



## ABSTRACT

This study examined political leadership and underdevelopment in Nigeria. The challenges associated with leadership and developments in Nigeria are well documented, especially in this age of globalization. While many tend to blame the North's industrialized western nations, the source of Nigeria's problems lies in the country's own leadership response to critical issues, including poverty, food security, political instability, and technological development. The study takes a form

# POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## Introduction

Leadership is an indispensable factor in every sphere of human life, most especially, the political domain, where the decisions made and actions taken affect every member of the society either directly or indirectly. The success and failure of any nation of the world hinges on the quality of their leaders at the political level. Hence, national development and economic growth is unattainable without good political leadership. This is particularly true since no nation can develop beyond the level of its leadership (Adamaagashi, 2022).

Underdevelopment is a state of poverty and deprivation in which a society's resources are not fully utilized, resulting in lower-than-expected local or regional development. This often manifests as a lack of control over resources and the inability to process natural endowments, causing the society to be both regressive and oppressed. Underdeveloped nations are often characterized by a wide gap between rich and poor populations and trade imbalances, and this unstable situation is often attributed to poor leadership and inadequate



of library research approach where extant literatures were reviewed on the topic under study. The Implication of bad or corrupt political leadership in Nigeria is manifold with effects on all sectors of the country including the economic, political and even social spheres of the nation, and these include economic implication, political implication and social implication. Some of the challenges of leadership impeding national development include; lack of rule of law, absence of transparency and accountability, corruption challenges and lack of ideology. The study recommended among others that there should be absolute practices of the rule of law according to international standards without prejudice and that political leaders should see themselves as servants and not masters.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Political Leadership, Underdevelopment, Corruption

representation of the populace. This has led to economic sabotage and social issues such as prostitution (Obilor & Amadi, 2024).

According to Muhammad and Chikajib (2017), development involves forward progress towards a superior state, encompassing material and non-material aspects of life, including the enhancement of human resources and behavior. Onodugo (2016) viewed development as a qualitative process that enhances the general welfare of a society, resulting in positive changes in various areas of life. There is no universally accepted definition of development, but social science literature has explored its various meanings. Without discussing underdevelopment, conceptualizing development in a nation's context would be difficult if not impossible. Development goes beyond economic and social indicators to include positive changes in a society's overall welfare.

The concepts of development and underdevelopment only apply to nations operating within the capitalist world-economy. It is evident that underdevelopment does not imply a complete lack of progress since all people have advanced in some way or another, to varying degrees. Rather, underdevelopment is valuable as a tool for comparing levels of development. Frank visualizes the world-economy as consisting of two major components: metropolis and satellite. The flow of financial surplus in the global economy is from the satellite or periphery to the core or metropolis, an arrangement that systematically facilitates this transaction (Obilor & Amadi, 2024).

The reason underdeveloped nations become and remain underdeveloped is that they are economically dominated by developed capitalist nations that consistently extract wealth from them, a phenomenon that Frank terms the development of underdeveloped. Nigeria's case is an instance of this. Nigeria's economy primarily produces raw materials



for export to developed countries. Nigeria has put continuous effort into hastening development and restructuring its economy. Unfortunately, the outcomes of such endeavors have largely been uninspiring. A swift evaluation of the Nigerian economy reveals that its core features have not evolved significantly from the situation in the 1960s, and the situation is arguably deteriorating rather than improving (Ogbeidi, 2020).

United Nations experts define an underdeveloped country as having a low per capita real income compared to developed regions like the United States, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe. Underdevelopment is characterized by inadequate economic development and low productivity levels. The term can also refer to a country that has not yet reached full economic maturity. Underutilization of resources can cause a lack of job opportunities, healthcare, and basic necessities. Different scholars have their own definitions of underdevelopment. Nigeria is an underdeveloped economy that relies on external factors for finished goods. The per capita income in 1998 was \$258 and \$300 in 2003. According to TEGMM, the per capita income will reach \$2400 and \$2500 by 2022 and 2023. Manufacturing accounts for less than 10% of the GDP, while crude oil accounts for over 90% of export earnings. Widespread poverty is a visible problem that has worsened since independence in 1960 (Onodugo, 2016). According to Ogbeidi (2020), weak and arbitrary colonial rule is the root cause of underdevelopment in Nigeria. There is evidence linking a country's past colonial experience to its current level of economic development. According to Oyekanmi (2022), Nigeria's problem with underdevelopment is due to relying too much on external factors and not developing independent socio-economic plans. The global capitalist system, established through colonialism, perpetuates underdevelopment and can only be overcome by freeing oneself from capitalist exploitation.

### **Methodology**

The study takes a form of library research approach where extant literatures were reviewed on the topic under study.

### **Political Leadership**

Leadership with regard to this article is focused on political constitutional leadership with basic ingredients such as strong democratic values, rule of law, political stability etc. The focus here is on economic development which is the bed rock of the other kinds of development. Therefore the leadership in the context is constitutional-political leadership based on sound democratic system as rated by global standard. Any economy that is independent, industrial, high human development index, current technological standard



etc is developed or trying to break out of underdevelopment. This is what every political leader seeks to achieve (Udofia & Edem, 2024).

Policies that lead to economic development are greatly influenced by the ideology of the leader. Political leadership and personalities of the leaders are some of the several factors influencing policy. The world views every leader with the side of his ideology. Ideology is the basic or principle guiding the action of any leader “as a self-containing and self-justifying belief system that incorporates an overall world view and provides a basis for explaining all of reality” such ideologies include: liberalism, nationalism, fascism, communism, capitalism, socialism etc. These ideologies are the basis which political leaders take sides hence policies that affect or give economic direction of a country.

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

Political leadership is the act of leading a political entity or occupying a political position. This according to Abah and Nwoba (2016) describes democratically elected representatives who are vulnerable to reselection, and operate within, as well as influence a constitutional and legal framework. They have the mandate to govern the state by the electorates. Though, this definition is restricted as it favours only political leaders who are elected; excluding those appointed and those emerged through coup, in the case of the military, Anazodo, Agbionu and Uche (2022) noted that the political leaders are ruling class who have the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources in a political entity (country) by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision-making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory.

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

Anazodo, Agbionu and Uche (2022) stated that in Nigeria, most of the policy makers as well as those involved in decision making is engaged in bribery, egoism, power, and trade liberalization. Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto and Nkiah (2015) stated that the Nigerian State is



a victim of high-level corruption, bad governance, political instability, and a cyclical legitimacy crisis. The country's authoritarian leadership faced a legitimacy crisis, political intrigues, in an ethnically differentiated polity, where ethnic competition for resources drove much of the pervasive corruption, and profligacy. Furthermore, Lawal (2020) noted that corruption and lack of vision among past and present leaders of Nigeria culminate to hamper any meaningful effort in the quest for development in Nigeria.

### **Political Leadership and Underdevelopment: Nigeria Perspective**

Nigeria political system can be termed to be developing. Democracy has been in existence in Nigeria for the past twelve years consecutively by counting from President Olusegun Obasanjo's era till date. Since President Obasanjo's era, democracy has continued to exist in Nigeria. This article is to give indication whether this is growth of democracy or decline. Lawal (2020) views democracy thus "as a system of government based on the acquisition of authority from the people, the institutionalization of rule of law, the emphasis on the legitimacy of rulers, the availability of choice and cherished values (including freedom), and accountability in governance" the above insight of democracy and more will give the guide to decide the growth and decline of democracy in Nigeria". Of course the bulk of the success or failure rest on the political leader. Inequality, investment, security, foreign policy, international relation, insurgency, poverty, literacy and infrastructure will assist in determining the level of growth of democracy

Democracy came into existence after the military rule on May 29, 1999 led by President Olusegun Obasanjo termed the forth republic. The state of the economy before then was retrogressive. Obasanjo came up with economic development plans such as (NEED), National Economic Empowerment Development, Strategy Economic Empowerment Development, (SEED) and Local Economic Empowerment Development (LEED) amongst others. The questions therefore are: were the policies achieved or successful? was he able to keep to his campaign promises? did the poverty level reduce etc?

Then came President Shehu Musa Yar'Adua who came into the presidency through the first democratically transited government. Yar'Adua became the first president to take over power from a civilian president in Nigeria. He came up with 7 point agenda on economic policies as he assumed office on May 29, 2007. The seven point agenda consisted of power and energy, food security and agriculture, wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reform, security, qualitative and functional education and pursuance of the rule of law. Yar'Adua added that his administration will focus on accelerating economic and other reforms in a way that makes a concentrate and visible difference to ordinary people. The proposed plan looked lofly and perfect to



enhance economic development that will take Nigeria to the global stage. Unfortunately he did not live to see the conclusion of the program (Anekwe, 2020).

President Goodluck Jonathan's 9 point agenda include; rebuilding the North, ridding the region of boko haram, the inclusion of best materials from the North in his government, completion of power projects that will lift the power supply, the commercialization of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), reducing the number of out-of-school children in the North and across the country and strengthening the health sector, as well as move the strategic appointment of women in the cabinet (Nigeria tribunal). The plan or agenda was however supposed to be in second term plan should he have succeeded. Since the recent democratic governments of twelve years there are basic national issues that each government or political leader tries to tackle. Such include; failed public enterprise, deplorable state of infrastructure, poor power situation, obsolete educational facilities, instability of the currency, abject poverty, high cost of living, income inequality, high rise in insurgency, tribal killing, religious violence, insecurity, poor health facilities etc (Paul, 2020).

### **The Implication of Poor Political Leadership in Nigeria**

The Implication of bad or corrupt political leadership in Nigeria is manifold with effects on all sectors of the country including the economic, political and even social spheres of the nation.

#### **a. Economic Implication**

There is no gainsaying that the formalized or entrenched culture of corruption among the political elites in the country has affected every sector of the Nigerian state. One of the devastating consequences of corrupt political leadership in Nigeria is stunted growth and economic underdevelopment. Corruption in the political leadership of the country slows down economic growth and hinders foreign investment. Economic growth and development in Nigeria for over twenty years has been soiled with misappropriation and embezzlement of funds even with the return of democracy, turning the country's economy into an underdeveloped nation with least position in international ratings (Anekwe, 2020).

Corrupt political leadership has forestalled the country's match to greatness and has impeded economic progress. When money which should be used for public good has been diversified for selfish purpose, the masses suffer. The fact that many Nigerians live in penury and below poverty level in a country immensely endowed with natural resources amount to monumental injustice, and failure of leadership. As Anazodo, Agbionu and Uche (2022) have rightly said, if the amount





of illegal resources acquired by those occupying political positions in country is ploughed into some key sectors of the economy like education, health, agriculture, human capital development, infrastructure and power, the nation would have been rated among the most economically developed countries of the world. Hence, corruption among the political leaders leads to poor economic growth rate as reflected in poor Gross Domestic Product as well as poor infrastructural development, while also causing the underutilization of both natural and human resources.

**b. Political Implication**

Political corruption undermines democracy and good governance by flouting or even subverting formal processes. It results in various forms of electoral malpractices that jeopardize smooth electoral processes. Corruption in the political leadership of the country reduces accountability and distorts representation in policymaking, compromises the rule of law and results in the inefficient provision of services. More generally, corruption erodes the institutional capacity of government if procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned off, and public offices are bought and sold. Political corruption undermines the legitimacy of government and such democratic values as trust and tolerance as well as accountability to those governed (Anekwe, 2020).

**c. Social Implication**

Corruption among the political leaders has affected the social fabric of the nation. Corruption is a socially negative phenomenon that is characterized by the deviation from the value-oriented and norm-adjusted way of promoting the interests and the needs of the society (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic np.). Corrupt political leadership breeds inequality, with majority living in poverty and others swimming in affluence. Due to this, social vices such as kidnapping, armed robbery, etc. are heightened as people device other illegitimate ways to earn a living. Corruption in Nigeria has become so pervasive to the extent that young men and women do not see the essence of doing the right thing or going to school to learn because they see daily how illiterates and half-baked educated ones control billions of naira while the highly educated once conducting research that is contributing to advancement of knowledge and the society are looked at with scorn.

**Corruption, Leadership and Underdevelopment**

Corruption is a word that has been defined differently by both practitioners and academicians who study it, depending largely on the individual's cultural background,



discipline and political leaning. However, the word corruption may be used to explain acts that mean abuse of public office for private gain. It becomes glaring when a public official experiences a conflict of interest in scenarios of having to exercise the powers of public office in the public interest on the one hand, and personal interest in attaining private gain on the other hand. Corrupt acts then imply exploiting one's public position, the commonwealth and power for personal benefits (Shettima, 2023)

The public-private sphere analysis captured in the World Bank view is accentuated in the opinion of Udofia (2020) who sees corruption as "any anti-social behaviour or illegal act, which involves inducement or undue influence of people either in the public setting or the private sphere to act contrary to the extant rules and regulations which normally guide a particular process". Its meaning is summarised in anti-social behaviours such as fraudulent acts, theft, embezzlement (misappropriation of non-private resources) and bribery (payments aimed at attaining a benefit or escaping a bad outcome).

Anekwe (2020) sees corruption manifesting in three different ways; political corruption which takes place at the highest levels of political authority with telling effects on decision making. It happens when public policy makers, saddled with the task of formulating, establishing and implementing decisions relating to governance on behalf of the people, are themselves corrupt. It manifests in the manipulation of public institutions and rules of procedure. Electoral corruption is the buying of votes, special favours or promises of votes, and bureaucratic corruption is the low levels or street levels corruption, which the citizen's experience in schools, hospitals, even with the citizen's interaction with the police. An example is when one obtains a business from the public sector without passing through the appropriate procedure.

Political corruption then can be said to connote any unauthorised, non-legal and unethical misuse of public position for self-benefit. The word 'political' in this context refers to public affairs including official resources, wealth and state institution. In other words, 'political' here connotes official, public (non-private) and governmental in character. Thus, the most adversely affected victims of political corruption are usually the citizens of a defined political territory and public affairs in general (Abah & Nwoba, 2016).

The effects of corruption on a nation have also been classified into economic, social and political. In the economic realm, corruption depletes a nation's wealth and increases the costs of goods and services. Socially, corruption discourages people to work together for a common good and encourages frustration and general apathy among the people, as well as widens the gap of social inequality between the rich and the poor. On the political side, corruption impedes democracy and the rule of law. It also results in cynicism, reduced interest in political participation and political instability (Adamaagashi, 2022).





Leadership on the other hand has been severally defined such that it becomes increasingly difficult to arrive at a definite working definition. For instance, one could define it as the ability to inspire confidence and support among those whose competence and commitment determine performance. It has also been referred to as “the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in efforts towards goal achievement in a given situation”. Leadership is an important element in the social interactions of groups whether in public or private setting, as it makes all the difference in the fortunes of any social group, be it a family unit, a business corporation or a nation. Groups need leaders and leaders need followers (Lawal, 2020).

Over time, the conception of leadership has moved from an elitist activity related to power and hierarchy, essentially top-down, charismatic, and individualistic process, inbred and congenital potential possessed by a minority to a relationally dynamic activity in which people interact and attempt changes aimed at utilizing their knowhow in shaping their world. Leadership is both a relation and a process. It is a relation between persons who are engaged, together, in some cooperative activity or set of activities to achieve a common goal. It is a multilevel web of social influence by which the accomplishment of an end is pursued through the influence of many people by one person. Leaders essentially direct the workings of the collective towards attaining a jointly shared end. It requires explicit organizational ability, strategic thinking and character laced with vision and goodwill. It is then expected that one who carries the leadership responsibility must, inter alia, possess traits of tact, vision, charisma, character and goodwill as team members expectedly ascribe leadership to individuals they trust in positively shaping the attainment of desired ends (Muhammad & Chikajib, 2017).

Development and underdevelopment on the other hand can be viewed as two sides of a coin, with a movement from one necessitating moving a nation towards the other. It places attention on issues of development in the impoverished regions and countries of the world, representing a substantial size of the world’s geographical divisions, and traversing considerable part of global annals. Events across the world present cases of a highly unbalanced and unequal international system where many societies are abjectly poor while some exude wealth in proportions.

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

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



judiciary through patronage appointments, and judicial administration is marked by weak enforcement capacity (Lawal, 2020).

- **Absence of Accountability and Transparency:** lack of openness and accountability remain a frightening legacy of the Nigerian leadership since 1960 to date. Anekwe (2020) stated that a country where corruption is entrenched can never have a transparent and accountable system. Anekwe (2020) explained that an accountable government is one that is responsive to the demands of the citizen. Accountability is best enforced through the instrument a judiciary and the rule of law. But, unfortunately the Nigeria judiciary seem to have lost her independence and the rule of law in Nigeria is worse than epileptic.
- **Corruption Challenges:** No doubt, corruption is endemic in every society but, currently, Nigeria ranks very high in the league of corrupt nations. The ex-British Prime Minister David Cameron also affirmed to this by stating that, Nigeria is a “fantastically corrupt”, with corrupt leaders. Corruption is one of the greatest threats to good governance today and have hampered in the country. It socioeconomic growth especially as economic growth and development in Nigeria for over twenty years has been stalled with misappropriation and embezzlement of funds even with the return of democracy (Paul, 2020).
- **Lack of Ideology:** The lack of ideology is the tragedy of our politics since 1999. An ideology is a collection of ideas or beliefs shared by a group of people. Anekwe (2020) stated that in Nigeria, the political elites constitute a nonproductive class who rely on the control of state structures to access economic rewards. The over-politicization of the Nigerian state is also understood in the context of the unmediated struggle for power, influence and patronage. The nature of political contest ensured the emergence of a local governing class without ideological commitment. Rather than pursue political contests within ideological frameworks, politics became a contested terrain for shallow, self-centred political gains.

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

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The present day democracy in Nigeria has had political leaders who have focused on economic development as part of their plans to move the nation forward. However, these plans have not still changed the position of Nigeria from what it used to be from a dependent nation to a developed state. Such indices of economic underdevelopment still prevails such as lack of rule of law, poor level of investment and industrialization, brain drain, poor infrastructure, insecurity, poverty, illiteracy etc.



Consequently, the following recommendations are given:

- i. There should be absolute practices of the rule of law according to international standards without prejudice.
- ii. Political leaders should see themselves as servants and not masters.
- iii. Economic development plan should be void of sentiments and should not be politicized rather professionalism and merit should lead the way to economic development.
- iv. Security challenges should be handled professionally and tactfully to boost the confidence of investors.

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