

**LEADERSHIP BY DEMOCRACY: EVALUATING
IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS FOR MANAGING THE
NIGERIAN STATE (1960-2015)**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to comprehend the idea of Leadership via its measurement by democratic standards. It is observed that, democracy is no more ‘government of the people, by the people and for the people’ as the international political system is also largely ‘partisan’ about who gets what, when and how in any given nation-state (Nigeria inclusive). This is due to the economic interests by the ‘developed’ nation-states who still have strong imperial desires to fulfill as well as the craving for ‘underdeveloped’ countries who perceive the parties to an electoral contest, as more favourably disposed to accommodate them. Thus, the citizens of Nigeria since 1960, have not been able to come to terms with why it seems leadership had not been responsive and responsible to their concerns over the years should it really be a product of the people’s desire. The paper recommends that, African citizens should continue to engage their government as well as that of any other nation-state where their interests lies. Proactiveness is germane in a ‘globalized’ world where everyone is a stakeholder ‘everywhere’. The paper utilized the historical method in collection of data and the descriptive analysis was utilized in the processing and presentation of data. The time boundary for the work is situated between 1960-2015 which are obvious landmark dates especially the latter when an opposition party, emerged victorious after the general elections.

Key words: Leadership, Democracy, People, Africa, Nigeria.



INTRODUCTION

Democracy has emerged as the most engaged concept in analyzing interactions between the peoples of any nation-state as regards the multifaceted and intricately knotted nature of their various interests. One of such interests is the idea and practice of leadership in any country. It is important to stress that; the concept of followership is also as important as that of the former. But there seems to be no instruments to observe the leadership recruitment and performance levels which Africans in general and Nigerians in particular have deliberately crafted for use. In other words, what could be considered as effective and efficient leadership has to be measured on the European or western designed parameter of democratic indices which are essentially arbitrary and does not carry “universal acceptance”.

The universal acceptance stated above connotes not only the divergent perspectives of what leadership should be but also to what end. As the discourse on this critical component of the political culture of any country is a continuum and notes from various parts of the world are presented for comparism, there is the obvious constant of the wishes of the people as the yardstick as being responsible for the peculiarities identified.

The focus of this paper, is to attempt an interrogation of the idea and practice of leadership by democratic (United States of America) standards in Nigeria between 1960 and 2015. The justification for this is evident that, from 1960, Nigeria had gained independence and were seen as being in charge of their internal affairs while the terminal date is important for political opposition history in the country as an opposition political party won the general elections the produced the President of the Federal Republic. The conceptual framework is next up to enable an evaluation of the supposed symbiotic relationship between leadership and the people through the instrumentality of democracy possible.



Conceptual Clarification: Leadership and Democracy

The idea of leadership and democracy are akin to the concept of “twelve” and “dozen”. In fact, one cannot discuss about leadership without democracy and vice versa. Just as the concept of democracy has become a “buzzword” in the Nigerian state from the late 20th century, leadership has different faces and it depends on whom is postulating about this all-important structure of the country. Thus, there are several views on these subjects from scholars all over the world. To adopt a working fulcrum for this paper, it is imperative to have a glimpse of what other scholars and commentators have contributed to the debate.

Leadership has been identified as the key to unlock societal potentials for its development¹. Leadership can be invested in persons, groups, networks and institutions. In other words, the state especially government, politics and political parties are not and cannot be the only institutional platform in which leadership can be explored. Thus, non-state and non-partisan leadership is equally critical for the continued existence of the society². As noted by Wirth (2007:77), there is the phrase of ‘natural leader’ which implies the ability to or talent for ‘manipulating’ people to follow that individual³. The basic question that had been left hanging is, where is the leader leading the people to? Or put differently, should we take leadership as influence, what kind of influence does the leader exert? The answers to these questions are again, dependent on the transactional relationship between the leader and the led.

Leadership is considered the fundamental element of mobilization in for the purpose of enlightenment towards participation by citizens in the political process. According to Chikendu, it is leadership that mobilizes the people and arouses in them, various levels of political consciousness⁴.

The idea of leadership also comes with followership. Thus, there is obviously an inter-relationship between the concepts. All leaders were at some point, followers and many were also led after leaving the helm of affairs. However, not all followers become leaders especially in a political sense. This is dependent on the



time and space as well as preparedness of individuals to take advantage of opportunities to cross to the leadership divide when the need arises. In Nigeria, over the years, there seem to be a big disconnect between the leadership and followership. It has been observed that, a fundamental problem with the country is that of leadership⁵

Democracy on the other hand, has been defined as “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. Democracy, as it originates in the West, is a necessary creation of capitalism. Its current form is globalization, and its ultimate aim is to ensure the continued marginalization and exploitation of the disadvantaged southern collectivity in the international political economy⁶. One popular description of democracy as “Government of the people, by the people and for the people”⁷, makes this critical concept solidly about *who the people want as their leaders, what structures and processes are instituted by the people for the emergence of leaders as well as to what end such leadership should be*. Thus, as long as the people are involved in the processes of structuring their society to suit their **wishes**, the pragmatic model becomes viable as the most suitable to analyze the system’s functionality. Put differently, democracy should be what the people say it should be. For example, the use of elections especially as regards popular voting has not really ensured the emergence of purposeful leadership in Nigeria. In fact, the condemnation of the military intervention in politics in Africa has now been revised to show that, it could be classified as “democratic” as long as the “peoples” of the country have this as their wish as well as the personnel are “citizens” of Nigeria as stipulated by the grand norm, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

However, it is observed that, from the foundations of the country, Nigeria, as it became by 1960, there been no input from the “peoples” that make up the nation-state. Thus, the leadership structure and recruitment processes are still being dictated by the West in the name of “democracy” which doesn’t reflect what the citizens want. This had given rise to the challenges of ethnic



rivalries and agitations for self-determination reflected in various guise including but not limited to, religious fanaticism and terrorism, farmers-herders clashes, resource control, the kleptomaniac nature of leadership as regards the management of financial and mineral as well as human resources⁸ amongst others. The unpalatable nature of leadership engagements over the years, have necessitated the need for a thorough appraisal of this important structure of the society to ensure that, it continually meet the wishes and aspirations of the peoples of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This is as well, designed to meaningfully engage the fulcrum support (followership) and instrument (democracy) that are essential for citizens' wellbeing are always responsive to the set-goals and objectives of the peoples of the country thereby, managing their various interests.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper seeks to adopt two leading theories to explain the complexities in the discourse. These theories include; the Theory of Political Imperialism and the Democratic Participatory Theory propounded by Robert Dahl. Democracy anywhere in the world remains largely couter to political participation. From the perspectives of various scholars, power resides with the people⁹. In other words, the people who constitute the followership and electorates, remains the most potent factor in any democratic setting. However, democracy becomes mocked when there are attempts to subvert the will of the people through the manipulation of elections in particular or whatever leadership processes the people had designed in general.

The concern of this piece is that, post-colonial African nation-states are perceived to have been subjected to 'teleguidance' by former colonial masters and the aim is to sustain the economy of the imperialists¹⁰. Thus, the imperial motives of the West are sustained and advanced by neo-colonialism. A fundamental component of democracy which include periodic scheduled elections, which would enable independent African states to strengthen their political institutions, are perceived to be



meddled with through foreign financial support for their preferred candidates or political parties, election monitoring observers as well as security apparatus compromise of African nation-states through international intelligence network. Such indirect meddling with the electoral processes in any given country, is strange and antithetical to democratic doctrines.

Effective leadership is seen to be a product of political participation through transparent electioneering processes. Hence, to promote and strengthen democracy, the people must be involved. However, the theory of political imperialism, remains dominant in post-colonial African nation-states. Many former colonies continue to struggle to maintain political independence in the international system where it is expected that, nation-states have to submit some of their sovereignty for the advancement of world peace and stability. This theory explains the relationship between the ‘developed north’ and ‘underdeveloped south’ as well as the factors that are critical to this relationship. While realists are of the view that, might is right hence, they must mastermind the processes of leadership recruitment in other countries in a bid to extend their imperial interests. It is noted that, political power determines both economic, social, military and cultural powers in the nation-state. Therefore, imperialists interfere with the electoral processes of former colonies.

Leadership in Nigeria: Historical Engagement

The making of Nigeria is said to be a product of slow growth¹¹. While some believe that Nigeria is a British creation, Ikime averred that, the country would have still come to be given the nature of inter-group relations in the pre-colonial era. Although he noted that, the Nigerian nation-state might not be exactly the way it is today especially in cultural composition and geography, there was a gradual movement towards integration. The fact is that, whether the peoples of the country initiated it or not, the British who iced the cake were the deciding factor in designing the structure and functions of leadership in Nigeria. As the popular adage goes, “He who pays the piper, dictates the tone” is evident as



the style of leadership and governance was anchored on the West Minister idea. From 1914 when the current nation-state was born, the leadership structure of the colony and later, independent Nigeria to 1963, was headed by British colonial personnel with the Monarchy of the empire assuming supremacy. The various provinces, divisions and districts as well specialized departments, were designed to colonial specification. One fundamental problem which the British did not acknowledge about how to manage the affairs of the country was that, “they preached what they did not actually practice”.

The British were engrossed with the American styled democracy where popular views through elections, formed the bedrock of leadership engagements. However, she was still a monarchy with the Queen as head of State. Probably in their worldview, there was no need to have a replication of their “revered” system in Nigeria or worse still, where would the headship of the monarchy be from?. This preoccupation triggered the adoption and utilization of constitutional instruments to shape the architecture of state leadership in the country. Between 1914 and 1949, the colonial enterprise operated a centralized system where the Governor-General ruled the colony with different “strokes” on behalf of the Queen. There was a Legislative Council which was purely ‘advisory’ and resolutions from this law-making body was not rooted in the wishes of the peoples that make up the Nigerian space. There was little democratic element in the emergence of representatives (leaders) for the legislative council as majority of its members were ‘appointed’, not elected. The British felt they could experiment with the ideas they had about democracy, indirect rule and more importantly, federalism with the Nigerian peoples whom had been tagged ‘peoples without a sense of direction’ to handle their affairs as reflected in the Hamitic Hypothesis. The nationalist movements that evolved to tackle colonialism utilized western tactics and ideologies that yielded the desired results. However, the personalities that history entrusted the responsibilities of fashioning the future of the political structure and culture, could not agree on an ‘indigenous’



solution to the challenge of leadership and more importantly, the Nigerian identity.

From 1951 when self-government was granted to the regions, the leadership changed slightly with the accommodation of peoples from the region in their affairs with the parliamentary structure retained both at the Federal and regional levels. But ultimate power still resided with the British monarchy who was the head of state as well as foreign affairs conducted by colonial diplomats on behalf of the country. It is important to note that, the leadership of the regions reflected the drive for not just the independence of the British-created Nigerian state but also that of their various ethnic nationalities. In other words, the fever of self-determination which leadership was a critical component of, was thus, double-edged. On one hand, it was the colonized against the colonies and on another, the colonized against themselves. A vivid scenario can be seen in the political taboo against persons not from a particular region in terms of leadership engagements. The symptoms of this was made manifest during the National Youth Movement (NYM) leadership tussle between Ernest Ikoli/Obafemi Awolowo group and that of Nnamdi Azikiwe faction¹². With the collapse of the NYM, the seeming fundamental fabric that would have constituted the basic material for leadership development and recruitment was destroyed.

The 1959 general elections were alleged to have been rigged to favour the Northern part of the country¹³. The north was said to be more populated than the South and this gave them the rare advantage of deciding the fate of others in the Nigerian state via the skewed legislative majority against other regions¹⁴. From the nomenclature of Nigerian federalism, population size has been used as a vital component to determine the share of revenues given out by the centre to the component parts. The continuous struggle to have “more people” in the different parts of Nigeria can be seen as an elitist design to curry more allocation to their states which at the end, has no bearing on the lives of the peoples whom this revenue was the reason for the distribution.



The utilization of state power by the various leadership structures in Nigeria had been characterized by class interests intersected with nepotism, ethnicity and religious colourations. In other words, the ruling class especially for civilian governments, had been a class that appropriated the resources of the state for its wellbeing. Most monumental indices of development in Nigeria after independence, from refineries, to state creation¹⁵, infrastructures such as roads, railways, bridges (third mainland in Lagos in particular), foreign relations landmarks, and many more, were instituted by the military. Civilian leadership have not been able to muster the needed courage to tackle issues that could threaten the unity and stability of the country. They have bluntly refused to put aside, obvious sentiments to ensure that, issues of national importance are sorted out. For example, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Sec. 8 clearly stipulates the requirements for state creation.

One of the already existing state, Bayelsa to be precise, has eight (8) local governments. Should the Nigerian political class especially the National Assembly, not take up this issue to ensure the constitutional balance for this state? Is it not supposed to be a matter of equity and justice to ensure everyone was at per at least meeting the basic criteria? The answer is a rhetoric one no matter the perspective one holds. Another critical issue is that of resource control. It became an obvious reality that, the natural and mineral resources of the southern part is for everybody but that of the north is for the north only¹⁶. There are obvious revelations that, revenue from mineral resources such as gold, iron-ore, tin, amongst others do not constitute national revenue? The ghost of resource control is intricately linked the agitations for self-determination in its different guise.

No known Nigerian leadership had, consciously attempted to engage the issue of the Nigerian states continuous existence which is critical to the aspirations of self-determination. The National Conferences organized by Presidents Obasanjo and Jonathan respectively, were seen to have avoided discussing the renegotiation of the entity called Nigeria. This is a thorny issue



that must be resolved should the Nigerian state desire peaceful co-existence, stability and unity that the federation yearns for. In other words, the issue of self-determination as well as calls for the evaluation of the existence of the Nigerian federation, is not a call for the dissolution of the country in the first instance. Rather, such are essentially instrument to ensure that, issues of abuses and imbalances in the system are properly addressed should they be handled thoroughly. The issues include but not limited to Resource Control, Rotation of the Presidency and other strategic Offices in the Nigerian State as well as the fundamental concern of security of lives and properties across the country.

Democracy in Nigeria: Managing Divergences beyond the Country

The nation-state as it is configured in the international political system (a euphemism for Europe and American dominated), is not basically about the 'people' but the 'individual'. According to Onyeoziri, the state and citizens are mutually exclusive¹⁷. It is the body politic that contains them both. In another phrase, it is the body politic that determines the political difference between countries which is also said to be different from the concept of a state. However, this position seems obscures the reality that, the collectivity of individuals is the fundamental ingredient of state-formation. Thus, democracy which is said to be about citizens' participation in governance, provides that, the individuals in the political system craft institutions and regulations for its smooth running. The views of individuals must be sorted before critical decisions that would affect their lives are taken. Another major problem in analyzing the concept of democracy are the idea of political parties and periodic elections as benchmarks for measurement as well as evaluation. Should we agree that, democracy is about people-centred governance, there need not be political parties only because the concept of independent candidature can suffice for the arrangement of projecting individuals for leadership positions. Also, elections might not necessarily be done so long citizens are comfortable with the



leadership they have. What is essential is the provision of media of citizens' expression such as freedom of press to enable them put forward their positions to the government, institution of regular referendum to allow citizens determine the direction of government policies as well as the independence of the judiciary.

The Nigerian situation had not met certain criteria to say it is a democracy, at least, in a Western sense. The idea of democracy in the state is essentially about elections. As noted by Nwolise, Nigeria is a republic that had never held a referendum on vital matters that had affected citizens for a long time¹⁸. In fact, the concept of citizens in the Nigerian federation is a problematic one. Who is a citizen and who is not? Marshall gave three fundamental rights of a citizen as;

1. The liberty of the human person; freedoms of speech, thought, faith, right to own properties and conclude valid contracts, right to life, justice;
2. The principle of equality of all citizens
3. Equality with others and by due process of the law¹⁹.

In the Nigerian case, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in Chapter III discussed issues of Citizenship and qualifications for such rights and privileges. However, not all that are captured in Sec 25, 26 and 27 do actually enjoy the rights of citizens in the country. The north-south divide in the Nigerian state ensured that, privileges are skewed to the former than the latter. This had been a deliberate attempt by the British administration and the north had consolidated on power after then to their advantage disregarding any call for equity and access to state resources for all. It must also be pointed out that, not all 'northerners' enjoy these appropriated state resources as it had exclusively been for the 'elite' group made up of the Fulani as majority and a few Hausa.

From the above, one can infer that, these groups of persons enjoy the benefits meant for all in the name of democracy. A vivid example comes to mind on this matter. On the issues of resource control, solid mineral remains largely with the states in the north while natural resources such as crude oil in the south is owned by



the Federal Government. Also, when there are government directives on non-movements in form of curfews, environmental sanitation and others related to security especially in the south, those from the north (Fulani-Hausa herders basically) violates such orders and nothing is done to bring such erring persons to book. Those found in the 'red' zone are cattle herders who are always seen moving with their livestock during such periods. There is also the accusation that, the Fulani allow their kith and kin in other nation-states in Africa to migrate to Nigeria without any procedural scrutiny from state security apparatus²⁰. The Fulani are found in virtually all positions of decision-making in Nigeria and as such, wields much influence in 'who gets what, when and how'. It is observed that, the porous borders of the north are fertile source for fulfilling the agenda to boost and sustain their alleged numerical strength over other parts of the country. There seems to be no 'justice' in the Nigerian state as even constitutional provisions are ignored when it is not in the favour of the 'majority'.

The lopsided nature of democratic engagement in Nigeria, has been of serious concern to critical thinking from various endeavours in the country. One of such individual whose voice continues to resonate deeply when issues of the Nigerian State are tabled for deliberation is Fela Anikulapo Kuti. In his *Teacher: Don't teach me nonsense*, he expressed the contradiction of Western styled democracy in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. From his analysis, it was a fundamental reality that, the idea of democracy was antithetical to the peace, progress and development of the State. Hear him when he stated thus;

*Democracy; Craze demo,
demonstration of craze,
crazy demonstration.
If e no be craze, why for Africa,
As time de go, things just de bad
E de worse more and more.
Poor man de die, rich man de mess.
Democracy!²¹*



From the view expressed above, democracy which preaches freedom, in all its ramifications, has rather, further institutionalized oppression, slavery and poverty. The idea of democracy as being brandished around, seem not to have the same 'fruits' it has yielded in its original habitat for the several years it had been on African soil. Why then is democracy said to be the 'best form' of government or way of political life? The answer to this question lies in the operations of democracy through the lens of the United States of America (USA), the bulwark of international freedom and democracy.

The Contradictions of American Democracy on World Affairs

The mindset of any critical individual (either as a biological or legal entity) is to advance their cause by the maximization of opportunities available to them. In the international system, as it is constituted since 1945, a few nation-states are 'charged' with the responsibility of promoting and protecting world peace by 'any means necessary'. Emerging as the Allied Powers, Britain, China, France, Russia (formerly Union of Soviet Socialist Republic-USSR), and the United States of America (USA), have become the custodians of the sacred mandate to uphold the sanctity of freedom which democracy promotes. The USA is personified as the 'bulwark' of global democracy. From the leadership of George Washington to Monroe, the principle of allowing Americans decide for themselves anything that is of concern to them was strong. The American War of Independence, Monroe Doctrine as well the general idea of isolationism, are pointers to her sentiments on the issue of neo-imperialism. The stated sentiments did not include the USA infringing on the very foundation of her democracy, the people's right when it comes to doing so to others. According to Lawal, the idea of 'America for the Americans' as captured in the Monroe Doctrine, explicitly cautioned against the interference of other European Nation-State like France and Britain in the American Continents. However, it did not stop her



from dominating and oppressing members of both North and South American continents²².

Furthermore, it has been observed that, the idea of promoting world peace could at some point mean to instigate conflicts within certain nation-states with the aim of unseating elected governments to enable the exploration and exploitation of the needed resources possible in such areas. Thus, while there is the guaranteed freedom of the human personality and rights, the nation-states are not independent as they must 'obey' the dictates of the powers that be. A classic example that comes to mind is the USA's utilization of force to replace the governments of Iraq and Libya²³. Others include the Russia's aggressive imperialism in eastern Europe and Asia²⁴, China in the South-eastern part of Asia as well as France's continued colonialism of African states. From the above examples, the value of democracy is what had been enforced on other nation-states as the system to adopt. Thus, international law as it would be called, is a matter of nomenclature. It is essentially utilizing European and American morality gauges, to construct a sense of regulation of human actions. Put differently, democratic leadership is what those that control either the national or international system say it is. In other words, Democratic leadership does not exist outside the perception of what those in mainstream government and political elite, define it to be. This is the problem with the concept of Democracy which hook wind people to believe that, 'their voices and views' count no matter their 'place' in society.

The above negates the principles of freedom of a group of people or peoples to evolve institutions, structures and instruments of democratic engagements that would be convenient for them. That which has come to stay is of the idea from the 'superpower' pushing such agenda. Since no higher authorities in existence to check the excess of these 'developed' countries, the days are field ones for them to continual exploit.



CONCLUSION

The paper has tried to examine the idea of leadership in Nigeria especially from 1960, as that of the strive to attain self-actualization and fulfillment to no avail. Nigeria is yet to evolve the 'National' identity needed to accommodate the divergent interests in the country. Rather, it is that of Britain and the USA essentially, that are the benchmark for measuring and evaluating what democracy means and how it should be practiced. In other words, the Nigerian peoples have not 'mattered' in the fundamental equation of the State. Foreign and elite interests supersede that of the over 200 million peoples of the country.

The study has shown that, democracy is about not just the accommodation of various interests in a given nation-state like Nigeria, but also that of all other nation-state in the international political system. Like individuals, the nation-states are needed to continually allow the interests of other nation-states to be housed in one's own system as well as reciprocated in the environments of others. This would ensure that, the stability needed to evolve the Nigerian identity so sought after, is not just within the purview of Nigeria to construct. It would also require the input of others no matter how minute. Thus, Nigerians would not only be created but 'global' citizens whose identity originated from Nigeria but citizens of the world.

In the final analysis, democracy is not only government of the people(s), by the people(s) and for the people(s) of a particular nation-state, but also, government of a people also acceptable by other peoples in the interest of accommodating mercantilist tendencies of the outward dominant nation-states. The challenge to this position is that, how has Nigeria in particular and African nation-states in general, attempted to project their interests in the leadership recruitment processes in other climes? While it is acknowledged that, many Nigerian had held positions in countries such as Britain, United States of America (USA), Canada and other European States, would such political participation be attributed to the deliberate state-craft-ship of the Nigerian Government? The answer is in the negative as she has not been able to evolve a



foreign policy framework that could transform such individual citizen's efforts to that of the country's concern.

The reality is that, the peoples of Nigeria, domiciled in the Nigerian Federation, see democratic leadership differently. While for the Niger Delta peoples especially the Ijaw ethnic nationality, democratic leadership would mean the Government's consent to the idea of resource control, the South-east especially the Igbo nation would see it from either the actualization of Igbo Presidency or Biafra Republic, the South-West consider the provision of security for lives and properties as the hallmark of a leadership after their interest. No matter the side one turn towards, there are concerns and demands made. The evaluation of the various peoples in Nigeria depends on how well the Federal Government had been able to address issues that are paramount to their continuous existence and advancement respectively.



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