

# DEMOCRACY, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*The nexus between leadership and governance in Nigeria is an area that requires focus of which several scholars have reflected and are still reflecting on. Nigeria has experienced challenges of different kind since the return of the country to civil rule almost two decades ago. The most prominent of these challenges are tied to weak and poor leadership orchestrated first by the pitfalls in the democratic process as well as the corrupt tendencies found in the political class. Presently, challenges such as electoral fraud, insecurity and resource management have truncated effective governance and national development. Corruption and poor leadership style have exposed the weakness and lack of political will of leaders to deliver dividends of democracy to the people. There can be no meaningful development without transformational leadership that will influence outcomes at all levels. One of the findings in this study is that bad leadership has created political instability and retarded socio-economic and political development. Nigeria needs nationalist leaders that have the capacity to provide public welfare not bigots that promote personal aggrandizement. Despite the electoral reforms such as e-voting that were meant to promote transparency, fairness and accountability, the electoral body has failed in the area of objectivity thus soiling its integrity and independence. In this study, the researcher utilized KIIs, Content analysis and personal observation as a method of the study. The study concludes that with transformational leadership, people do not necessarily need to protest since the welfare of the people would be taken care of. The paper recommends that there is the urgent need for a paradigm shift from transactional leadership style to transformative leadership that will address the basic needs of Nigerians.*

**Key Words:** Democracy, Leadership, Government, Governance, Democratic Governance

## Introduction

Government and governance can be used interchangeably but they do not necessarily mean the same thing. Both denote the exercise of authority in an organization, institution or state. However, government refers to that entity that has the responsibility of exercising authority, on the other hand, authority simply means legitimate power. Furthermore, power is the ability to influence the behavior of others and authority is the right to discharge such power. In a nutshell, authority is based on an acknowledged duty to obey rather than on any form of coercion or manipulation. Authority is authority when obedience is established by those directed to obey. For the purpose of emphasis, Weber classified authority into: traditional authority rooted in history, charismatic authority built upon personality and legal-authority established by a set of impersonal rules. As a matter of fact, studying government simply means studying authority. Government does not mean politics, neither does politics mean government but both are related in a sense (Heywood, 1997).

Studying politics entails the study of government or more broadly studying the exercise of authority. This is why it is said, politics is the art of governance (which involves negotiation, policy formulation, and management of societal issues) and which is the exercise of control within the society through the making and enforcement of collective decisions. However, Heywood (1997) states that, the realm of politics is restricted to the state actors who are consciously driven by ideological beliefs, and who desire to advance them through membership of a formal organization known as political parties (Heywood, 1997). In governance, citizens lay claim on government's responsiveness to their needs including the promotion and protection of their rights. Government is the mechanism through which

political decisions are executed. In essence, governance issues pertain to the ability of government to develop an efficient, effective, and accountable, public management mechanism that is open to citizen participation which is capable of strengthening and not weakening a democratic system of government. This is more so that the whole essence of government is trust.

Governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage the state's affairs at all levels; comprises of mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and obligations and mediate their differences. It is not the sole domain of government but transcends government to include the business sector and of course the civil society (NEDA, 2006). What this means is that, governance has three legs: economic, political and administrative. Economic governance comprises of decision-making processes that affect a nation's economic activities and its relationships with other economies. Political governance on the other hand is the frameworks and processes in which a leader exercises authority in the cause of managing the resources of a state. Some of the major responsibilities of leaders are decision-making, implementation of laws and the rules and regulations that guide behavior within the society.

In between the period of French Revolution (1789) and the outbreak of the WWI (1914) was the remarkable experience in the history of government. This experience is the rise of democracy which came with it the activities of nationalists. It all started with few democratic institutions which were to be found in Britain, France, Holland, Switzerland and the United States of America. Democracy was therefore seen as the driving force of governance in Europe such that during the period of 1914, there was hardly a country in Europe which did not possess one form of constitution or the other. However, there were traces of democracy in Australia, many states of South America and Asia, where more or less democratic constitutions were to be found. The whole essence was to fashion out a representative form of (parliament) government, where the voices of the majority would be heard. In this work, the intention is not to define or describe democracy but interrogate the representativeness of democracy especially in African countries; particularly in Nigeria (Hattersley, 1930).

The question of whether democracy is the best form of government especially in developing democracies is debatable. As a principle, democratic governments should be considered the most acceptable to any other form of governance because it is supposedly built on a given constitution. Indeed, constitutional government promotes and defends the rights of the citizens allowing them to decide who represents their common interests. Of course, in most democracies, this is achieved through a frequent, regular and fair elections which are conducted by and independent electoral body. In an ideal situation, it is expected that the most credible candidates nominated by the electorates are allowed to fly the flags of their various parties until the final selections are done. This is the mark of departure between constitutional governments and especially military governments which rule by fiat. In most developed democracies, electoral petitions tribunals may be constituted to thrash any petitions that might be filed by contestants who feel shortchanged. However, in Nigeria the courts which are supposedly last hope for the common man have become most partisan than expected.

Principally, philosophers like Aristotle have established the fact that, the state originated for the sake of life, and continues to exist for the sake of the best life. What this entails is that, the end of the state is ethical. The state may extend its influence if it has such ambition but not to the detriment of the individual citizens. The state must not deviate from the reasons that establish it, which is to improve the quality of life by ensuring members of the state achieve and fulfill their purpose. However, governance in Nigeria can best be described as a state where there is no settled law, a known and indifferent judge and common executive. Governance has become a tool in the hands of the very few individuals to punish the greater majority thus; the proceeds of governance in Nigeria are now abject poverty, starvation and hunger, high level corruption, insecurity and joblessness, perpetual strikes, and unending period of graduation for high school students of public institutions. It is no longer the business or responsibility of government to provide the welfare of its citizens. This has become the hallmark of Nigeria-type leadership that has deprived the people of the right to share in the prosperity of the nation.

### **The Concept of Democracy**

Democracy is guided by some basic principles which must adhere to the rule of law, promotion and respect for human rights and the protection of life and property of the citizenry. There can be no democratic governance especially when these principles are not deliberately respected and deepened. Indeed, the term democracy presupposes that the individual is at liberty to express himself or herself especially in determining who gets their mandate. When a democratic government ensures that the citizens enjoy this liberty, such government is termed accountable to the people. It is said that democracy is the best form of government because the citizens reserve the right to insist that government business be carried out in a transparent manner. This will persuade those in authority not to violate citizen's fundamental rights with impunity. However, in a corrupt leadership, the people are stripped off such power to hold them accountable for irresponsible leadership.

According to Ukase (2014) political leadership in democracy is acquired only through the mandate and consent of the citizenry, this is freely sought by those seeking to lead through free and fair elections. Those elected are expected to be accountable by responding to the demands of the people. Certainly the hallmark of democracy is how to govern society in a manner that power actually belongs to the people. Basically, democracy institutionalizes the rule of law where emphasis is placed on its legitimacy; available options to choose from. Furthermore, in practice, the competitive nature of democracy ensures regular, free and fair elections where various political parties field contestants. As a representative government, democracy also entails mass participation where people express their will through the ballot. It was for this reason that Ukase (2014) posited that democracy requires that the consent and mandate of the people is freely given to establish an elected government.

### **The Concept of Leadership**

Basically the concept of leadership has been largely pronounced in the area of management and organizational science, psychology and other related disciplines in the social sciences (Lyne de Ver, 2008). The conception is less prevalent in the daily usage of political science scholars (Peele, 2005), and economists and development theorists. However, few conceptions of leadership are presented in this paper for clarification. The organization of people for the purpose of achieving a particular objective connotes leadership, however it is better understood contextually because it is used at different levels. Different groups have leadership, for instance, armed bandits or robbers have leaders that instruct their subordinates on what to do or what not to do and compliance is most necessary in achieving their goal.

One famous conception of leadership is that given by Barnard Bass, he saw it as a universal phenomenon where interaction between two or more members of a group involving a structuring or restructuring of the situation and what members expect as the outcome. Generally speaking, leaders are agents of change because their acts affect others more than the acts of the followers affect them. Leadership is the creative and directive force of morale that the leader commands by impelling others to obey, respect, cooperate and become loyal (Bass, 1990). Indeed, leaders have the responsibility to help a group create and achieve shared goals. It is not about imposing their own goals but mobilizing people to reach those goals. It is a social relationship which comprises of leaders, followers, and what prompted such interaction (Nye, 2008). What Nye suggests that, for a good, effective and intelligent leadership, the leader requires to have soft power and hard power skills. Simply, a leader is expected to possess the lion and lamb face as a leadership style to utilize as circumstances permit.

According to Oyedepo (2000), leadership is qualitative governance as against just quantitative governance. What this simply implies is that a leader should demonstrate commitment, leadership style, approach and policy that will deliver ample dividends or blessings. For him, leadership entails service because a leader is actually a servant, a selfless servant who is expected to deliver as expected or positively as unexpected. He is by and large, a pathfinder always seeking how to resolve situations that affect those he leads.

For better comprehension, it is pertinent that leadership is distinguished from management. In fact, Iles & Preece (2006) described managers as concerned basically with today, with delivery, targets,

efficiency, utilization, and authority, concentrating on internal issues of the organization, and also on doing things right, while leaders should look beyond by focusing on tomorrow, development, direction, purpose, vision and innovation (Iles & Preece, 2006). The conception of leadership by Iles and Preece fits in the conception of the paper.

### **Method of the Study**

This study adopted the KIIs, Content analysis and personal observations. Few individuals were randomly selected to answer some vital questions on leadership and governance in Nigeria. Some of them were politicians and others were political analysts. Large information was gotten from relevant academic materials and personal observations of the researcher were also of essence.

### **Empirical Review**

The art of leadership for national transformation is positively influenced by a culture of responsible followership and vice versa. It is expected that the leader should be able to initiate qualities of good followership that creates transformative leadership. The welfare of the people and the expression and enjoyment of basic rights within a system that is transparent, accountable, and is merit-driven. Indeed, transformative leadership is cause, everything else is effect. The leadership provides the vision as it sets in place the think-tank that guarantees the adoption of development agenda (<https://www.abubakarbukolasaraki.com/leadership-and-national-transformation-in-nigeria-2/>). In line with Saraki's submission, the panacea for good governance is transformative leadership. However, this quality or attribute is grossly lacking in Nigerian leaders. The near best quality leadership Nigerians ever enjoyed was that by the first Nationalists who fought and won independence for the country – the likes of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tafawa Balewa, and Awolowo, all of blessed memory.

Several scholars from diverse climes have made their contributions on the relationship between leadership and governance, pointing out the need for quality leaders is transformation that takes the welfare of its citizens as most important. In their discussion, Samuel and Nekwube (2017) emphasized on the need for leadership styles and corporate governance. They analyzed the nexus between various leadership styles that include transformational, transactional, etc. and corporate governance. Most important in their analysis is the emphasis on the impact of effective leadership on the art of governance (Samuel & Nchekwu, 2017). The discourse on leadership and governance for sustainability looks at the intersection of leadership practices and the frameworks of governance intended at promoting sustainable development. For sustainable development to occur, leaders must be deliberate in identifying policies that are tailored towards collaborative governance, where the citizens are carried along. Such leaders should be purposeful in their policy design that will influence the success in organizational sustainability and initiatives (Kumar, 2023).

The challenges of leadership in Nigeria have become very crucial thereby giving several concerned Nigerians sleepless night. This has become persistent with governments coming and going without any meaningful impact.. The new government comes without leadership issues but all they do is to accuse the previous administrations of bribery and corruption, and lack of accountability which was the reason for the new government coming in. Hopes are once more raised and in affirmation, the poor masses in the society welcome the intended “savior”. But unfortunately, experiences have indicated that once the new government settles down, history and stories begin to reemerge. In most cases, the same problem becomes worse and more perplexing and poisonous than the ill it came to cure. The promises the new government made to the people become a mirage (Akpan & Ezeugo, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

One prominent theory that has explained the nexus between leadership and governance is the Theory of Transformational Leadership. The theory was first propounded by Burns James MacGregor in 1978 but was later expanded by Bass Benard in the 1980s. As a matter of fact, the theory based its central argument on the capacity of a transformational leadership to motivate followers to achieve higher levels

of performance. It also fosters significant change within institutions/organizations, thus aligning their goals with broad-base values of society.

The theory assumes that leaders can influence the values and motivations of their followers. Power becomes effective when the one exercising it is able influence the people with the decisions/policies taken. It adds that effective leadership goes far beyond ordinary transactional exchanges between leadership and followership. Influence emanates from charismatic qualities of a leader. Indeed, the central thesis of the theory ensures organizational governance while at the same time, promoting ethical values and shared visions, thus enhancing improved consequences.

The theory possesses some key strength that encourages innovation and adaptability. The leader is able to introduce new methods in the art of governance that will improve the quality of lives of the people. By so doing, strong relationships hinged on trust and confidence are built between and within teams. There is no theory no matter how prominent it may be that is without criticisms. In this case, critiques have identified as one of the weaknesses of the theory that, it may overlook structural issues in governance. This is because the theory depends heavily on the leader's personal disposition, which often times can be subjective. Despite these weaknesses, the theory is most valuable in explaining the relationship between leadership and governance in public domain. The theory generally underscores the significance of ethical leadership in promoting effective governance. This is most relevant in contemporary institutional dimension.

### **The Nexus between Democracy and Leadership**

Tracing the relationship between democracy and leadership in Nigeria simply points to the interplay of effective leadership and democratic governance. Leadership either in public or private sector is imperative for fostering development; however, corruption and mismanagement have over the years of Nigeria's democracy slowed down progress in the right direction. Notably, democracy as a form of government is meant to enhance development but the Nigerian situation reflects otherwise. There is poverty of quality leadership as displayed by the crops of political leaders we have had since the return to democratic rule in 1999. The unfortunate experience is that, these political leaders have continued to recycle themselves from one level to the other. The concern of Nigerian political class is not to improve the living standard of the greater number but to steal from the treasury damning the pervasion of poverty, unemployment, insecurity, hunger and starvation. The knowledge about governance shows that an effective leadership should be deliberate in tackling these challenges for the general prosperity.

It is only in Nigeria that looters are celebrated by those they stole from. Institutions such as the EFCC and ICPC were instituted so as to strengthen democracy and improve the livelihood of the citizens and create a peaceful and prosperous society. However what has played out is the complete reversal of the intention because these institutions have become shield to the Nigerian politicians. It interesting to note the disgusting practice whereby indicted politicians by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission are today occupying exalted positions either as executive governors/ministers and lawmakers (House of Representatives and Senate). This can only happen in Nigeria, the giant republic of public thieves where the Judiciary is braved of dispensing justice.

From the personal observation of this study, when Nuhu Ribadu was the Chairman of EFCC, he appeared before the Senate and mentioned five most corrupt governors. They included: Orji Kalu of Abia state; Ahmed Bola Tinubu of Lagos state; Ahmed Sani Yerima of Zamfara state; Godswill Okpabio of Akwa Ibom state; George Akume of Benue state; Chmaroke Nnamani of Enugu state. Within the span of 18 years, Orji Kalu is a Senator of the Federal Republic; Bola Ahmed Tinubu is Nigeria's President. Ahmed Sani Yerima is a Senator; Chimaroke Nnamani is a Senator and George Akume, the Secretary to the Federal Government. The person that pronounced Bola Ahmed Tinubu as one of the most corrupt governor is a beneficiary in Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration as the security adviser.

Can we see this development as mere coincidence or deception in the way the political class continues to appoint and re-appoint itself? In a normal happening, it is not possible that President Tinubu would have appointed Nuhu Ribadu as security adviser and similarly, if Nuhu Ribadu had clean hands,

he would not have accepted to work with someone he pronounced as one of the most corrupt persons in Nigeria. There was no time that Nuhu Ribadu said otherwise. The lesson for the electorate to learn from this scenario is that the politicians are the same irrespective of party, religion and ethnic background; they have one goal – to exploit the Nigerian resources at every given opportunity.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Overcoming this nightmare is becoming and impossible venture because a strong cabal has hijacked governance at all levels. The masses are not even allowed to protest against this unwholesome act as the forces of coercion are instructed to prevent genuine protesters from embarking on peaceful processions. However, with transformational leadership, people do not necessarily need to protest since the welfare of the people would be taken care of. There is the urgent need for a paradigm shift from transactional leadership style to transformative leadership that will address the basic needs of Nigerians. What is currently happening in the country is that leadership has been demonized necessitating a hunt for leaders that will be conscious and deliberate in tackling corruption so as to restore public trust and prioritize both human and resource development (<https://www.najops.org.ng/index/php/najops>).

One other strategy is for citizens to be encouraged to actively participate in the art of governance by protecting their rights and for them to demand accountability from their representatives at all levels. Democracy is a constitutional government, which entails that the constitution is paramount as such the rule of law should be respected. In addition to this, institutions such as the Judiciary, EFCC and ICPC should be transparent in the discharge of their constitutional roles so as to strengthen democracy and to ensure good governance (Ibid).

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