

Poor Political Leadership: Quagmire to National and Political Unity in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper looked at poor political leadership in Nigeria as a bane and or quagmire to Nigeria's togetherness, political and national unity. Nigeria is a multicultural economy with diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural practices that has given rise to political and religious differences. The political unity, teamness and progressiveness have over the years being given a lips-sided attention by those in the helm of affairs in Nigeria. Albeit, several governments and political parties have embarked on various policies aimed at strengthening the peace and unity of the most populous black nations of the world; there seems to be no clear direction and strategic focus in dealing with the root causes, which in some cases are being occasioned by political, tribal and religious differences. African nations, particularly Nigeria have been branded with such issues—ranging from poor political leadership, poor economic policies, religious bigotry, unemployment, poor infrastructures, poverty, mistrust, illiteracy, selfishness/egotism, high mortality rate, low standard of living, insecurity, decaying health sector, corruption, terrorism, banditry, misuse of the rule of law, mismanagement of the nation's natural resources, nepotism, internal conflicts, strikes (particularly amongst the university's academic staff, medical workers, etc.), poor funding of our educational sector, consumption economy, etc. In analysing this poor political leadership trend, therefore, the researcher concludes that total synergy, teamwork and balanced approaches by our political leaders in nation building, and at the same time a change in the mind-set of the masses will enhance, and or improve togetherness, unity, and progressiveness amongst Nigerians, and other African nations.

Keywords: Political Leadership, Teamwork, Togetherness, National and Political Unity.

Introduction

"How does one fashion a book of resistance, a book of truth in an empire of falsehood? Is it possible for freedom and independence to arise in new ways under new conditions?" - Philip K. Dick

Leadership is of more recent usage. The term is a product of the 19th century and refers to as; "the dignity to lead, or position of a leader, esp. of a political party; ability to lead; the position of a group of people leading or influencing others within a given context; the group itself, the action or influence necessary for the direction or organisation of effort in understanding (Oxford English Dictionary, Online)". It is a known fact that the growth and development of any functional organisation, and or society even in our competitive global and business environment can only be realise through meaningful socioeconomic contributions by all its members. In order, ergo, to coordinate the activities and actions of the organisation, or community, there must be a leader charged with the responsibility and

authority, and must be able to carry his subjects along for meaningful social, political and economic development, and also to maximise profit.

The term leadership to many denotes an image of action, power, and personality. Organisations or institutions have different peculiarities and the styles of leadership will depend largely on the circumstances. However, it is an open secret that the management of business organisations, and or nations are more often than not accused of ineptitude by auditors or committees usually set up to look into their activities when things go the other way around.

Leadership is all about influence, and influence is concern with togetherness and unity amongst the group. The study of leadership is the study of outstanding men and women in action that can be viewed from many angles; such men and women could be in government, politics, military, religion, family, university, business or organisations, etc. Coming from this background, therefore, we can state without mincing words, that leadership is an act of influence based more on integrity than authority. It is never the exclusive domain of designated person(s) who occupy positions of authority, and arguably not even predominantly so, rather, it is an act defined by the nature and quality of relationship between people that go beyond specific roles. Every member of an organisation or institution has the responsibility to provide an opportunity to participate in leadership, and one of the surest ways to approach and achieve this great task is by being involved in politics.

Aristotle (384–322 BC), one of world's acclaimed scholars observed that whenever men seek to define their position in a society or as they attempt to achieve personal security from available resources and as they try to influence others to accept their points of view; they had engaged themselves in politics. The underlining piece here is his ability to exercise his leadership trait to achieve his personal ambition of influencing his subjects toward accomplishing the set goals. Seeing leadership in this direction, therefore, does not deny the reality of power and authority, but it takes a different approach to organisational and community life (Chikaima 1990). The leadership approach here is grounded in an ethics of care; based on informed insight and enacted through trusting personal relationships that are mutually influential. Ideally, authority and influence creates a responsive synergy despite their contrasting natures.

One of the criteria to successful leadership is that you must have good leadership skills to motivate and infuse good work practices in staff/citizens. Also, leaders need good people skills to gain the trust of the people. When political leaders give orders, they must have the power, authority, and motivation to inspire confidence so that the subjects or followers have positive attitudes towards the tasks and the organisation, institutions, etc. The aim is to achieve good results in the workplace. The managers and directors of an organisation must demonstrate that they have the power and the good governance needed to control their workers, and it is imperative that they have good leadership skills as well so that the organisations can achieve the results they want.

Good leadership, however, must maintain a balance between vision, strategy and results. According to Nwafor E. S. (2017) in Evans & Evans (2002), Leadership involves leading, conducting, escorting, guiding, tracing, steering vision and most importantly, managing others. A leader is also a person who aids a group when work, tasks and social functions are to be performed.

In the same token, therefore, nations/institutions are today confronted with increased competition resulting from changes in technology, economic environments, globalisation, political instability, terrorism, ineffective and poor leadership traits, covid-19 pandemic, etc. as it could be buttressed from the above that not much research has been conducted on the relationship between all of these constructs. In this regard, this paper is aimed to contribute to the existing knowledge particularly in the sphere of leadership. In fact, the world needs more capable and trained leaders to cope with the ever-changing economic spheres of life. Many political leaders all over the world are today becoming too aggressive to one other, thus, this century's leaders; particularly Africa needs more capable leaders to cope with the uncertainty enshrined in the arsenal of humanity. It is to this end that this paper seeks to critically examine the poor political leadership as an unnecessary but acute factor to the unity, progress and togetherness as a vital key to Nigerians and Nigeria's progress.

Leadership defined

Leadership is a concept which has fascinated mankind for centuries. It is something more than just an aspect of personality, tradition, opportunism, or appointment. It is connected with actual behaviour and attributes toward oneself and others. In the mean, the author shall discuss several important aspects of political leadership including a description of what good leadership is, and a description of several aspects of poor political leadership. Leadership is the ability of management to induce subordinates to work towards groups with confidence and keenness. It is the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Definitions more inclusive of followers have also emerged in this century.

Leadership is a central feature of organisational performances. The manager must understand the nature of leadership influence and factors which determine relationships with other people and the effectiveness of the leadership relationship. Previous researches have shown that successful interactions between leaders and their followers are central to the overall functioning of a company. One rationale for this study is that good leader-follower relationships are vital to ensuring the effective functioning of any organisation/institution, particularly Nigeria.

Alan Keith states that Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen. Leadership, according to Dan Agbese (1988) is a glory, and it is a burden, whichever is greater only those who led know. According to Ken "SKC" Ogbornia, "effective leadership is the ability to successfully integrate and maximise

available resources within the internal and external environment for the attainment of organisational societal goals. That is, taking cognisance of the SWOT Matrix.

According to Aderounmu W. O. & Ehimetalor (1981), leadership is 'the ability to initiate, to motivate and direct others toward the fulfillment of a goal'. To Nwankwo J. I. (1981), leadership is simply 'the interpersonal influence exercised through communication and directed towards achieving group goal'. Peter Drucker asserts that the only definition of a leader is someone who has followers." To gain followers requires influence, but doesn't exclude the lack of integrity in achieving this. Indeed, it can be argued that several of the world's greatest leaders like Dr. Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, etc. have integrity, and adopted values that would not be shared by many people today.

According to Etzioni (1965), leadership is the ability based on the personal qualities of the leader to elicit the followers' voluntary compliance in a broad range of matters. Leadership is distinguished from the concept of power in that it entails influence: that is, change of preference, while power implies only that subjects' preferences are held in abeyance.

In the 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, John Maxwell sums up his definition of leadership by saying that "leadership is influence; nothing more, nothing less". This, however, moves beyond the position of defining the leader to looking at the ability of the leader to influence others-both those who would consider themselves followers, and those outside that circle. Indirectly, it also builds on leadership character since without maintaining integrity and trustworthiness, the capability to influence will disappear. Warren Bennis' definition of leadership is focused more on the individual's capability of the leader: "Leadership is a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated, building trust among colleagues, and taking effective action to realise your own leadership potentials".

Political Leaders in Nigeria need a new mix of competencies to properly shape their board and develop their subjects to meet the 21st-century challenges; shifting cultures, social-cultural dynamics, rapidly changing technology and other factors, therefore, will require new patterns of leadership. The cultural norms of modern day customers and, or our society are rapidly changing the ways and manners work activities, and or governance is carried out in our organisations/society. Thus, 21st-century leaders in Nigeria will need greater awareness of diverse factors and new sets of competencies characteristics that lead to success in the job to help make relevant, correct and timely decisions in the leadership of change and leadership of people.

Politics defined

In our contemporary society today, the word politics is an elastic one. The Oxford Learned Dictionary defined "politics as a methodology and activities associated with running a government, an organisation, or a movement". According to Dudley, Ball and Laski, politics is concerned with the ordinary day-to-day activities of the community in which we are all personally involved. Aristotle observed that 'man by nature is a political animal'. By this, he

implies that the essence of social existence is politics and that two or more men interacting with one another are invariably involved in a political relationship. To others, including Harold Laswell, politics has been equated with the study of power or the study of influence and the influential. Laswell further define politics as "who gets what, when and how" which underlines the importance of power as the major ingredient of politics. By this definition, politics not only happens in states, but it happens in organisations, NGOs and businesses, even universities and families.

To Aristotle, politics was the search for the good life. By this statement, therefore, Aristotle meant to suggest two things: Cities (governments) exist by nature, they are natural. If one is not part of the city, one is either a beast, or god. Cities must exist because men are not self-sufficient, and thus require the cooperation of others in order to survive and thrive. Secondly, that we only experience our humanity as we interact with others in the polis, in the society, in the government. We need other people in order to live the good life. Thus, we can deduce from the foregoing that leaders apply the chemistry of politics in governance.

Political leadership

The whole world is trembling today because of the unwholesome attitude of our political office holders-particularly in Nigeria who sees political office as an avenue to loot government coffers, and or to victimise their opponents. The Russia president, Putin is busy destroying Ukraine, and at the same time his people. North Korean president is every day threatening world existence. The whole quest is to show power and to exert supremacy over others. However, leadership in his paradigm, is a part of multi-causal social processes that brings about concrete political outcomes-election results (King: 2002, Greenstein, 2004). Leadership is an essential feature of all government and governance: weak leadership contributes to government failures, and strong leadership is indispensable if the government is to succeed.

Good leadership secures prosperity in the long run; foolhardy leadership may bring about a catastrophe. An average Nigeria politician doesn't know anything about the next generation in his plans; he is only interested about the next election.

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. It could also be described as the human element that operates the machineries of government on behalf of an organised territory. This 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 (Wikipedia, 2009). Honestly, political leadership goes beyond the ruling elites that directly manage the affairs of a territory; it

embraces the totality of the political class that has the capacity to manipulate the machineries of government even from behind the scene.

Political leadership is one of the most widely experienced and intuitively or tacitly phenomena-like great power competition, Olympic rivalries, climate change, the right to develop, or central human rights controversies about trade-offs between security and civil and political rights. In contrast, the concept of political leadership is difficult to define essentially because it is dependent on institutional, cultural and historical contests and situations-both particular and general (Blondel, 1987, Wildavsky, 2006, Klenke, 1996).

However, at the dawn of political independent in Nigeria from the British colonial masters on the 1st October, 1960, there was, amongst the citizenry a high hope of occupying leadership positions without subjecting themselves to some sort of upheaval and political bureaucratic bottlenecks. Nigerians see themselves as brothers and sisters; there was high hope to strengthening unity and peace among the various ethnic nationalities that makes up the whole; Leaders-politicians, businessmen and women, academics, entrepreneurs, students, and peasants in the rural areas were much more ready to stare the ship of progress, unity, comradeship, oneness, etc. What seems to be a dream however has become a reality, but the reality on ground today shows a total negation of these, amongst the populace, and our friends.

It is of note today, that Nigeria nation is currently at the verge of disintegration occasioned by incessant killings, corruption, money laundering, nepotism, police brutality, incessant strikes (ASUU, NMA), kidnapping, unwholesome utterances from political office holders that negates unity and co-existence, religious bigotry, terrorists frequent attacks on citizens without meaningful reprisal from the APC-led government of General Mohammadu Buhari (rtd), etc. the lack of leadership routinises governance, its political and creative aspects fade away and it becomes no different from administration- focusing solely on pattern maintenance and repetition of the same.

As regards an overall guiding definition of political leadership for research purposes, cultural context matters in giving substantial content to any definition. For example, in a Russian cultural context, a leader with a sentimental, compassionate or weak character would be rejected as a failure (Volodymyr Zelenskyy's weakness versus Putin's strength as contrasting images).

On the other hand, over-assertive leadership pays little attention to institutional constraints:

it may bring about sudden, unexpected changes, and disrupt the normal flow of the political process, thus detracting from its transparency and/or predictability. Basically, many political leaders appear to be severely lacking in some of the most essential qualities of a good leader, such as integrity, vision and accountability. It's no coincidence that the word "politician" has many negative connotations in Nigeria, but experience tells us that there is only a handful that comes near to the principles of leadership and shows strong indicators of a successful political leader. Political leaders in civilise societies are vital—they

determine the allocation of power and money through governmental policies, establish partnerships with other stakeholders, and make decisions that can have a major effect on a nation's well-being and its citizens.

Essential elements of political leadership

Most researchers agree that the following elements should be taken into account in defining political leadership:

- the personality and traits of a leader(s), including his or her ethical and cultural character,
- the traits and ethical-cultural character of the followers with whom the leader interacts, (keeping in mind that leaders of different followers and followers of different leaders interact as well, cooperatively or competitively),
- the societal or organisational context in which the leader–follower interaction occurs –general culture, political culture, political climate, norms, and institutions,
- the agenda of collective problems or tasks which confront the leaders and followers in particular historical situations,
- the nature of the leader's interpretive judgement since situations do not define themselves, but have to be defined by leaders' insights accepted by the followers,
- the means—material and intangible—that the leaders use to attain their ends and/or their follower's goals; these are 'the techniques which the leader uses to mobilise support on behalf of his or her agenda and/or to maintain support or position' (Peele 2005, 192).

Succinctly, many researchers and authorities have asked questions as to the problems of Nigeria. According to Achebe (1984:1), the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigeria land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership.

What is good leadership and how does it differ from bad leadership? This is an area where empirical political science encounters normative political theory. The terms are loaded. We tend to believe that 'good' leadership should be good both ethically and instrumentally (cf. Ciulla 1998, 13). 'Bad' leadership can be designated as such if it is morally evil, rests on the violation of human dignity and rights (or some variant moral orientation), or caters solely to the egoistic whims and private interests of a ruler. It may also be 'bad' in the sense of being ineffective due to, for example, incompetence, rigidity or intemperance in leaders or followers that interferes with the use of appropriate means to attain the ends sought (Kellerman 2004).

A person with good political leadership skills will prove to be a successful leader who can easily distinguish between success and failure. Effective leaders do not stand behind a group to push and prod; they place themselves before the group as they facilitate progress and inspire the group to accomplish organisational goals. This, however, portrays some distinct qualities performed by effective leadership in furthering human knowledge and understanding about the truism of effective leadership.

Collectively, a political leader's first goal should be representing one's government, not just oneself. Given the reality that politics may be complicated and often messy; a strong leader should balance their actions with what is right for a nation and living by the maxim, "the nation before self." Consequently, a political leader will be able to take severe actions in the interest of the country if required. A leader should be able to recognise unique sector specialists who are confident. More critically, a leader should realise when it is best to believe in authority. Leaders will have the correct expertise to take prompt and reasonable actions based on sound judgment.

A democratic leader should also recognise the benefits and most importantly, the disadvantages of democracy, and guide, honor, and listen to his supporters while encouraging mutual accountability and team-work. Lastly, a political leader should travel widely, attending important gatherings within the country and outside. This is imperative as the leader will establish valuable networks and expertise with other internationally renowned leaders. To put it in a nutshell, a political leader should have a global perspective, and eschew sentiment.

How do we come out of this poor political leadership debacle?

- There is need for a symbiotic relationship between the Nigeria leadership and citizenship upon the infallible foundations of trust, integrity, and unyielding spirits of patriotism, with the aim of establishing strong structures and institutions.
- There is need to entrench the culture and instrumentality of good governance.
- Nigerian government needs to tackle decisively the problem of corruption, poverty and unemployment, nepotism, religious bigotry, and promote accountability and transparency in order to build people's confidence.
- Political leaders should seek true development for the citizenry instead of manipulating poor and illiterate Nigerian youths through economic, ethno-religious means for political gains as these are potentially strong factors that fan the embers of terrorism, civil unrest, and insecurity in the country.
- Nigeria must get its domestic priorities right by examining the outcome of policies from political leadership and its relationship with others.
- Nigeria government should strengthen our educational sector, and embrace human capital development.
- Nigeria government should as a matter of urgency look inward and discard this maxim "winner gets it all".

- Reorientation in the mind of our judiciary and law enforcement agencies the spirit of equal and equal playing ground for all irrespective of one's cultural, political, religious, and ethnic nationalities in our day-to-day activities.
- Lastly, strengthen the value of naira, remove multiple taxation and encourage local production.

Summary and Conclusion

It has been observed that leadership is a dynamic process. It is an essential feature of all government and governance: weak leadership in its own contributes to government failures, and strong leadership is indispensable if the government is to succeed. Good leadership secures prosperity in the long run; foolhardy leadership may bring about a catastrophe. It is simply evidence today that an average Nigeria politician does not know anything about the next generation in his plans, or knows but don't want to follow it, etc. he is only interested about the next election.

The global economies is trembling today because of the unwholesome attitude of our political office holders-particularly in Nigeria who sees political office as an avenue to loot government coffers. The leader-follower relationship is reciprocal and effective leadership is a two-way process which influences both individual and organisational performance. Lord Sieff notes that leadership is usually important at all levels within an organisation-from main board to the shop floor. It is the moral and intellectual ability to visualise and work for what is best for the organisation and its employees.... the most vital thing the leader does is to create team-spirit around him and hear him, not in a scholarly sense alone but in realistic terms. It is a matter of mature adults....and to be effective, leadership has to be seen, and it is best seen in action. What we need now as Nigerians is to enthrone leaders with the passion, clear understanding of issues, respect for the rule of law, sense of justice, understanding the dynamics of forgiveness, that an agile leadership style is required to effectively lead the African people.

Political Leaders in Nigeria needs a new mix of competencies to properly shape their board and develop their subjects to meet the 21st-century challenges-shifting cultures, social-cultural dynamics, rapidly changing technology and other factors therefore, will require new patterns of leadership. Thus, 21st-century leaders will need greater awareness of diverse factors and new sets of competencies characteristics that lead to success in the job to help make relevant, correct and timely decisions in the leadership of change and leadership of people.

The author notes further that total synergy, teamwork and balanced approaches by our political leaders in nation building, and at the same time a change in the mind-set of the masses will enhance, and or improve togetherness, unity, and progressiveness amongst Nigerians, and other African nations.

In this century and beyond, Nigeria needs good and effective leadership that will usher into our politicians and masses the utmost piece to help develop teamwork and the integration

of individual and group's goals. The author concludes with the words of Berton Brecht: "the worst illiterate is the political illiterate. He hears nothing, sees nothing, take no part in political life. He doesn't seem to know that the cost of living, the price of beans, of flour, of rent, of medicines all depends on political decisions. He even prides himself on his political ignorance, sticks out his chest and says he hates politics, that from his political non-participation comes the prostitute, the abandoned child, the robber and, worst of all, corrupt officials, the lackeys of exploitative multinational corporation".

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