

## RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Democracy, Good Governance and Political Leadership Misconception in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Since Nigeria's democratic rule began, successive leaders have increasingly neglected the welfare of their citizens by accruing dividends of democratic government to themselves, friends and families. The apparent neglect has manifested chronic hunger, high level of illiteracy, inadequate health facilities, poor infrastructural facilities, and unimaginable poverty level in the country. The situation has remarkably shown that Nigerian leadership has undermined the culture of democracy and good governance, based on their misconceptions of what democracy and good governance stand for. The misconception of democracy and good governance by Nigerian leadership has unequivocally affected their idea of provision of essential needs to the citizens. Hence, frustrations arising from the citizen's neglect have spurred groups' agitations and separatists' movement for self-determination in all parts of the region. This has resulted in suppression/oppression and the use of state's security agencies to intimidate the agitators by the government. The paper therefore, examines the effects of leadership perceptions of democracy and good governance and how democracy and good governance can be embraced by political leaders in Nigeria. To achieve the study's objectives, the paper employed qualitative data such as textbooks, the Internet, and Journals. The findings revealed that Nigerian political leaders are more interested in liberal democracy, which does not take the welfare of citizens into account in the day-to-day running of government. The paper recommended that political leaders should imbibe quality leadership with stanch commitment to the rule of law, among others.

**Key words:** Democracy, Good Governance, Political, Leadership, Nigeria.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Political leadership conception of democracy and good governance has generated an enormous crisis of legitimacy in Nigeria. The heightened presence of political apathy, self-alienation, pessimism in the electorate's political participation, and the discouraging involvement of the people in political organizations show that democracy has not gotten its footing in Nigeria. In Nigeria, political oppression, alienation, distrust, chaos, anarchy, genocide, and wars characterize liberal democracy. The country has been experiencing political setbacks fuelled by complex interactions

among individuals, groups, and government forces. From past regimes to the present, there have been intricate internal political forces and struggles for political culture. The situation has left the country to wallow in political turbulence and upheaval with conspicuous deep concern for self-determination, renegotiation of power relations, group agitation for good governance, and involvement of civil society in the political bargaining for good governance (Adejumobi, 2004:12-13). The unfolding political situation requires a thorough understanding by leaders of what democracy and good governance stand to represent. Understanding democracy and good governance will enable political leaders to retrace their steps from

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biased, trivial, dismissive, or uncritical approaches they manifest in governance. This paper is to interrogate the ways leaders perceive democracy and good governance in Nigeria. For easy identification and analysis, the research questions and the objectives of the study are articulated below:

## 1.1 | Research Questions

1. What are the effects of political leadership misconception of democracy and good governance in Nigeria?
2. What are the ways leaders can embrace inclusive democracy and good governance in Nigeria?

## 1.2 | Objectives of the study

1. To examine the effects of leadership misconception of democracy and good governance in Nigeria.
- 2 To proffer methods leaders can embrace inclusive democracy and good governance in Nigeria

## 1.3 | Theoretical Framework

The study found it essential to employ elite theory for adequate analysis of the objectives of the study. The elite theory was first popularized by Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michel (1876-1936). The proponents' motive for developing the theory is to explain the power and social relations and how few privileged individuals grab and keep state power within the democratic structure. According to Higley (2009:3), elites are people who can influence political results or outcomes uninterruptedly. This is because of their stratified importance and inevitability in positions they occupy in social or political organizations. The theory implies that the elites are selfish in the roles and realities of representative democracy by stratifying the society into two classes, a powerful minority, who control state power, and a powerless majority extricated from the decision-making process and governed by the elites. In the present day Nigeria's democratic governance, elites still assume themselves to possess the requisite expertise and core political insight in the management of public affairs. The position of elite theory is an opposite practical representation of the democratic principle of major-

ity in the governance process. The domineering of the elite arises from the inept and lack of expertise of the majority to gain the necessary and proper wherewithal, values, and skills for democratic political leadership (Omodia, 2011:113). The ability and egocentric characteristics of elites essentially place them in control of political and state power for protecting and promoting their interests at the chagrin of the masses. The elites sustain and perpetuate their political rule and leadership by demonstrating political violence, commercialization of politics, falsification of political results, enactment of public policy and programs for their benefit (Okoh, 2010:172; Omodia, 2011:114).

## 2 | DEMOCRACY

It is axiomatic to base the definition of democracy on Abraham Lincoln's declaration as the government owned by the citizens, conducted by the citizens and for the citizens. This was the practice in Ancient Athens of Greece, where all the citizens attended the Assembly and took part in decision making. This type of direct democracy is no longer possible in modern states because of their colossal size and populations. Therefore, that the whole people do not gather in assembly does not make a state undemocratic. The state is now considered democratic if the majority rules. The electorate of the state gives their mandate to their representatives through elections and forms the government. The government must fulfill the terms of the mandate which it promises to pursue. The government must also be responsible, responsive and accountable to the electorate. For the government of the majority to emerge, in a genuine sense, the election must be free and fair. A natural, honest and non-partisan electoral administrative body needs to conduct the election. In Nigeria there have been situations where candidates have doubted the integrity of the electoral commission in relation to the elections' results, resulting the contestation of the result in electoral tribunal. Precisely put, manipulation and rigging of elections contradict the spirit of democracy (Adebayo, 1982:3-4). In Nigeria, rigging, manipulation of elections, snatching of ballot boxes, killing of opponents, buying of votes, among others is the norm rather than the exception.

Democratic states are states with a constitution and guided by the rule of law with organized political competition and accountability which has a mechanism that holds the ruling elites accountable or not for what they do. Democracy is an institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions. Democracy is mechanization for building, choosing and allowing a government in response to the interest of the masses. To others, democracy connotes freedom of speech, freedom of associations, and supremacy of the will of the electorate, regular elections and accountability (Offe, 2012:450-456, Jacob and Abdullahi (2007:64, cited by Bature, 2019:49). Democracy itself has been summed up into classical, liberal and Marxist postulations of democracy. The classical writings of Aristotle shaped the democratic and institutional frameworks of the polis. Democracy is also regarded as liberal, where writers like John Locke and John Stuart Mill's influence on the limitations of government is emphasized. Democracy also has Marxist postulation proffered by Karl Marx in which the working proletariat will engage in a revolution of the bourgeoisie. Democracy as an ideology comprehends the following concepts of sovereignty of the people in lawmaking: inclusion of all citizens as free and equal persons; a comprehensive system of rights for all citizens, uncovered deliberation of public matters among citizens. In the practice of the classical aspect of democracy in Athens, the term "power" of the people meant the people exercised control over policy through direct acts of will in the assembly. In addition, the citizens were chosen by lot to carry out the executive tasks of government. In Libertarian times, democracy came to be joined with several other factors; the competitiveness of elites, the representativeness of representation, the control of bureaucracy, the independence of the judiciary and freedoms of various kinds. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was among the first writers to advocate for a liberal version of democracy which spelt out and limited the powers of legally elected majorities by protecting individual rights against the majority. Liberalism as a political creed began with John Locke (1632-1704). Locke espoused liberalism as a combination of constitutionalism, stability, freedom, consent, property and tolerance which played a crucial role in the development of western democracies (Bature, 2019:49-50). Liberal democracy, as

described above, is what has taken up the political space of Nigeria, where leaders see state resources as their birth rights and nothing else for those governed.

### 3 | GOOD GOVERNANCE

Governance is the process through which citizens and state agents continuously engage in robust interaction to express their demand, their rights and obligations, in order to reconcile their differences and cooperate to produce public goods and services. The beauty is that it makes society a conducive place by producing collective goods and services that people cannot provide individually for themselves. The collective goods and services include: security, public roads, schools, hospitals and control on epidemic diseases; a functioning and independent of the judiciary. It equals the various obligations of the state through its institutional framework within which socio-economic development is pursued. According to Pierre and peter (2000:2) the concept of governance is often used without a concise definition. Nevertheless, governance implies the efficient management of state institutions where issues of public accountability, transparency, rule of law and public sector management are of great concern. In furtherance of the above, governance is steering state and society towards the realization of collective goals. It is an act by which the affairs of the nation are controlled by deciding and implementing them on behalf of the citizens (George-Genyi, 2013:21). It is the activity of governing a country or controlling how a country is governed. A state without good governance, without the rule of law, reliable administration, legitimate power, and responsive regulation no amount its funding, no amount of charity will set such state in a pedestal of prosperity. Good governance flows under legal and ethical principles and conceived by society with the capacities of a political system to exercise authority, command legitimacy, adjudicate conflicts and carry out the needed programme for implementation (Annan, 2014:36). For example, good governance includes political stability, the rule of law, leadership devoid of corruption and observance of accountability. Others include the manner power is exercised for the management of a country's economic

and social resources for the interest of all with a capacity for efficient problem-solving and conflict resolution. Generally, governance is the exercise of political power in the management of a nation's affairs. It encompasses the state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making processes and implementation capacity. It equally entails the relationship between the governing apparatus and the governed that is, the people in terms of their standard of living. Good governance is based on good leadership, respect for the rule of law, due process, accountability of the political leadership to the electorate, and transparency in the operation of government. As a policy framework, good governance imposes demands on policy makers in their exercise of power in a state that has enabling political environment for effective distribution of resource to improve the living conditions of the people. This suggests the use of political authority and the management of the resources of society to better the lots of the populace (Odock, 2006:32). Below are the attributes of good governance:

- i. Accountability and responsiveness in leadership and in public service.
- ii. Adequate mobilization and utilization of resources
- iii. Transparency, effectiveness and efficiency in handling offices
- iv. Self-sacrifice and unprejudiced service to the people
- v. popular participation and empowerment of the people in the conduct and management of their own affairs (Jega,2012:19). Good governance involves a whole gamut of things, respect for the fundamental human rights of citizens, judicious use of resources that is devoid of waste, fraud and corrupt practices. Good governance requires respect for principles of accountability and transparency. It also encapsulates issues of equity, equality, justice and fair play in the distribution of goods and services to promote and enhance the quality of life of the people irrespective of their class, status, religion or other parochial considerations.

### 4 | LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the ability to inspire, direct, motivate and encourage others to achieve a stated goal. "Leadership has to do with organizing, planning, coordinating human and material resources, time, relationship, skills, expertise and finances to achieve a goal for the interest of all" (Alamu, 2004: 318). In a broader sense, leadership connotes: transparency, honesty, efficiency, effectiveness, responsibility, accountability, vision, character, productivity, persuasion and realization of expected goals for the generality of all, old and young, boy or girl, man and woman. The extent to which these characteristics are inherited into our leadership largely determines the type of governance that a country has. Nigerian government is short-circuited in leadership. This is because leaders lack visibility in governance. They perceived governance as a means of exploitation, personal enrichment, fulfilling parochial interest and selfish ambition (p.319). In addition, Achebe (1984:34) and Gambari (2008:6) assert that political leadership in Nigeria encompasses only personal qualities, commitment, and competence of individual leaders at the top and the collective interest of common plan, focus, and desire for development of the elites. Gambari (2008:6-7), succinctly encapsulates the dire condition in the country further:

The modus operandi and procedure for recruitment and the performance of our individual leaders over the years has created political apathy. It is hard time we rejected leaders who see themselves as champions. We should not sustain leaders who do not understand the economic and political problems of the country. We should not accommodate leaders who are more interested in silencing their opponents, for say the truth rather than pursuing what is right. We do not want leaders who preach one thing and do the opposite. We do not need leaders who see and aggrandize themselves above the constitution and the laws of the country, but leaders with exemplary character who lead by example to uphold and respect the law. We do not want leaders who have no interest in tomorrow, other than their private bank accounts.

Nwobu (2013:1), complimenting the views of Gambari, has this to say that ranging from local government to the presidency, the only enterprise of government is voracious and reckless pillaging of the

nation's resources, while the hapless masses wreck in irreparable poverty and destitution. The consequences arising from our fraudulent and corrupt leaders have resulted in a failing state, characterized by chronic hunger, social injustice, political unrest, abject poverty, disharmony and ethno-religious conflict and unfortunately, the heightened profile of leadership self-centeredness in Nigeria manifests in merciless looting of public treasuries, insensitivity to public opinion and enactment of anti-people's laws, non-accountability and transparency, abuses of power with impunity. In the same vein, Zainab (2011:2) added that Nigerians leadership activities have remarkably with no doubt enhanced and perpetuated bad governance in Nigeria. His views on corrupt leadership had this to say:

The basic philosophy of our Nigerian-ness has introduced crippling poverty, increasing inequality between the haves and the have-nots, alarming levels of insecurity, ethnic, regional and religious cleavage and animosity amongst citizens. All this has culminated in a political leadership that is grossly inefficient, corrupt, self-seeking and unpatriotic. This leadership has not only resulted in weak and dysfunctional state institutions but re-enforced poverty, inequality, frustration-aggression, marginalization and a sense of injustice that is increasingly becoming desperate, disillusioned and militant.

This has shown that lack of commitment and cooperation among political leaders is a major threat to the sustainable democracy in the country. Leaders can influence public policies to better the lives of the people, but have failed to do so because their primary goal of assuming a leadership position is self-enrichment.

#### **4.1 | The impact of leadership misconception of democracy and good governance in Nigeria**

Democracy creates a political opportunity and space for active political actors to interact, negotiate, compete and seek self-reliance, within a carefully spelt out limit and rules of law (Adejumobi,2000:26-42.). The meaning of democracy in the classical sense, as Ake (2000:7) succinctly puts, is a concept that attracts no precise definition. It briefly means popular power and common exercise of power by the people. Liberal democracy has to do with govern-

ment by the consent of most of the people within a political system., the people choose political leaders through keenly contested and competitive elections with a secured and broad civic and political right, within the limit of the rule of law, transparency and public accountability (Diamond 1996:34). Nigerian political leaders often choose the practice of liberal democracy, although it has some common boundaries and traits with classical democratic government. The common boundaries attract political participation, political equality, inalienable human rights, the rights of the people, and the rule of law. Despite the democratic traits, the political leaders do not use the resources and the influence of the state for the collective interest of the people. What is in practice is that leaders for their selfish interest embrace liberal democracy which is centered on the individual dominating those of the collective interest of the masses, substituting the government by the consent of the people with the government by the people. Instead of the sovereignty of the people, the leaders bid for the supremacy of law and renounce popular power which is viewed as the quintessence of democracy. Therefore, substituting liberal democracy for democratic governance in the classical sense is to remove the value from; or deprive democracy of its idea and undermine its values. In actual situation, democracy unconditionally plans for the actualization of human potentialities through active participation in rulership. Liberal democratic practices by leaders offer protection, prevention and passive acceptance of immunity. On the contrary, democracy in a genuine sense, entails freedom as a positive and activist, enable and empowers (Ake, 2000:14).

In view of the above, the Nigeria's democratic situation is a semblance of liberal democracy where leadership personal interest substitutes that of the collective majority of the people. It is common to see them living in affluence while the people they are supposed to provide for are wallowing in abject poverty, high illiteracy level and general insecurity. In response to the unfair treatment meted on the people, who express grievances against the leaders, have always been met with repression and branded as oppositions, enemies of the state, or of their self-service government. People who have been branded enemies are vulnerable to attack, harass, detain without trial or exterminated by state security appara-

## Democracy, Good Governance and Political Leadership Misconception in Nigeria

tus in order to perpetuate their commanding leaders in power. The above explanations are practical demonstrations of elite theory in action. The selfishness inherent in elite theory affects the true practice of democracy for good governance in Nigeria. Governance is about the well-being and security of the people. But when the interests of the people in governance are not represented, it becomes a false sense of democracy. Nigeria's political process in relation to the roles played by political leaders is primarily operated to satisfy their consumption habits, and to appropriate the resources of the state to themselves alone and with nothing more to address poverty, inequality and employment ravaging all over the country.

This partly explains why social tensions and contradictions reflect aggression, violence, police brutality, murder, arson, among others. Some of these are forms of resistance by marginalized groups and individuals agitating for self-government apparently to be free from deprivation and oppression. The modus operandi of the Nigerian elite not only lacks sophistication and civility, but a variance with democracy which accommodates the interests of the masses within the framework of party politics and free and fair elections. The elite theory explains the role of the Nigerian political leadership, and such roles are responsible for the state's failure to improve conditions of the citizens even as a democratic state. Introducing godfatherism in Nigerian politics has invariably confirmed the circulation of political elites in Nigeria, which has largely influenced the irresponsibility of the political leaders, in dangerous contestations for state power (Omodia and Aliu, 2013:39). It is obviously an aberration of good governance for elected officials to find it easy to allocate large sums of public wealth to themselves in forms of allowances, utility bills and retirement benefits, they have mindlessly neglected the electorate by failing to meet necessities such as good roads, electricity, employment opportunities and even prompt payment of salaries and pensions. The posture of successive governments since the return of democracy in 1999 contrasts with their overt messianic disposition during electioneering campaigns

Most Nigerian leaders do not see good governance from the perspective of maintaining broader conduct in public affairs. For many of them, good gover-

nance means maintaining the state's coercive agencies to enforce general conformity with an official position. The majority of Nigerian leaders believe the state's resources are used for nothing other than to satisfy their consumption appetite and those of their cronies. They also believe that the state's security agencies should perpetuate them in office as long as they desire to stay. That is why Nigerian political leadership often deploys security arsenals to monitor critics of their self-serving policies. (Aisedion and Oboh, 2021:1). The above situation is currently going on in Nigeria where agitators for good governance are arrested, their property demolished and killing of people with reckless abandon. Experience has it that government's policies are consciously made to further impoverish the poor Nigerian citizens in order to render them powerless and prevent them from taking part in legal, political, or economic affairs of the state.

In Nigeria, citizens have no free access to qualitative, well-structured and functional education because the government lacks the will power of funding, resulting in strikes. The inadequate government's presence is not only noticeable in education but also in every sector of the economy, resulting in disillusionment and agitation for self-determination by various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The character of Nigerian leadership has bequeathed a high burden of acute food shortages, poor capacity building, high illiteracy, a weak infrastructural base for even development, inadequate public utilities, chronic unemployment, absolute poverty, asymmetric distribution of resources, among others (Aisedion and Oboh, 2021:2).

### 4.2 | How leaders should perceive democracy and good governance in Nigeria

When redefining democracy and good governance, it is an attempt to re-focus leadership perceptions of what a true democratic government and good leadership represent. Democratic government has the impact of positive conditions in the lives of the citizens within the state and being able to provide them with an acceptable atmosphere for their self-actualisation. The concern for good governance is basically the pre-occupation of every nation and of course, of every human person or community. This

is because good governance affects not only the satisfaction of human basic needs but also the primary issue of survival of the human person or nation. It is only under a democratic situation and good governance that individuals within the state engage in meaningful activities to meet their needs. Similarly, it is also under a democratic and good governance atmosphere that the state can productively harness human and material resources for meaningful development. Therefore, any country who wants to enjoy development should predicate good governance on everybody. A sound democratic policy must address the aspirations of the entire the people, then such efforts become all-inclusive and truly democratic because it will take care of both the government and the governed.(Aisedion and Oboh, 2021:6). So refocusing is to have a people-oriented democratic system that takes a different focus away from the liberal approach, to a classical democratic system in which all those elements that minister to the needs of human beings are present (Imobighe, 1998:1-11). In the same way, good governance as refocused should encompass peoples' safety from hunger, diseases and repression from individuals and the state. This equally includes economic, environmental, food, health, personal, community and political security, as well as protecting women and minorities (Holmes,2015:20). The realization of genuine democratic government and good governance will no doubt call for a wide range of reduction of employment, natural disasters and pollution, physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, and child labour (United Nations Office, 2009:10). Therefore, with this refocus of the concepts of democracy and good governance, state leaders cannot endeavour to starve its citizens of their basic necessity of life. Oluwasuji (2020:261-264) succinctly captured the responsibilities of a good government to include personal security and protection of citizens, general welfare and education of individuals, promotion of economic and social development, maintenance of diplomatic relations, protection against external aggression, taxation, maintenance of law and order, protection of right and property, formulation and implementation of policies. The above responsibilities and duties are needed from a responsible government. This is what democracy and good governance entail particularly by ensuring the rights of the citizens are guaranteed,

welfare services are provided including the provision of infrastructural facilities, formulation of necessary and relevant policies that will enhance the general well-being of the citizens, among others.

## 5 | CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria has over the years been in search of credible leadership to no avail. Those that take over the reins of power see the state as a haven to siphon the public treasury to their own pockets and to their cronies. Also their agenda of assuming leadership is primarily to perpetrate themselves in power, where they can use the state's security agencies arbitrarily to deal decisively with perceived opponents or agitators for good governance. Although democracy is regarded as the government of the majority, it is not so perceived by Nigerian leaders, rather it is perceived as a government of the elites with complete absence of accountability, transparency, provision of social amenities, among others. Therefore, it is recommended that public leadership in Nigeria should imbibe and cultivate morality with humane disposition of exemplary character of quality leadership. Nigerians need leadership that is committed to the rule of law and has a demonstrable sense of fair play and democratic tolerance. The general public and civil societies should actively engage political leaders, by pointing out to them that good governance is about the welfare of the people. Finally, it is in keeping with the tenets of good governance that both the leaders and the governed will be secured for meaningful development. This is because it is under secured atmosphere individuals can increase their productive capacity for sustainable development of the state.

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