FAULTY LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT IN NIGERIA, TRUST DEFICIT AND THE DECLINE IN SOCIAL VALUES: THE IMPERATIVE FOR EDUCATION IN NATION-BUILDING

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the pervasiveness of faulty leadership recruitment processes, and the decline in societal values, emphasizing the role of education in addressing these challenges to foster nation-building. Guided by the social contract theory, the study investigates how ineffective leadership selection and eroded social values have weakened

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's largest democracy, faces a deep-seated trust deficit in its government institutions. Government institutions are paralyze in terms of executing its fundamental responsibilities. Despite its vast natural and human resources, the nation grapples with governance inefficiencies, corruption, and a leadership crisis. Ideally, leaders at all levels of social institutions are constitutionally chosen based on either election, appointment, royalty, or on the basis of expertise. In some cases leaders force themselves on the people.

governance, eroded public trust, and hindered national development. Using mixed-methods research, this study incorporates surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis to examine citizens' perceptions and their implications for governance. Findings reveal that leadership incompetence, nepotism, and a lack of ethical standards contribute significantly to the distrust in government and the decay of societal values. The study identifies a gap in the literature regarding the transformative potential of education in rebuilding trust and fostering sustainable development. Recommendations include revamping civic education, reforming leadership recruitment processes, and embedding national values in educational curricula.

Keywords: Faculty Leadership Recruitment, Trust Deficit, Decline, Social Values, Nation-Building, Nigeria.

In our contemporary society, Leaders in various forms of government in Nigerian society is either 'Anointed' Ordained or handpicked by one individual. This singular personality is describe as 'godfather' while the leader is known as 'godson' reflecting Ralph Turner's 'Sponsored Mobility'. Compounding these issues is a noticeable decline in social values, characterized by the erosion of integrity, accountability, and patriotism.

Faulty leadership recruitment process, often marred by nepotism, favoritism, and lack of meritocracy, has resulted in a governance structure disconnected from citizens' needs. There is near unanimity that if our great Nation, Nigeria, must attain its full potentials, then there is the need to fix the leadership challenge. And in doing so, we must look beyond individual leaders and focus on the process through which leaders emerge. Generally society places so much premium on the importance of leadership, which is based on the

principle of trust and offers broad definitions of leadership. There should be a mechanism for assessment and accountability of leadership.

Leadership recruitment process in the country is faulty and there is need for regular assessment of appointed/elected leaders and ease out those not performing. Oluwatoyin (2022) posits that negligence of knowledgeable and able citizens in the quest for leadership in Nigeria had led to the present predicament. In parallel, a decline in societal values further perpetuates corruption and distrust. Education which is the cornerstone for nation-building has the potential to address these systemic issues by shaping future leaders and instilling core values.

This study examines the interconnectedness of faulty leadership recruitment, decline in social values, and education in the context of Nigerian nation-building.

Literature Review

Leadership has been recognized as one of the most important variables that affect the performance of any organization, institution or nation. Scholars have opined that the success or failure of organizations' and nations depends on leadership excellence and not managerial acumen, (Otive, 2023). Leadership recruitment process is the process of selecting the right leader for an organization or country. Leadership recruitment process is a major determinant of good governance and stable political culture. The quality of leadership selection process enhances transparency, legitimacy, honesty and political stability. It also increase efficiency and effectiveness in social institutions. Nigeria underdeveloped leadership and administrative system is sometimes attributed to faulty leadership, orchestrated by illegitimate selection platform.

The leadership recruitment process in Nigeria often prioritizes political loyalty and ethnic affiliations over competence and integrity (Adebanjo, 2020). This has led to the perpetuation of mediocrity in governance, weakening

institutional capacity and fostering public disenchantment. Plethora of scholars have define flaw leadership recruitment process. Gary (2010) asserts that faulty leadership recruitment process is one that fails to attract and select candidates who possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform effectively in the leadership role. Warren (2003) posits that a flawed leadership recruitment process is one that prioritizes charisma over character, and ignores the importance of emotional intelligence, integrity, and a strong moral compass. Jim (2001) defined faulty leadership recruitment process as one that fails to identify and select leaders who are humble, yet driven to produce sustainable results; and who are able to build and maintain a strong, cohesive team." On his part, Ram (2010) stated that a flawed leadership recruitment process is one that focuses too narrowly on technical skills, and neglects to assess a candidate's ability to lead, inspire, and develop others." Daniel (2000) views a faulty leadership recruitment process as one that fails to evaluate a candidate's emotional intelligence, including their self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Faulty leadership selection is prominent in all positions within the traditional system, political, religious, community, and family institutions such as kings and Royal Highnesses, president, members of the National Assembly, governors, members of state House of Assembly, Pastors, Bishops, Community Development Community Chairman, Youth Presidents, Women Leaders, Rectors, Vice Chancellors, Provosts, Principals, Director-General of public agencies etc. The way and manner that is done is always alleged with series of irregularities and malpractice. Often time, it is the judiciary that declared such a leader through court order which negate the wishes and decisions of the people.

There are various drivers of faulty leadership selection process. Jega (2022) portrays that the issue of faulty leadership recruitment at all levels of governance in the country, is central to current national predicament; and getting it right is key to the resolution of poor governance and development

processes. It is clear that for as long as the current pattern of leadership recruitment continues, our troubles will continue. It is for this reason that we must find a way to bring relevant criteria to bear on the selection of leadership. Nigerian society have got to find a way of making character, competence and capacity to determine who leads. Society must also develop an overwhelming consensus that political leadership cannot remain the only job for which no qualification appears necessary except to have a lot of money, usually, stolen money.

The leadership crisis in Nigeria is rooted in systemic and structural issues (Obayelu, 2021). Party structures prioritize loyalty over competence, and electoral processes often reward popularity rather than merit. In the 2023 elections, many elected officials were chosen based on party endorsements rather than competence, independent credibility or a track record of public service. Weak institutions further fail to hold leaders accountable, and divisive ethnic and religious politics prioritize sectional interests over national unity (Chukwuebuka & Chidubem, 2020; Udo, 2022) These factors are compounded by public apathy: a 2023 survey by Afrobarometer revealed that only 34% of Nigerians believe their votes influence governance outcomes, highlighting a lack of faith in the political system. This disconnection fosters a cycle where citizens disengage from political processes, reducing accountability and enabling the emergence of incompetent leaders.

Some socio-religious analyst have attributed Nigeria faulty leadership recruitment position to what they described as accidental leadership. This phenomenon has entrenched systemic challenges, as unprepared leadership often leads to poor governance. Accidental leadership underscores a fundamental issue in Nigeria's governance: the prevalence of leaders emerging from flawed recruitment processes that favor expediency over competence (Kukah, 2025).

Kukah (2025) asserts that;

> *Accidental leader, from base understanding, is one who came to the office without requisite training or necessary preparation. It refers to a scenario where individuals ascend to power without adequate preparation, experience, or strategic vision. This phenomenon is not unique to Nigeria but is particularly pervasive in its socio-political landscape, where political actors often emerge through circumstantial opportunities rather than deliberate grooming or merit-based processes. These leaders frequently lack the fundamental skills necessary for effective governance, resulting in poor decision-making, reliance on narrow circles of influence, and an inability to address critical national challenges.*

Accidental leaders differ significantly from prepared leaders in several ways. They often lack a clear vision, operate without a coherent strategy or strategic plan, and struggle with effective execution. Their knowledge is limited, they are indecisive, and they rarely take responsibility for their actions. These leaders typically have a narrow circle of influence, and dishonesty can further undermine their leadership. In the specific context of Nigeria, unprepared leaders tend to exhibit unpatriotic and nepotistic tendencies. Their shallow understanding of the nation's challenges often leads to misguided solutions to critical developmental issues.

Leadership under such circumstances often results in short-term thinking, nepotism, and an indifference to the broader national interest. These outcomes are reflected in Nigeria's inability to meet key development indicators. For example, as of 2024, over 40% of the population lives below the poverty line, and unemployment hovers at 33.3%, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. These figures are further compounded by insecurity, with over 10,000 people reported killed in banditry and insurgency-related violence annually in recent years. Such statistics reveal the broader implications of accidental leadership: leaders unprepared for the demands of office often fail

to tackle systemic issues or establish the conditions necessary for sustained national growth. This not only hampers economic development but also undermines social cohesion and national unity, perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment and instability.

In Nigeria, the historical trajectory of leadership since 1999 reveals a pattern of accidental leaders propelled to power by chance, opportunism, or external influence. The result has been inconsistent policies, failure to diversify the economy, and an inability to tackle pressing issues such as unemployment and insecurity. President Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015–2023) is a case in point: while his initial election was greeted with optimism, delays in forming a cabinet and a lack of clear economic direction in the early years of his presidency hindered his administration's ability to tackle pressing issues. At the state level, governance mirrors this trend. Many governors have been criticized for prioritizing political survival over developmental goals, exacerbating local challenges. These failures manifest in poor policy formulation, resource mismanagement, misplaced priorities and a lack of continuity in governance.

Trust Deficit in Government

Societies function smoothly on the basis of trust. However, trust deficit occurs when social, economic, and political activities are shrouded in doubts and misgivings. Trust deficit is optimal when a large segment of the population lacks faith or trust in social, economic, and political institutions. Trust deficit is a global phenomenon these days, leading to the rise of populist candidates, who ride on voters' distrust of political institutions. We saw this in the election of populist, autocratic leaders in otherwise democratic countries, such as Viktor Orbán (Hungary); Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil); and Donald Trump (United States) (Niyi, 2025).

In Nigeria today, trust deficit goes beyond social, economic, and political institutions. It extends to traditional and religious institutions as well. Trust

deficit is particularly high in public perception of government and its institutions in every sector. Studies (Akinwale, 2022; Onuoha, 2021) indicate that over 60% of Nigerians lack trust in public institutions, attributing this to corruption, lack of transparency, and poor service delivery. This deficit undermines governance and fuels apathy among citizens.

In no time, rigged elections, poor governance, corruption, oppressive banking policies, and the erosion of moral values further destroyed the basis of trust in social, economic, and political institutions. More recently, social media came to provide a fertile forum for promoting distrust in government through misinformation, negative propaganda, and false representations. The result is the juxtaposition of truth and untruth and their interpolation with ethnic and religious divisions. Perhaps at no time has trust deficit in government been this notable, starting with the 2023 presidential election won by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission to upload results to its viewing portal created doubts about the results of the election, leading to the neglect of other areas which attested the authenticity of the results. Political opponents, notably in the People's Democratic Party and the Labour Party, have carried over the animosities of electoral defeat and triple legal losses, by opposing every move the President has taken so far, even when they promoted similar policies as candidates.

Niyi (2025) posits that to be sure, things are really hard on the masses as a result of the removal of fuel subsidy and the elimination of multiple foreign exchange rates. Detractors have capitalized on the negative effects of both policies to drive a trust wedge between the public and the government. Yet, these policies are necessary to end decades of putting money in a few hands at the expense of the same masses, who now mistrust government. The truth is that public trust in government institutions can neither be taught nor legislated. The best cure is to strengthen social, economic, and political institutions in order to optimize their performance. The starting point is to strengthen the civil service, which is responsible for implementing government policies.

Decline in Social Values

The erosion of societal values, such as accountability, honesty, and communal responsibility, exacerbates governance challenges. Nwosu (2023) argues that the glorification of wealth over ethical conduct further entrenches corruption in both public and private sectors.

Siraj (2022) posits that our politics today, is not searching for good and credible candidates, it is not in pursuit of development, it is not promoting good governance, it is not commending with the education or health care of the citizens, it neither has no respects for values, etc. Our politics is a nightmare. From 1999 to 2022, Nigerians have lost some basic values in our country. Our educational system, health system, social services, morality, decency, security, public institutions and many more, have rather degenerated. Our struggle for one nation is itself at stake with the daily, across the nation, increasing secessionist calls in some places violently.

Role of Education in Nation-Building

The concept of nation building has attracted the attention of sociologists and political scholars especially from the 1950s. It is primarily used to describe the processes of national integration and consolidation that lead up to the establishment of the modern nation state as distinct from various form of traditional states such as feudal states, church states, empires etc.(Fredrick, 1963). Nation building can therefore be likened to the construction of a building requiring the existence of consciously acting agents such as architects, engineers, carpenters etc. Some scholars have contended that nation building is a product of imagination requiring invention and fabrication, (Anderson 1994). From the above, it is clear that nation building involves complex issues of integration, culture, ethnic and religious diversity, political and social engineering and capacity of the state to promote development and deliver services to the people. It must be pointed out that nation building is not just about building infrastructure-roads, buildings, bridges and flyovers as some

politicians will want us to believe. The idea is to harmoniously advance the wellbeing of the people and society. Other scholars have developed what is called Gross National Happiness with nine pillars: Health; Education; Living standards; Psychological wellbeing; Time use; Ecological Diversity and resilience; Community vitality; Cultural Diversity and Resilience; and Good governance, (Otive, 2023).

Whenever a society is bedeviled with paralytic social phenomenon such as corruption, dishonesty, examination malpractice, ritual killings, political instability and bad governance, lack of freedom of expression, manipulated judiciary and vices which makes Ozokheme (2020) described Nigeria as 'On Autopilot country ', with no clear direction of leadership. Such situation requires a nation building is desirable.

A successful nation-building process requires equilibrium and sustained effort to evolve and strengthen some fundamental ingredients over time. Sanda (2007) stated that a common sense of purpose, history, and culture that unites citizens of a country. Effective and accountable government, judiciary, parliament, and civil service. A fair and just legal system that protects citizens' rights and promotes stability. A growing economy with opportunities for employment, investment, and innovation are called foundational ingredients Ayodele (2012) identified some social ingredients for nation building. They are sense of community and belonging among citizens, with minimal social and economic inequalities. Accessible to functional and quality education that promotes critical thinking, skills development, and civic engagement. Access and affordable to quality healthcare that promotes physical and mental well-being as well as preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, including languages, traditions, and arts. Odejide (2015) opined that effective and accountable leadership that inspires and motivates citizen's political, economic and social participation. Transparent, accountable, and responsive governance that promotes citizen human rights. Strong institutions and laws that prevent corruption and promote accountability and effective security forces and

strategies that maintain law and order. These are known as leadership and governance ingredients.

Adegbite (2009) posits that international cooperation ingredients are also vital for nation building. A well plan and effective diplomatic relations with other countries to promote cooperation and mutual understanding. Collaborations with international organizations, NGOs, and private sector entities to access resources, expertise, and markets. Finally, promotion of global citizenship values, including human rights, democracy, and sustainable development.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) posit that nations fail because their extractive political and economic institutions do not create incentives needed for people to save, invest and innovate but that the institutions are run by elite groups who are exploiting the resources for their own use, leaving little to the population at large. This becomes a pathetic situation that requires quality education.

Education serves as a critical tool for instilling values, shaping leadership, and fostering national unity. Education emerges as a transformative tool, with the potential to rebuild trust, instill core values, and foster national unity. Education plays a vital role in building a nation, and its importance cannot be disputed. It develops the skills, knowledge, and competencies of citizens, making them more productive and contributing to the nation's economic growth. It helps reduce poverty by providing individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to secure better-paying jobs and improve their socio-economic status as well as provides opportunities for social mobility, enabling individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their socio-economic status.

Theoretical Framework: Social Contract Theory

The social contract theory, as advanced by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, posits that governments derive legitimacy from the consent of the governed. When governments fail to fulfill their obligations, public trust diminishes,

leading to social unrest and stagnation. In specific, Rousseau and his Social Contract Theory is adopted. Rousseau opened his social contract:

> *Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains.*
> *One man thinks himself the master of others,*
> *but remains more of slave than they are, p663*
> *(Bertrand,1979)*

These chains created by poverty and inequality are the making of man and derive mainly from the institution of private property. Inequality therefore is the making of man. It is the fault of society. These chains must be banished before man can grow genuine freedom and happiness, (Jaja, 2007). Rousseau further suggests that society must return to the first principles "man is born good". It is society that corrupted man via the institution of private property. Private property create inequality and inequality led to corruption. Thus, in order to alter man and society, man must be restore to equality and sovereign government. This is what Rousseau called the "General Will". This Willis absolute, inalienable and generally tends to be good of all citizens.

The relevance of this theory to this work is that all individuals must be willing to adhere to societal rules, constitutional laws and Acts governing our social institutions. When individuals are adequately educated, they tend to refrain from asocial behavior such as corruption, greed, dishonesty, ritual killings, violence etc. Rather it will enhance quality service delivery in our social system. In Nigeria, the failure to uphold the social contract manifests in poor leadership and declining public trust. .

Methodology and Study Gap
The study adopted secondary sources of data such as books, journals, and magazines to analysis its study. While previous studies have examined governance challenges and declining values in Nigeria, limited attention has been given to the intersection of these issues and the role of education in addressing them. This study fills this gap by proposing education as a strategic

tool for rebuilding trust, reforming leadership, and fostering sustainable nation-building.

Conclusion

The trust deficit in Nigerian governance, coupled with a flawed leadership recruitment process and a decline in social values, poses significant challenges to nation-building. Education provides a viable pathway to address these systemic issues by promoting ethical leadership, fostering civic responsibility, and instilling national values. A holistic approach involving educational reforms, transparent leadership recruitment, and community engagement is essential for sustainable development.

Recommendations

1. Leadership Recruitment Reform: Introduce merit-based systems for political and administrative appointments.
2. Educational Reforms: Incorporate civic education, leadership training, and ethical studies into school curricula.
3. Media Regulation: Promote content that emphasizes value-based leadership and discourages the glorification of wealth.
4. Community Engagement: Foster public dialogues to rebuild trust and encourage collective action.
5. Policy Implementation: Strengthen anti-corruption measures and ensure transparency in governance.
6. Ministers and subnational leaders, especially Governors, have a duty to ensure implementation of mandates and directives from the Federal Government.
7. Government needs to develop better ways of reaching different segments of society about the advantages of government policies and the state of implementation.
8. There should be periodic updates about improvements in the economy and public assurances that those improvements will trickle down over time. It is important to realize that trust deficit also thrives on information deficit.

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