the fight against corruption. Also, corrupt practices should be reported to the appropriate authorities and any public officer found guilty should be punished in accordance with the law.
3. Government and non-governmental organizations should sponsor an awareness on corruption and electoral misconducts; educating the masses on their forms, implications on the nation and measures to curb both.
4. There is need for the country to diversify its economy and explore other economic activities to generate employment and foster economic growth and development.
5. There is need for the country to uphold the rule of law, patriotism and national consciousness so as to effectively identify national interests and put national interests above their personal interests.

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