VOL. 09 NO. 6,
AUGUST, 2025
E-ISSN 3027-1401
P-ISSN 3026-9148

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of Arts and Sociological Research (JASR)

Political Leadership and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

***Vin Jonathan Chidomere Egesi, Ph.D; **Enwerem Prince O.; *Emenyeonu Immaculata; & ***Obi-Ifeanyichukwu Sharon - El B**

*Imo State Polytechnic Omuma, Oru East, Imo State Nigeria. **Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Imo State University, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. ***Alvan Ikoku University of Education, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria
Corresponding Author: joegesi2001@yahoo.com
DOI: **https://doi.org/10.70382/ajasr.v9i6.059**

Abstract

This study focused on political leadership and socio-economic development in Nigeria. The study was carried out to determine how the Nigeria political leaders have contributed in stabilizing the Nigeria economy. Social contract and vacuum filling theories were used for the study. The study used descriptive research design and secondary data were collected and used. It was discovered that there is need to effectively use political leadership in human capital development; and infrastructural development of Nigeria. Based on that, it was recommended that corruption must be eliminated to its bearest minimum, if possible eradicated. Adequate punishment should be given to offenders to serve as deterrent to others. As that will help to improve socio-economic development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Political Leadership, Socio-Economic Development, Nigeria Economy, Human Capital Development and Infrastructural Development.

Introduction

Nigeria gained independence on October 1st 1960 after hundred years of British dominance of economic and political affairs. Nigeria had the control, power and authority to stir economic, political, and social affairs of the country so as to bring about development. Nigeria assumed a new governance status in 1999 following the

collapse of authoritarian regime in the country (Chukwuka, 2023). Military dictatorship was replaced by representative democracy with the hopes and aspirations of good governance. The country appears to have remained backwards on social, economic, and political developments whereby its resultant effects include political instability, acute youth unemployment, abject poverty, heightened crime rate, poor health prospects and widespread malnourishment, corruption, among others. If Nigeria must achieve socio-economic or sustainable development, there must be good leadership in the country. Socio-economic development here is the improvement in human capital and infrastructural development of the country and sustainable development means an ability to improve the already development efforts and make it to last long for future generation (Akachi, 2024).

Socio-economic development has been the focus of many countries, especially the developing countries like Nigeria. Any country that wants to achieve strategic development and sustainability must be able to utilize good leaders in the country. This is true because good leaders are the instruments for national development and transformation (Ubah, 2023). The pride of any government is the attainment of higher value level of socio-economic development in such a way that its citizens would derive natural attachment to governance. However, for a nation to be in a phase of national development there must be some pre-requisites, which include socio-political stability. Socio-economic development is essential and critical to growth and sustenance of any county. In order to successfully enhance meaningful national development, it becomes imperative for the citizenry of such country to have a good leader. In this same vein, Gboyega (2023) captures socio-economic development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications.

It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and 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 political leaders should be effective so as to promote national development in Imo State in particular and Nigeria in general. Political leadership is all about the process of governing the country to achieve development objectives (Ubah, 2018). The political leaders in the country through election or appointment have the power and authority to direct the affairs of the country manage its resources and perform functions based on the authoritative allocation of value for national development in the country.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The Concept of Leadership

Many scholars and writers have given different explanation on leadership. According to Akanwa (2009), leadership can be described as a process of influence on a group in a particular situation at a given point in time and a specific set of circumstances that stimulate people to strive willingly to attain organizational objectives. High quality leader-follower relationships have been found to have impact on development and stability of an organization. According

to Katz, leadership is an increment component that centres on the existence, survival and functioning of any group or organization. Yurl (2019) defined leadership as the process of influencing the subordinate in such a way that the subordinate is inspired to achieve his target. Ogbeidi (2012) portends that leadership is a process of social influence by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs a country in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. 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. Udotai (2020) define Leadership as a process of social influence whereby a Leader steers members of a group towards a goal. Leadership here involves influence. It is concerned with how the Leader affects followers and the leader is the focal point. Musselman and Hughes (2017) also see leadership as implying a purposeful direction of the affairs of the Led. Leadership is all about influence. Udeagba (2019) defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

Ikporukpo (2013) define Leadership as interpersonal influence exercised in situation and directed through communication process, toward the attainment of goals. Shakleman (2016) defined Leadership as the art of mobilizing in a least cost manner to achieve a clear goal. This concept can be enlarged to imply not only willingness to work but also willingness to work with zeal and confidence. To lead is to guide, conduct, direct and proceed. Leaders act to help a group achieve objectives with the maximum application of its capabilities. Ogbonna (2009:16) defines an effective leader as "an individual with the capacity to consistently succeed in a given condition and be viewed as meeting the expectations of an organization or society". Akubuiro (2009:37), defines a leader as one who stands out with qualities that influence others towards achieving goals, he performs the task roles (like encourager, harmonizer, standard and pace setter) and individual roles like (aggressor, dominator).

Concept of Political Leadership

According to Ogbeidi (2012), 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 organized territory. This includes people who hold decision making positions in government, and people who seek those positions, whether by means of election, coup d' etat, appointment, electoral fraud, conquest, right of inheritance or other means. For Akachi (2024), 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.

While Agena and Odoh (2005), see political leadership as a government that runs a country through democratic leadership or other acceptable forms. According to Oke (2020:128)

"political leadership involves the opportunity to participate in decision making in the political process". It repudiates arbitrariness and authoritarianism. It extols the consent of the governed and it protects human personality and values (Ake, 1991). political leadership, whether liberal, African or modern, includes equal opportunity for all, fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty, representativeness, majority rule, minority rights, popular consultation, right of choice between alternative programmes, consensus on fundamental issues, as well as essentially periodic elections (Oke, 2005). The concept of political leadership confers the opportunity to participate in decision making by all.

Nwolise (2006) asserts that good political leadership requires that elections be conducted peacefully, freely fairly and regularly; an incumbent democratic government defeated in office through a free and fair electoral process should accept the results; the society enjoys longevity of regular democratic; elections and government; the society progressively develops its capacity to nurture and consolidate democratic culture and democratic governance; there should be no threats to abort or actual abortion of democratic governance and culture. There are many types of political leadership. They include;

1. **Autocratic leadership:** Autocratic managers are classic "do as I say" types. Typically, these managers are inexperienced with management thrust upon them in the form of a new position or assignment that involves people management. Autocratic leaders retain for themselves the decision-making rights. They can damage an organization irreparably as they force their 'followers' to execute strategies and services in a very narrow way, based upon a subjective idea of what success looks like. There is no shared vision and little motivation beyond coercion. Commitment, creativity and innovation are typically eliminated by autocratic management. In fact, most followers of autocratic management can be described as biding their time, waiting for the inevitable failure this management produces and the removal of the leader that follows (Michael, 2010).
2. **Democratic leadership:** Tannenbanum and Schmidt (2008) describe democratic management as one where decision-making is decentralized and shared by subordinates. The potential for poor decision-making and weak execution is, however, significant here. The biggest problem with democratic management is its underlying assumption that everyone has an equal stake in an outcome as well as shared levels of expertise with regard to decisions. That is rarely the case. While democratic leadership sounds good in theory, it often is bogged down in its own slow process, and workable results usually require an enormous amount of effort.

Socio-Economic Development

Obasanjo and Akin (2011) define socio-economic development as a process, which is concerned with peoples' capacity in a defined area over a defined period to manage and induce positive change, namely to predict, plan, understand and monitor change and reduce or eliminate unwanted or unwarranted change. In other words, development concerns people, since they constitute a repository of energy for development and it is the careful release of this

energy that constitutes development. According to them, development entails several aspects. It is not only about consuming, it is also about producing. However, it is concerned with creation by people themselves of technology, which is required for development, as well as development, by people of the capacity to manage their own affairs.

Similarly, Sanda (2015:1-3) assert that socio-economic development is a transitional process, which sustains a multifaceted improvement in human conditions, which result from structural and functional changes in social, economic, political, techno-scientific as well as other spheres of human existence. Soyombo (2015), whilst explaining socio-economic development, defines it as qualitative and quantitative improvement in the living conditions of people of a state in line with national objectives, as indicated in its national development plans. He argues that rapid improvement of the standard of living of the average Nigerian has always been a major objective of the country's national development plans. According to him, other key objectives of the development plans include: Reduction in the level of unemployment; equitable distribution of income; reduction in the incidence of poverty; improvement in the quality of life of the people; more employment opportunities; greater access to and ownership of houses; and access to basic necessities of life such as qualitative health services, potable water, education and electricity.

It is when these objectives are achieved that one can talk of national development. According to Sanda (2015), socio-economic development entails normative and organizational changes in society which result in:

1. Improvement and expansion of the mental horizon of the population arising from functional education, and
2. Sustenance of positive and highly functional values, customs and practices regarding all aspects of life and living.

The Roles of Political Leadership in Nigeria Socio-Economic Development

The roles are discussed thus:

1. **Diversification of Nigeria economy:** It is the role of Nigeria political leaders to diversify Nigeria economy so that the country can earn revenue through other sources – such as agriculture, industrialization etc (Nwolise, 2006) and not only oil sector. This is the only way to recover from the present economic recession in Nigeria.
2. **Promoting competitive federalism in Nigeria:** The Nigerian political leaders have the function of promoting economic development in Nigeria by encouraging true/ competitive federalism in the country (Yurl, 2019). This entails allowing ethnic nationalities/states to harness the resources within their environment and give federal government some percentage.
3. **Promoting democratic practices in the country:** The practice of democracy promotes national development (Akanwa, 2009). Therefore, the Nigeria political leaders have the function to encourage, promote and sustain democratic practices so as to achieve national development in Nigeria.

4. **Making/implementing favourable economic policies:** Nigeria has made numerous policies since independent aimed at enhancing economic development. But, the area of implementation has been problematic (Ikporukpo, 2013). Therefore, the political leaders should make policies and implement it so as to reduce unemployment in Nigeria, reduce poverty in Nigeria, encourage industrialization in Nigeria and encourage national development.
5. **Encouraging industrialization/export:** it is the role of political leaders in Nigeria to encourage industrialization and promote the export of industrial products as that will serve as avenue for economic/national development in the country.
6. **Accountable leadership:** For purpose of clarity, "accountable leadership" simply means responsible governance, that is, a government that recognizes the superior authority of the people and is willing to submit to this authority as may be expressed in the constitution, the laws of the land and democratic principles. It can be seen as a means to an end-good governance, which in a simple sense can be used to indicate the extent to which the government lives up to the expectations of the people and meets the needs of the generality of the people (Omololu, 2016).

Sections 14(1) (2) (a-b) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria states that:

1. The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principle of democracy and social justice.
2. It is hereby, accordingly, declared that: Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this constitution derives all its powers and authority; the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government; and the participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of this constitution.

In spite of the above unambiguity, all efforts at development have not yielded the desired results even from successive governments. The country remains largely underdeveloped; the quality of life of most Nigerians has remained largely low. All indices of development have weighed heavily against Nigerians (Torulagha, 2011). Is it per capita income, life expectancy, mortality rate, etc? The rising spate of insecurity and its attendant consequences on development has called to questioning the leadership capability and capacity in Nigeria. Disturbingly, Achebe (2013) provides an answer to the Nigerian predicament when he asserted that 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 Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership.

Major Factors Affecting Political Leadership and Nigeria Socio-Economic Development

These are the major factors affecting political leadership and Nigeria socio-economic development. They are:

1 **Insecurity:** The high level of terrorism (Boko Haram/Fulani herdsmen) in Nigeria is a great challenge to election and democratic consolidation in the country.

1. **High level of unemployment:** One of the major causes of crime in Nigeria is because of the youth unemployment. This is affecting the sustainability of our democracy in Nigeria (Ubah, 2018).
2. **Bad economic conditions:** Our economy is not improving. Just few months ago, our naira value was down in favour of dollar. The bad economic situation has effects on our democratic sustainability.
3. **Election irregularities:** Election rigging and it's concomitant effects are the greatest obstacles to the successful operation of democracy in Nigeria. Electoral malpractices have been the order of the day in Nigeria. There exist thuggery, falsification of election results, intimidation of voters and other forms of electoral vices. Commenting on Nigeria election, Odey (2015) noted that they are not peaceful they are not free, they are not fair. The political thuggery of the last election made many voters to stay in their homes instead of going out to be shot or injured.
4. **Absence of rule of law:** Absence of the rule of law in Nigeria is another problem affecting the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. Rule of law, implies the supremacy of the law and absence of arbitrary government. In Nigerian's legal system, law is not supreme; law in Nigeria is often manipulated to the advantages of the rich in the society. Very often, our government acts arbitrary.
5. **No proper separation of power:** Sustainability of democracy requires that the three arms of government should be separated and that they function in co-ordinate relationship. The absence of rule of law in Nigeria hinders this.
6. **Ethnic rivalry/crisis:** In another dimension, rivalry among the ethnic groups during elections in Nigeria to enthrone their own man also affects democracy. Commenting this, Amujiri (2003) noted that the nurturing of ethnic differences and the ever rising of ethnic affiliation have made Nigerians view themselves through tribal lens and this had hindered our efforts toward genuine national integration.
7. **No national integration:** National integration is very essential for the survival of democracy in Nigeria. Lack of national integration had resulted to poor national consciousness and all sorts of sabotage against sustainable democracy.
8. **High level of corruption:** Bribery and corruption among the public office holders also hinder-survival of democracy in Nigeria, pervades all strata of the society from the highest level of the political and business to the ordinary person in the village. Corruption exist when public fund are embezzled by people in government or it's agencies, when bribe is demanded before performing a formal duty in public offices, admission into schools, when lawful acts is covered because bribe is given or certain interest are protected etc. Eze (2005) noted that corruption is inimical to sustainable democracy, since it places some people above the law and encourage illegality.
9. **High poverty rate:** Poverty is another barrier it successful operation of democracy in Nigeria. Nigeria is one of the moist poorest national in the world notwithstanding her

enormous wealth of natural resources. Agreeing with this statement, Njoku (2010) noted that despite our huge resources, majority of Nigerian up to 70 million people are still living in a state of abject poverty. Poverty has also contributed to illiteracy and ignorance and political apathy among the citizens. All these factors influence successful operation of democracy in Nigeria.

10. **Lack of independent of judiciary:** Interference with the judiciary in Nigeria is another barrier towards sustainable democracy. Under government pressure, the judiciary had given court judgment contrary to the rules of law and law of equity.
11. **Poor political education:** Poor political education among the Nigerian citizenry has resulted to poor national democratic society where the masses suffer from oppression, injustice, and exploitation. Poor political education may result to situation which breeds ethnocentrism, sectionalism, ethnicity as well as less commitment to national problems.
12. **Religious conflict:** Religious conflict and ethnic crisis are so frequently and divesting in Nigeria that are threatening the co-existence of individuals in the society and the nation at large. Ugwu (2014) observed that Nigeria as one of countries where religious has wrecked havoc on the unity and prosperity of her citizens. The treat on peace caused by ethno-religious violence, makes it difficult for democracy to survive.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the researcher employed social contract and vacuum filling theories.

Social Contract Theory

Thomas Hobbes propounded the social contract theory in 1651. He posits that each man in the society surrenders all his rights to the community; the community is therefore sovereign and its power absolute. However, it is the act of the people that establishes Government. People enter into social contract among themselves and between them and Government whereby they agree to surrender certain rights to the state in return for security and the protection of their inalienable rights. These rights include the right to life, property and liberty. All men are born with these rights equally and the Government must protect them. Where the Government fails to do so, the citizens reserve the right to challenge its authority and if necessary, overthrow it. Thus, the citizens retain the supreme power to hire and fire.

This is to say that in an effort to have an organized society, people started organizing themselves together in order to solve their problems. This is how government originated. To make the government effective, people started electing or appointing representatives to head them. This is in form of contract. This is to make sure that the contract between the people and government is effective hence the government needs to be effective to protect lives and property, provide infrastructural facilities for the people and enhance the living standard. Therefore, social contract theory originate based on the needs to enhance unity, progress, peace and development of the society. The contract is between the government and the

governed. The government is focused on protecting lives and properties and enhancing the economic, socio-cultural and political development of the society.

While the governed focused on contributing for the governance by paying taxes/revenue and obeying the laws of the land. Social contract theory was adopted because the government of the country is under contract with the people and is focused on development of the entire society. In the Nigerian case, the federal, states and local governments has the contract (based on the election that brought them into power/oath of office) to provide social amenities and promote all aspects of development in the Nigerian society. However, this theory was found suitable to the study as it holds that the legitimacy of a leader and its power to govern a people depends on their consent. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the leader to perform for the people, much as it is the responsibility of the people to monitor the activities of the political leaders which allows sustainable development in the country.

The Vacuum-Filling Theory

This theory was propounded by Ugwulebo in 2003 in his book titled "religious crisis in Nigeria". According to Ugwulebo (2003), vacuum – filling theory aims at explicating and bringing to bear why people, especially those in high places, the political leaders behave the way they do. In other words, the theory wants to unearth what these people do not want to say but have as the foundation bedrocks of their policies. It aims at looking at the reasons behind the offered reason or reason guiding certain actions. Invariably, this theory is a system of articulated and thinking aloud for those concerned. The vacuum-filling theory can be used to explain the various ineffective political leadership in Nigeria, which has negatively affected the Nigerian political development. This theory was used because there is a great vacuum between what the political leaders promise the public and what they do when they get to power. This is true because the theory focused on the need to understand the behavior and inconsistent way of life of our political and economic leaders (including government institutions). In this direction, the people elected the political leaders to enhance good governance. The leaders at that time normally give many promises to deliver democratic dividend to the people. However, there is a very big vacuum between what these leaders promised and their practical performance in office. There is also a very big vacuum between the "said" manifestoes of the political leaders and their actual performance. This theory is in line with subject matter and was adopted because according:

1. There is usually a gap or difference between what people (government) promise and what they actually do.
2. On assumption of office (by leaders), there is a gap between what the leaders promise the people and what they actually do in practical.
3. There is also a gap in what people need and what is provided (in terms of development).
4. The promises made to the masses heighten expectations which are usually dashed with reckless impunity on assumption of office.

5. Because of the gap between what the leaders ought to do and what they actually do, coupled with the heightened expectations, bottled up aggression results looking for escape routes.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on political leadership and socio-economic development in Nigeria. The study was carried out to determine how the Nigeria political leaders have contributed in stabilizing the Nigeria economy. It was discovered that there is need to effectively use political leadership in human capital development; and infrastructural development of Nigeria. For that, the effect of leadership in socio-economic development cannot be over emphasized in the sense that poor leadership has crippled most nation, "like the words of John Maxwell “There is no success without a successor. No nation can grow without good leadership". It could be concluded here that the military leadership helped in uniting Nigeria, but the civilian leadership is more focused in the development of Nigeria. In spite of a robust endowment in national and human resources, the level of poverty of her people stands in contrast to the country’s enormous wealth. This is simply because the country’s wealth only revolves around few Nigerians while greater majority of the citizenry languish in extreme and abject poverty. This situation has been a worrisome issue and it’s like bad leadership is a contributory factor to this problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, we recommend the following:

1. Corruption must be eliminated to its beeriest minimum, if possible eradicated. Adequate punishment should be given to offenders to serve as deterrent to others. This will help to effectively improve the socio-economic development of Nigeria.
2. The present administration should show positive commitment to effective leadership. The challenge of insecurity should be handled by the government so as to enhance development and promote progress in the country.

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