

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE IN NIGERIA (AN OVERVIEW)

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Abstract

This paper examines political leadership and the developmental state in Nigeria. The history of a great nation is linked to purposeful leadership. Such leaders have played significant roles in the socio-economic development and political emancipation of their nations. In Nigeria, however, the case is entirely different. The trouble with the developmental state in Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of political leadership. There are of course failures in other dimensions, but all these are traceable to inadequacies in political leadership. Why? To answer this question, the paper adopts a descriptive research design; relies on secondary data; and theoretically analyzes the collected data. The findings of the study reviles that lack of ideology, electoral malpractices, corruption, lack of rule of law, absence of accountability and transparency, among other things are the challenges of leadership which plague the developmental state in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, recommends among others the election of strategic and progressive leadership that would identify and harmonize national capabilities to achieve the national interest; the creation of effective national institutions that can meet citizens' needs and take full part in the workings of the international community; the undertaking of concerted development, broadly understood as progress toward stable and accountable society; the restructuring of the polity to ensure equity, justice and fairness among others. In conclusion, there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian political system in operation; the trouble with the developmental state in Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of political leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, Political Leadership, Development, State, Developmental State.

Introduction

The history of a great nation is linked to purposeful leadership. Such leaders have played significant roles in the socio-economic development and political emancipation of their nations. In Nigeria, however, the case is entirely different. The trouble with the country is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the descent into failure and collapse. Africa's political history is replete with leadership crises and failure. From 1960 till date, the Nigerian governments have failed to set in place transparent and accountable institutions capable of securing economic progress, promoting good governance, and protecting the citizenry. This lack of capacity is amplified by the political leadership recourse to authoritarianism and

repression, dramatic economic decline precipitated by indiscriminate corruption, and the adoption of exclusive (ethnic) policies to assure self-succession tendencies.

Years of military rule and the attendant problems of corruption and accountability had crippled the developmental state of Nigeria. In his book *Power and Leadership in Nigeria*, Chuba Okadigbo (1987: 134) examined the role of leadership in Nigeria and concluded that:

“The lack of national cohesion, indeed of any bold attempt by raising institutions or leaders to really unite Nigeria, is indicative of leadership failure in Nigeria, i.e. of failure of personal leadership as well as institutional or structural failure”.

Professor Chinua Achebe came to the same conclusion in his book *The Trouble with Nigeria*, when he simply identified the problem of Nigeria as failure of leadership. The Nigerian problem, he concluded, “is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership”.

To underscore the importance of the leadership element, reference is made to the South East Asian nations, where the quality of leadership had brought dynamism and greater prosperity even in the face of globalization. These countries have also made a tremendous progress in building sturdier and more capable democratic institutions. By contrast, African countries, most especially Nigeria, have either stagnated or failed, due to an interplay of demographics, poverty, disease, and most importantly, poor governance.

The National Intelligence Council (NIC) report, ‘Mapping Sub Saharan Africa’s Future’, which painted a depressing picture of the African continent, had engendered several discussions. Using indices such as globalization, patterns of conflict, terrorism, democratization, AIDS, evolving foreign influences and religion, the report specifically estimated that Nigeria could fragment in the next 15 years. The NIC report’s projection that Nigeria would fail as a state in the next 15 years had drawn attention to the country’s enduring problem of leadership. Before now, the failed states phenomenon in Africa had often been associated with countries like Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Angola, Burundi and Congo at different stages of their evolving histories.

Interestingly, Robert I. Rotberg in his analysis even categorized Nigeria as a state that collapsed in the 1990s, but gradually recovered and is now weak. If Rotberg’s categorization is accepted with all its flaws, the question to ponder is, can Nigeria relapse into failed state as predicted by the NIC report and what is the critical role of leadership in averting this situation? The bid to answer the above questions necessitated the research interest of this paper – *“Leadership and the developmental state in Nigeria”*.

Conceptual Clarifications

✓ Leadership

Leadership refers to the process of persuasion or example by which an individual induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers.

It is therefore, a process of social influence by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leadership is the ability to lead or the office of a leader and a leader is any individual who can conduct, motivate, who has authority to direct, a chief commander, inspire a group of individuals to bring out the best in them. A leader therefore is expected to demonstrate qualities, which embrace but not limited to good character, vision, tact, prudence, and ability to lead by example because people basically ascribe leadership to those who they feel can most enable them achieve important goals or objectives.

✓ **Political Leadership**

Political Leadership refers to the ruling class that bears the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision-making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory.

Political leadership class includes people who hold decision-making positions in government, and people who seek those positions, whether by means of election, coup d'état, appointment, electoral fraud, conquest, right of inheritance or other means. In a broader perspective, political leadership goes beyond the ruling class that directly run the affairs of a territory; it includes the totality of the political class that has the capacity to manipulate the machineries of government even from behind the scene.

✓ **Development**

In this regard, we agree with Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) that development as a concept is a victim of definitional pluralism. However, Gboyega (2001), subsequently cited in Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) opines that development implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and the rich alone, in a sustainable way, such that today's consumption does not imperil the future; it also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances. The concept of development in this study is in tandem with the opinion of Gboyega (2003).

✓ **Developmental State**

The concept of developmental state is associated with the leading role played by the government in promoting industrialization in Japan and East Asia in the Post World War II era. Their respective governments pursues a series of policies, including tariff protections, subsidies and other forms of controls aimed at developing selected productive sectors of economic activity. Fundamental to the design of the developmental state of these countries was the creation of an alliance between politics and the economy, which materialized in the establishment of a specialized bureaucratic apparatus that had ample powers and coordinated the developmental efforts, at least in their initial stages (Caldentey, 2009)

However, the developmental state and its associated policies are not unique to Japan or East Asia, as Latin America and some countries in Africa (South Africa, Ghana, Rwanda among others) are now following suit. What then is developmental state all about?

Within the prevailing literature, there is little agreement as to the exact definition, attributes or interventions of the ‘developmental state’. Hence, there is a need to better understand what is generally meant by a ‘developmental state’, and to assess whether this concept can be used or adapted as an appropriate growth model for Nigeria.

Developmental state not only refers to the collective economic and human development, but also describes the state’s essential role in harnessing national resources and directing incentives through a distinctive policy-making process (Meredith, 1999). A developmental state is one that focuses on generating high economic growth rates, promoting structural change in production patterns and implementing welfare policies to achieve social equity.

Despite the lack of consensus around its exact definition, there are certain attributes and mechanisms that repeatedly feature in the relevant literature and which provide a clearer picture of what a ‘developmental state’ looks like in practice. The ‘key attributes and mechanisms’ of a developmental state, according to Craig (2017), are tabulated below:

Table One: Key Attributes of a Developmental State

Key Attributes	Description
<i>A common developmental vision that is shared and supported by key societal stakeholders</i>	It is often the case that a ‘developmental state’ will formulate a common national agenda with clear developmental economic and social goals, around which it can rally key societal stakeholders in business and government.
<i>A socially embedded yet autonomous state</i>	For a state to be successful in implementing its developmental vision, it must be sufficiently embedded within its society so that its policies and strategies resonate with its citizens. However, the state must simultaneously be sufficiently protected from private interests and political influence in order to exercise its autonomy.
<i>A Weberian bureaucracy</i>	A well-structured, internally cohesive and sufficiently resourced bureaucracy is an essential attribute of any ‘developmental state.’ Correct operational procedures capacitate a state to implement its policies, and staff should not only be highly skilled but hiring, firing and promotion policies should also be based on a strict performance basis
<i>High levels of social unity and cohesion</i>	High levels of social unity and cohesion amongst different racial or cultural groups assists a developmental state in carrying out its growth strategies. There is likely to be more support for the government when societal opinion is shared and a common sense of national identity exists.

Table Two: Key Mechanisms of a Developmental State

Key Mechanisms	Description
<i>Industrialisation and domestic investment policies</i>	Promoting trade and manufacturing has traditionally been a staple in the developmental state's growth strategy, as well as creating attractive domestic investment conditions for both foreign and local investors.
<i>Public private partnerships</i>	Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are a very useful tool for governments to use to draw in resources and support from both private and civil society stakeholders.
<i>Human capital development</i>	A developmental state provides education and training opportunities to its citizens so as to increase their productivity and ensure a supply of skilled labour to fast-growing sectors. This is now more important than ever, with knowledge-based sectors driving economic growth.
<i>Macro-Fiscal Management</i>	In an effort to attract foreign investment and boost trade, a developmental state will often focus on keeping inflation rates stable, interest rates favourable and exchange rates competitive.
<i>Redistributive social policies</i>	Developmental states commonly attempt to redistribute income through progressive taxation policies and egalitarian wage structures, so as to create a more equal and fair society.
<i>State owned enterprises and central planning agencies</i>	'Developmental' states make extensive use of central planning agencies and state owned enterprises to implement or coordinate their policies. Institutions acting as central planning agencies have taken many different forms including economic planning agencies, government ministries or development bureaus.

Political Leadership and the Developmental State in Nigeria

According to Babalobi (2018), the greatest challenge facing the Nigerian nation is not restructuring, insurgent militancy, corruption, economic recession, youth unemployment, or energy crisis, but the dearth of selfless and visionary leadership. There is a crisis of bad governance. All myriads of problems the nation is facing are the effects of poor quality of leadership that has failed over the years to transform the national wealth to commonwealth. Bad political leadership seems to be plaguing Nigeria; this is obvious with each cycle of election raising hopes, and dashing expectations; translating into bad governance at all levels particularly at the Federal, which is the most powerful because of the enormous resources it controls. From Tafawa Balewa till date, it has been a paradise lost, except for the 201 days interregnum of the vibrant, fearless, and dynamic Late Murtala Muhammed, whose portrait adorns Nigeria's twenty naira note.

The quartet of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Tafawa Balewa, Sardauna Ahmadu Bello, and Chief Obafemi could aptly be described as Nigeria's first and best four, but in retrospect, they seemed not to be ready for the challenge of foundational nation building, after 'flag' independence was negotiated with British colonialists. Not surprisingly, they allowed petty rivalry and inter regional conflicts to truncate Nigeria's march to greatness.

The pioneer coups and counter coups of 1966 and the ensuing civil war of 1967- 1971 not only decimated Nigeria's human capital and stagnated economic development, but sowed seeds of ethnic distrusts that is still germinating in spite of the 'No Victor, No Vanquished' end of war proclamation of the Nigeria government under General Yabuku Gowon. The Gowon administration of 1967-1975 was economically blessed, just like its helmsman, Yabuku Gowon, who attained power at age 29 is presently blessed with good old age. But the limited vision of the administration hindered it from maximizing the booming oil resources for national development. The administration failed to look beyond the oil boom. History has been unkind to the Gowon administration as the main issues it is remembered for is having much money it did not know what to do with it, and reneging on a promise to hand over to civilians in 1975; an incident that eventually became its cul de sac.

If you ask most of the older generation Nigerians, Christian or Muslim, Northerner or Southerner, Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa/Fulani, who is Nigeria's best Head of State, they are likely to refer to General Murtala Muhammed, a Muslim Northerner who straddled the political saddle for only 201 days. History has not judged Murtala by the thickness of his military toga or ethnic, religious inclination but by the fresh breath injected into national lethargy, in spite of his ideological limitations. The lesson here is that the real issue in our leadership challenge is not a Northern/Southern; Christian/Muslim; or Igbo/Yoruba/Hausa President; but the 'President Right' that not only knows the problems, but bold to take iconoclastic decisions to solve the problems.

Olusegun Obasanjo who succeeded Murtala Muhammed is perhaps the luckiest living Nigerian alive. National leadership was thrust on him twice in 1976 and 1999, without any overt or covert political manoeuvring from him. He was truly called to serve on those two occasions. The only time he pursued an ambition was in 2003 when he succeeded himself for a second term. If the General turned Chief had used the total 11 years he was privileged to be Nigeria's Head of state for egregious achievements, he would have become a political god in the likes of Nelson Mandela or our own Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo once described as the 'best President Nigeria ever heard.' But Chief Olusegun Obasanjo blew up his three chances in power, just like a kid will blow up millions of dollars won from lottery. Obasanjo's present cries and lamentations over the national socio-political and economic bereavement are tears of a crocodile and lamentations of a prodigal leader.

Alhaji Shehu Shagari, Nigeria's first civilian administration (1979-1983), now an aged national statesman, surrounded himself with several colourful politicians in the likes of Paul Unongo, K.O. Mbadiwe, Umaru Dikko, Olusola Saraki, but the administration's achievements were colourless. The only discernible colour was the colour of corruption, electoral violence, cronyism, and austerity measures. Another attempt at greatness was fizzled away, providing

an alibi for the military that midwifed the civilians to power to return and boot them to hospital beds and prison cells.

General Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria's present President, brought more energy, zest, and dynamism into his first tenure as military Head of State, than now as a civilian president. The first tenure was characterized by a relentless fight against indiscipline, corruption, and internal and international economic sabotage, though also accused of several human rights abuses. Maybe age has catch up with President Buhari; while he has fulfilled his political ambition of returning to Aso Rock, the nation is still awaiting the dividends of the messianic fervour, hosanna chorus, and halleluiah proclamations that propelled him to power. The administration continues to trumpet its fight against corruption as its greatest achievement, but a more successful fight against poverty and youth employment will make its bid for a second term smooth sailing.

General Ibrahim Babangida who once described himself as an evil genius is Nigeria's longest serving Head of State (1985-1993). The Structural Adjustment Programme introduced by his government laid the foundation for Nigeria's present economic miasma. Rather than lay a legacy of good government, he was dribbling everyone through an endless political transitions programme, until he dribbled himself out of power in 1993 under the false notion of stepping aside.

Generals Sani Abacha and Abubakar Abdulhaman military interregnum before the 1999 return of power to civilians were typologies of government in power. Abacha government was particularly vilified for human rights abuses and massive corruption. Chief Earnest Shonekan was like a passenger in government, and the forces that put him there as a stop gap removed him seamlessly after his government filtered away.

The immediate past administration of ex-President Goodluck Jonathan is still being tried by its successor for perceived misdeeds. Good luck brought Jonathan to power just like the number 6 of the ludo dice is the ace number in a ludo game, but the nation is still reining in the misfortunes of his personal luck not translated to national greatness.

The concern of this paper is will General Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria's present President, that came into power via the 2019 general elections be a President in the class of Kim Dae-Jung who pulled South Korea from the brink of economic catastrophe transforming the Asian country to a strong, industrialized nation.? When will Nigeria produce a Nelson Mandela, to liberate the country from internal apartheid that allows 469 distinguished and honourable men and women to appropriate almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of the nation's resources to themselves, making them richer than most local governments in Nigeria? When will a Mandela arise and sacrificially lead the country out of internal captivity of Nigerians by Nigerians? (Babalobi, 2018). All these questions beg for laudable answers in addressing the leadership gap cum crises in the country.

Problems of Bad Political Leadership in the Developmental State of Nigeria

The history of failed or collapsed states has clearly shown that failure or collapse is not equivalent to the absence of physical national attributes or capabilities. Many of the failed

countries in Africa like Zaire and Liberia are rich in natural resources such as diamonds, oil, gold etc. In the same manner, ethnic, religious and cultural homogeneity is not a guarantee that a state will not collapse as Somalia had shown. In all these cases the vital missing link was leadership, where political leaders were unable to deliver political goods or close the gap on the essential issues of security, capacity and legitimacy.

Like most African countries, Nigeria is experiencing difficulties in the delivery of political goods for its citizens, despite the abundance of natural resources. At the level of security, while Nigeria is not confronted by an immediate external threat to its sovereignty, internally the government is battling with the problem of providing security for the lives and prosperity of its citizens. The problems of armed robbery and banditry are effectively challenging the nation's internal security mechanisms. In addition, there are other forms of ethnic and religious strife that threaten the state. However, the most fundamental security problem is the proliferation of ethnic militia and separatist movements in the country (Osuntokun, 2017). According to Obasi (2002: 1), the proliferation of ethnic militia, vigilante and separatist groups has been one of the most significant failures of Nigerian society and politics in recent years. These groups subvert the rule of law, create violence in Nigeria, and thus constitute threat to national security. Crucially also, is the fact that Nigeria faces the problem of meeting the needs of its citizens due to years of mismanagement, profligacy and endemic corruption. Thus inadequate capacity to meet social welfare need of citizens or sustain the intermittent reinforcement of social goods and services had resulted in the erosion of public confidence and popular support.

While Nigeria does not fit perfectly into any of the categories considered, it would be no exaggeration to say that the country exhibits some of the characteristics of a weak state as identified by Rotberg, notwithstanding the imperfections in his thesis. It should be noted, however, that categorizing a state as failing, does not necessarily doom it irretrievably to full failure. Failure is a fluid halting place, with movement forward to weakness and backward into collapse always possible.

The problem of failed states remains a core security problem of the 21st century, not only to the countries that suffer the fate, but also to the international community. Osuntokun (2017) contends that failure and collapse are undesirable results for states, but fortunately they are preventable. Human factors rather than structural flaws or situational insufficiencies are almost invariably responsible for the slides from weakness (or strength) towards failure and collapse. Although Nigeria has potentials, its growth and influence cannot be assured unless it has a strategic national leadership that can harmonize and utilize its current capabilities to realize its national interest.

Challenges of Political Leadership in the Developmental State of Nigeria

The challenges Nigeria face is mainly attributable to the failure of political leadership. There are of course failures in other dimensions, but all these are traceable to inadequacies in political leadership. Umana (2018) identified some of the challenges as follow:

➤ Lack of Ideology

In Nigeria, the political elites constitute a non-productive 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-centered political gains. Political leadership is parochial rather than national; and corruptly converts national resources into its project of primitive accumulation. Ethnic diversity is manipulated to stay afloat to the detriment of national cohesion.

➤ Electoral Malpractices Challenges

This problem has become a popular phenomenon in Nigerian politics. Indeed, election rigging has become the norm in the nation's electoral process. However, electoral malpractice is not a recent phenomenon; it has existed since independence and has continued to exist till today. For instance, in the first republic, the leadership of various political parties were accused and alleged of election rigging. The same happened in the second republic. And forth republic was also not different. Our leaders scheme electoral fraud to get into elected offices. It is important to note that a faulty electoral process can never produce capable leaders. Therefore, if the process of selecting leaders is not free, fair, and credible, good governance will remain elusive.

➤ Lack of Rule of Law

Nigerian leaders do not show respect to the rule of law, especially, judicial decisions. This hinders the judiciary from discharging its duties effectively. The judiciary is so unpredictability because the political elites still undermine the independence of the judiciary through patronage appointments, and judicial administration is marked by weak enforcement capacity.

➤ Absence of Accountability and Transparency

Transparency and accountability are absent in Nigerian leadership. An accountable government is one that is responsive to the demands of the citizen. Accountability is best enforced through the instrument an independent judiciary and the rule of law. Citizen can seek redress in the courts for acts of omission or commission by a government and its officials. However, Nigeria has not done well in this regard; it has been corruption at all levels. And this corruption is not unconnected with profuse index of weak accountability and lack of transparency. Nigerian leaders abuse public office for private gain.

➤ Corruption Challenges

Although corruption is a global challenge, Nigeria appears to suffer greatly from this menace. Every one appears to believe that the nation has a culture of corruption; Nigeria is a rich nation floating on oil wealth, but almost none of it flows to the people. The countless reforms and lack of honesty by our leaders have left Nigeria poor as poor can be. Politicians are expunged and later re-admitted into their parties, then, what hope for good governance? When the leadership is deeply entrenched in corrupt practices?

➤ **Weak Institutional Patterns**

The personalized nature of rule in Nigeria (as well as in many African states) implies not only that public policy making lacks the logic and that typically characterizes such an activity in order contexts but also that governance structures are largely informal and subject to erratic change.

In Nigeria, political power became concentrated in one leader. Making the rise of the supremacy of the office of the President over all organs of government, Nigerian leadership and their cohorts have simply privatized the state for their selfish interest. Leadership in Nigeria is marked by parochial, personalized and selfish tendencies, political brigandage, ethnic rivalry and cleavages, clientelism and privatized state apparatuses.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The history of a great nation is linked to purposeful leadership. Such leaders have played significant roles in the socio-economic development and political emancipation of their nations. In Nigeria, leadership has failed to harness the resources and the ingenuity of the people for national development. There is nothing basically wrong with the African political system in operation. The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. The nature of political leadership became a problem as most of them lost or lacked control of effective leadership. This has led to the scramble for state resources to suit their personal desires.

The most fundamental measure required in confronting the challenge, and averting the Nigerian state from failure and collapse is strategic and progressive leadership. The importance of strategic leadership is that it identifies and harmonizes national capabilities to achieve the national interest. Based on the above the paper recommends the following plausible measures:

- The creation of effective national institutions that can meet citizens' needs and take full part in the workings of the international community.
- The undertaking of concerted development, broadly understood as progress toward stable and accountable society.
- The restructuring of the polity to ensure equity, justice and fairness in the election, selection and appointment of people into public offices in the country.
- The building up of a professional public service capable of initiating and executing people oriented governmental policies, programmes and projects that will meet the demand and aspirations of the citizenry.
- The building of a capable state via prioritizing strategic policy areas and minimizing political interventions and systematic corruption.
- The prioritization of socio-economic intervention policies which are most likely to contribute towards a stronger, stable, cleaner, coherent and more skilled and efficient government.

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