Chapter Eighteen

Leadership and National Development in Comparative Perspective: Insights and Lessons

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Introduction

At first glance, comparing political issues and governance structures of the United States of America with those of Nigeria might seem futile, especially given the contrast between a developed nation and a developing one. It is possible to assume that the glaring disparities between the two countries render any meaningful study impossible. Before dismissing the endeavour, it is pertinent to take cognizance that even comparing ostensibly similar countries can be challenging due to the inherent difficulty of aligning structures, processes, and citizens engagement across different political landscapes. In contrast, the United States boasts stable democratic institutions and deeply ingrained political processes. A significant majority of its citizens accept and support these structures, resulting in minimal violence stemming from disagreements over the political system's structure, institutional arrangements, or process outcomes. In Nigeria, the democratic institutions are notably unstable and lack legitimacy. The country faces numerous political crises, some of which are severe enough to destabilize the entire polity.

Additionally, the ability of the Nigerian democratic system to function effectively is hampered by the prevalence and widespread politicisation of ethno-religious disputes (Dode & Ita, 2018, 2019; Ita, 2022). Besides, the Nigerian state is governed by a predatory political class, leading to personal rulership, corruption, and underdevelopment. Many civilian and military leaders prioritize selfish personal goals over broader national interests, making them fit into what Apter (1960) described as 'instrumental' or 'consummatory' leaders. Plato's ideas and notion of the “Ideal State” provide insight into the concept of leadership. When Plato theorised the Ideal State and the philosopher king or leader as its central figure, he believedthat:

> When the supreme power in man coincides with the greatest wisdom and temperance, then the best laws and the best constitution come into being; but in no other way …. Until Philosophers become kings in this world, or till that we now

> call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands …, there is no other road to real happiness, either for society or the individual (Plato, 1955).

For Plato, an 'Ideal State' under a philosopher was a heavenly establishment that was admirable and even commendable. The philosopher king was the ideal leader because he would be least motivated to exploit power for personal gain. The goal of leadership was everyone's general well-being, thus it needed skills and credentials just like any other duty (Wolin, 1960). A philosopher would possess the attributes of a leader, such as bravery, honesty, high-mindedness, frankness, chastisement, fairness and the capacity to direct affairs in the best interests of his subjects. Again, he would be above material and physical pleasures, not petty or mean, and free from emotional attachments and financial concerns. Finally, he would be wise and public-spirited. On the basis of these qualities, a philosopher ruler tantamount a dedicated leader.

Leaders are patriotic individuals whose personal examples inspire their fellow citizens toward noble actions that contribute to nation-building and national development. These leaders wholeheartedly embrace and align themselves with their nation's goals and aspirations, primarily centred on unity, cohesion, and the integration of the people into a cohesive political entity with a shared destiny. They actively work towards expanding the nation's power militarily, economically, and culturally, positioning it competitively among other nations. For them, leadership transcends individual interests, prioritizing the nation over personal or sectional concerns; they are not opportunistic or latecomers to nationalism; rather, from early on in their lives, they prioritize national interests over local ones. Given that every nation encounter challenges, particularly in its formative years, emerging leaders are crucial in addressing these crises. Hence, leadership play an indispensable role in the prosperity and well-being of their nations, Nigeria inclusive.

Not everyone has the necessary leadership abilities and qualifications to run an establishment, let alone rule a nation. Furthermore, no nation could anticipate having an infinite supply of outstanding and remarkable leaders along the lines of Charles de Gaulle of France, Winston Churchill of Britain, or Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States. Certainly, too, no society can operate properly with nincompoops, fools or miscreants as its leaders (Graebner, 1987). A society, nation, or state without a leader is akin to a ship without a rudder. It is the leader who guides the ship of governance in a state. James Madison candidly expressed the importance of leadership and governance in his contention that:

> If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control of the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions (Madison, 1788, p.337).

By this expression, Madison suggested that angels are flawless creatures who require no regulation or oversight. More so, Madison recognized that humans are imperfect, driven by self-interest and ambition, and susceptible to corruption. Furthermore, he justified the need for government while also advocating for constitutional limits on political power. The above understanding has led to a consensus among many political theorists that while government is essential, it must be subject to constraints and limitations. For instance, Edmund Burke (1975) glowingly alluded to this fact when he asserted:

> Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants. Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom.... Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done by a power out of themselves; and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights. But as the liberties and restrictions vary with times and circumstances, and admit of infinite modifications, they cannot be settled upon any abstract rule; and nothing is so foolish as to discuss them upon that principle (cited in Curtis, 1977,p.24).

Above passage underscores the value of democratic governance, which is commonly perceived as a system where all individuals have an equal voice in decisions impacting their lives. Ideally, this entails equal participation, to varying degrees, in proposing, developing, and enacting legislations into laws. It also encompasses social, economic, and cultural conditions conducive to the free and equitable exercise of political self-determination. In effect, effective democratic leadership anchored on patriotism is essential for addressing the fundamental needs, concerns, aspirations, and expectations of the citizens in any polity.

Conceptualising Leadership and National Development

Leadership

There are numerous perspectives on leadership, each offering its own interpretation. Generally, leaders are individuals who translate their beliefs and visions into reality by exerting control and influence over others (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Leadership is thus defined by the actions taken to establish and pursue group goals while maintaining cohesion. As conceptualised by Heywood (2011), leadership is either a behavioural pattern or a personal quality exhibited by individuals seen as leaders. As a behavioural pattern, leadership entails influencing an organized group to plan and coordinate actions towards predetermined objectives. As a personality trait, leadership is characterized by charismatic qualities that allow certain individuals to influence the behaviour of others.

Bass (1990) views leadership as an interaction between group members that often involves restructuring situations and shaping perceptions and expectations. Yukl (2002) expands this definition to include not only influencing members to recognize and agree on shared goals and strategies but also facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve them. According to Uduig women (1997), leadership is the capacity and aptitude to lead. Being a leader therefore cannot be attributed to one's position; rather, one must lead by example, and in this case, leadership is defined as having a multiplier impact on issues such as good governance, peace, tranquilly, and the welfare and wellbeing of the populace. Consequently, a person might be regarded as the most successful leader even without a designated title.

Das & Choudhury (1997) approach leadership from a political perspective, focusing on the role of chief executives. In developed countries, chief executives face new challenges, particularly on the international stage, while in developing countries, they are often tasked with addressing endemic issues like poverty and underdevelopment. Effective identification and utilization of leadership are crucial for implementing development plans smoothly and swiftly. In developing countries, political leaders often rally personal followership through populism,

positioning themselves as national figures responsible for economic decisions and resource allocation. Therefore, studying leadership in modern political systems often revolves around analysing the roles of chief executives.

National development

National Development is a complex concept, encompassing a combination of factors that lead to positive and desirable growth within a nation. Raji (1999) conceives national development as progress across three major dimensions: political, economic, and social. Politically, national development involves nation-building through the establishment of stable political institutions and processes; economically, it implies increased productivity in both goods and services, leading to economic self-reliance and a high standard of living; and, socially, it entails promoting cultural and religious diversity, resolving conflicts, and enhancing public culture. National development is a continuous aspiration where leaders inspire their people to achieve. Success in this endeavour requires the citizenry to perceive tangible achievements by their leaders, fostering hope for a better future. Yet, if the citizens doubt the sincerity and selflessness of their leaders, believing little or nothing has been accomplished, their hope for the future diminishes. The goals of national development are not fixed; as society progresses, new challenges emerge, making complete attainment of goals impossible and pushing them into the future. This continuous striving and growth characterize development.

Leadership and National Development: The American Perspective

The United States stands out for its clear record regarding its foundation and the explicit roles of its leaders. A prime example is **George Washington**, who, according to Lipset (1998) founded and helped America to develop a national identity and institutionalised a republic and competitive electoral democracy. He fostered a great deal of trust and, more than anybody else alive at the time, he helped to shape the institutions and culture required for a sound, legitimate, and functioning democratic government. The contention is that in the early years of America's history, conditions that could eventually cause the collapse of post-revolutionary administrations, typical of newly formed states, were present, however, the country's competitive electoral democracy and republican institutions survived its first 75 years of existence largely due to Washington's charismatic credibility and legitimacy.

Lipset also noted that, unlike many successful individuals, Washington's ambition was not for power or wealth, but for his reputation and how he was perceived by others. He aspired to be seen as a man of morality and integrity, declining to take a salary as president or commander-in-chief, and eagerly

anticipating retirement to his plantation at Mount Vernon. Washington was devoted to a just society and recognized the importance of substantial legitimacy, understanding that he was the key figure in creating and sustaining allegiance to the new American nation. He cultivated respect by constantly acting appropriately, standing by his moral principles, and providing a positive example for others to follow.

Additionally, Washington was instrumental in institutionalising the principle of civilian supremacy over military personnel. During the "Newburgh conspiracy" of 1783, disgruntled members of the Continental Army, upset over the government's failure to pay them, planned to seize the government through a coup d'état. Several politicians, including Robert Morris and Alexander Hamilton, attempted to capitalise on these complaints to increase support for a more powerful central government headed by the executive branch. Although agreeing with their objective, Washington disapproved of their strategy, cautioning that 'playing with the Army might be perilous'. His skilful defusing of the situation guaranteed the stability of the newly formed nation and preserved civilian authority over the armed forces.

Finally, Lipset (1998) noted that Washington's leadership charm was crucial. He, undoubtedly, made a substantial contribution to the United States' transition to a system of legal domination by unwaveringly declining to abuse his position. Washington turned down every proposal to adopt an authoritarian regime or to become president for life. Washington understood the importance of setting an example and stepping down, lest people think he could not do without the 'sweets of office'. Dedicated to the laws and spirit of the country, he retired while in excellent health. His choice to retire set a precedent as the first president of a modern state to transfer power to a validly chosen successor, John Adams. This move was important because it established a tradition of peaceful transition of power. Notably, if Washington had served out his term in office, ensuing presidential successions would have been more acrimonious, with defeated candidates either suing for re-election or trying to hold onto their positions.

Washington's dedication to upholding the rule of law and comprehension of conditions necessary for a stable republic compelled him to retire, embodying a level of leadership and integrity unparalleled in history. His style of compelling leadership had a profound impact on stabilising the advancement of America's civilisation. It is no misnomer that Thomas Jefferson summed him perfectly when he remarked that 'Washington was a model of which the history of the world furnishes no other example' since he had meticulously observed the law throughout his career, both civil and military.

The next American leader was **Thomas Jefferson**, one of America's Founding Fathers, champion of democracy, primary drafter of the Declaration of Independence (1776), and third President of the United States (1801-1809). He was not well-known for his public speaking skills, but his written correspondences were full of eloquence. He wrote more than he spoke for the cause of patriotism in forums such as the Virginia House of Burgesses and the Continental Congress. Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence in 1776 while functioning as a quiet Congressman. He put much effort into bringing its ideals to Virginia, particularly by drafting legislation that guaranteed freedom of worship, which was endorsed in 1786 (Makokha, 2020). Jefferson implemented significant fiscal reforms, which included slashing the budget, eliminating the whisky tax in the West, and decreasing spending on the Army and Navy. He dispatched a Naval troop to counter the Barbary bandits, that posed a threat to American commercial venture in the Mediterranean.

Jefferson prevented the United States from entering the Napoleonic Wars, even in the face of meddling from France and England about the neutral rights of American trade vessels. As a realist, Jefferson acknowledged the inevitability of partisan politics in a representative government. But as an optimist, he was adamant that most Americans had similar objectives, even though their methods for reaching them varied. He held that each person owed their country a duty of service and emphasised the need for honourable leadership that put the good of the country ahead of personal benefit. Jefferson believed that nationalist leaders would prioritise the nation over the party and make the American experiment in self-governance a success. This sentiment was perfectly expressed in his inauguration address when he stated: 'We are all republicans: we are all federalists'.

Theodore Roosevelt assumed office at age 42 as the youngest president in American history after President William McKinley was assassinated. Roosevelt gave the presidency fresh vitality and strength, inspiring Congress and the American people to support progressive changes and a strong foreign policy (Milkis, 2024). He greatly raised the prestige and power of the presidency. During the second part of the 1800s, Congress served as the primary arm and centre of government activities; however, the presidency started to gain a measure of power in the late 1880s, but Roosevelt brought the executive branch up to speed and strength. Using his powerful personality and forceful executive action, place the President - rather than Congress or political parties - at the heart of American politics, hence in 1913, he could declare, 'Although I did not seize power, I did significantly expand the usage of the executive power'. He disagreed with popular ideas of limited government and individualism, holding that the President should act as a 'guardian of the people' and be able to exercise any and all powers unless

expressly forbidden by the law or the Constitution. He maintained that the people should use the government as a catalyst for change (History.Com, 2024b).

Roosevelt's administration enhanced the legitimacy of the progressive movement by endowing welfare legislation, governmental control, and conservation with the prestige of the White House. His goal was to establish economic opportunity for every American in a just and equal society. Roosevelt pursued a robust foreign policy to further American interests because, for him, America had a duty to the world. He travelled to Latin America, supervising the talks for the Panama Canal and acting to maintain regional peace in Venezuela and Santo Domingo. To balance world power, he negotiated peace accords and attempted to fortify the US Navy against any threats (History.Com, 2024b).

Roosevelt's presidency also revolutionized presidential style, introducing charisma and a direct appeal to the public. He was the first to be elected president based on his candidature rather than the party, even as he exploited the media to sway public opinion. His ability to influence attitudes, mould issues, and win votes contributed to his popularity. Roosevelt persisted in promoting his principles even after he left office (The White House, 2024).

Our last leader for consideration is **Ronald Wilson Reagan.** After taking office on January 20, 1981, as the 40th American president, Reagan adeptly manoeuvred Congress to enact laws promoting economic expansion, reducing inflation, boosting employment, and fortifying the country's security. Even though defence spending resulted in a significant deficit, he pressed for a reduction in taxes and government spending. By 1986, Reagan had completely overhauled the income tax system by eliminating several tax withdrawals and excluding millions of individuals with low earnings from payment. Under his leadership, the United States experienced a return to prosperity at home and the implementation of the 'Reagan Revolution', an innovative programme designed to re-energise the people and lessen their dependence on the government. For a certainty, America was going through its longest stretch of peacetime prosperity - one devoid of either a recession or a depression.

Reagan pursued a foreign policy of 'peace through strength', which included attacking Libya in retaliation for its involvement in the assault on US soldiers in a nightclub in Berlin and declaring war on global terrorism. Also, during the Iran-Iraq conflict, he issued a directive to naval forces in the Persian Gulf to ensure an uninterrupted flow of oil. In line with the Reagan Doctrine, he backed anti-Communist efforts in Africa, Asia, and Central America. In general, Reagan's reign witnessed a return to affluence, which advanced the goal of bringing about peace via strength. As his tenure ended in 1989, Reagan felt he had lived up to his campaign promise to bring back the grand, self-assured roar of American progress, development, and optimism.

The foregoing historical records demonstrate that leadership anchored on patriotism is ingrained in American life and is a fundamental aspect of its public culture (Ita& Edet, 2018). American statesmen, both in private and public lives, have consistently worked to protect American values such as national unity, constitutionalism, liberty, equality, civic rights, and religious freedom (Ikpe, 2004). The revolutionary and Union formation periods were particularly marked by exceptional nationalism, setting a standard for future leaders. Hence, all American presidents exemplify this tradition and demonstrate unwavering loyalty and dedication to the 'American Creed' embodying the essence of American patriotism.

Leadership and National Development: The Nigerian Perspective

The concept of leadership in Nigeria takes on a distinct character compared to its American counterpart. In analysing political leadership and its impact on Nigerian polity, it proved beneficial to review the activities of Nigerian leaders, particularly those who have held significant political executive positions at the national or regional/state level, and whose portraits adorn the nation's currency notes. Notable figures in this regard include Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, andMurtala Muhammed.

Nnamdi Benjamin Azikiwe is perhaps the only leader who began as a nationalist but ultimately emerged as an Igbo patriot. Serving as the Secretary-General of the Igbo Union, in 1948 he proclaimed that the gods of Africa had selected the Igbo race to lead the African liberation from colonial oppression. This declaration was perceived by other Nigerian leaders as an effort by Azikiwe to portray Igbo as a superior race. When Azikiwe lost the 1952 election to the Central Legislature in the Western Region, he returned to the East and utilized ethnic solidarity to disrupt the regional government led by Professor Eyo Ita, a minority from the Efik-Ibibio tribe (Achebe, 1983). Again, Azikiwe fully supported Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu when he declared the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra in 1967 - an act that resulted in a 30-month civil war in Nigeria.

Moving down the roster of leaders, **Chief Obafemi Jeremiah Oyeniyi Awolowo**, the first premier of the Western Region and founder of the Action Group, emerges prominently as the progenitor of divisive ethnic politics in Nigeria. He played a crucial part in the ethnic tensions that precipitated the downfall of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), the first significant nationalist political organization in Nigeria. Awolowo also orchestrated Yoruba solidarity efforts, prompting elected members of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in the Western legislature to defect to the Action Group. He even threatened to secede from the Western Region of Nigeria following the British decision to excise Lagos, then the nation's capital, from the Western Region (Crowder, 1978). Awolowo and several other prominent members of the Action

Group were convicted and imprisoned for treasonable felonies in 1962 (Post and Vickers, 1973).

Another notable leader is **Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa**, a Nigerian politician who served as the first federal Prime Minister (1957-1966) and deputy leader of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC). In addition to supporting reform and Nigerian unity, Balewa stood up for the specific interests of the north. He eminently declared that the North would resume the Usman dan Fodio-led Jihad towards the Atlantic Ocean - a campaign he claimed was halted by British imperialism (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2024). Balewa was not actively involved in any nationalist organizations. His authority as Nigeria's prime minister was limited by the federal government system, which bestowed greater powers on the regional governments. Balewa was incapable of defusing the mounting hostilities between 1964 and 1966, which included army unrest, violent outbursts in the Western Region, and a partial boycott of the 1964 election (Zaccheus Onumba Dibiaezue Memorial Libraries,2024).

Alhaji (Sir) Ahmadu Ibrahim Bello, often known as ***Sardauna of Sokoto***, was a conformist Nigerian statesman and a prominent Northern politician. He served as the Northern region's first and only premier from 1954 until his assassination in 1966, during which time he exerted significant influence over national issues. His focus was on the North, to achieve northern dominance in Nigerian politics and for that reason, became hesitant to embrace independence (Franz, 2009). In contrast to other Nigerian political stakeholders who anticipated a unified nation after gaining independence from the British, Bello considered that his major obligation was to protect the welfare of the North and its people.

In pursuit of his interest, Bello founded the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), a political party characterised by the slogan: “One North, One People, One Destiny” (Ita, 2018; Dickson & Ita, 2022). Although his party gained power at the centre, Bello remained in the North as the Premier, leveraging his influence as the Sarduana of Sokoto to coordinate NPC activities in the region. In one of the debates during plenary in the Northern House of Chiefs on March 19, 1965, Sir Ahmadu Bello statedthat:

> The Northernization policy does not only apply to clerks, administrative officers, doctors and others. We do not want to go to Chad and meet strangers catching our fish in the water, and taking them away to leave us with nothing. We do not want to go to Sokoto and find a carpenter who is a stranger nailing our house. I do not want to go to the Sabon Gari, Kano, and find strangers making the body of a lorry, or to go the market and see butchers who are not Northerners (cited in Albert, 2003, pp.59-60).

Bello's advocacy for Northernization policy never aligned with the ideals of national leadership since his major priority was to bring the Northern region up to the political and economic level of the Eastern and Western regions (Shillington, 2005). This mentality influenced the choice to swap the Southerners and Europeans with Northerners in the region's government services, a move that was criticised by Southern Nigeriannationalists.

The last to consider is **General Murtala Ramat Muhammed,** a Nigerian Civil War veteran, who later ruled Nigeria from July 30, 1975, until his assassination on February 13, 1976. He led the July 1966 Northern counter-coup troops in toppling General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi's military administration eventually paving the way for Northern dominance in Nigerian politics, against the coup's original goal of Northern secession (Kurfi, 1988). His national prominence stemmed from the perceived anti-corruption campaign he led after overthrowing General Yakubu Gowon's government. Muhammad's impact on Nigerian history is still complex and contentious. The hallmarks of his tenure were harsh repression and economic success, which significantly raised Nigerians' standard of living. Wide-ranging social and economic reforms were made possible by his extremely flexible dictatorial approach. Throughout his rule, he consistently pursued authoritarianism, federalism, national federalism, pan-Africanism, and highly centralised administration (Peoples Daily, 2023; Suleiman, 2020). Despite being regarded as the most widely acclaimed heroic figure, Muhammad was charged with using dishonest methods to profit himself during the Civil War, which resulted in his being court-martialled (Office of the Historian, 1975).

Military and Leadership in Nigeria and the United States

It might be assumed that the military, as a nationalistic institution, comprises devoted officers and soldiers dedicated to the national interest. This is not entirely true of the Nigerian military, which has been heavily politicized since its inception. As far back as 1960, 50 per cent of officer enlistment was reserved for the Northern region, leading to an overemphasis on one's ethnic and regional background for becoming an officer in the Nigerian Army. Even with the current state-equality quota system, the issue persists, since there are more states in some ethnic groups than others, resulting in a higher proportion of officers from those groups (Ikpe, 2004).

The Nigerian military had a significant opportunity to contribute to national development but failed due to the parochial nature of its leadership. The first coup plotters, who had patriotic intentions, did not seize power, which was unfortunate for Nigeria. Subsequent coup attempts were motivated by ethnic or personal interests. Therefore, it was not the military mentality, as some have argued, that hindered Nigeria's development during military regimes, but the lack of

commitment and effective leadership among military leaders. In contrast, the military in countries like Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan played crucial roles in their development. In Nigeria, the military became involved in corrupt practices, leading to weak command and dispirited efforts at national development (Ita, 2024).

During the military regimes, officers often chose political positions over professional military postings due to the opportunities for private wealth accumulation. This trend worsened during the regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. It was during this period that the term 'settlement' was introduced to replace bribery. Particularly, General Ibrahim Babangida had the potential to enhance political stability and strengthen democracy in Nigeria, but he squandered this opportunity by engaging in corrupt practices, brutally suppressing opposition, and in 1983 annulled the most open and free election ever held in Nigeria. Despite this, he is regarded as a hero by some, with many roads and public buildings across the country named after him.

In August 2006, Babangida indicated interest in contesting for Nigeria's presidency in 2007. However, he later pulled out of the race, claiming it would be a 'moral dilemma' to contest against both General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau and Umaru Musa Yar'Adua considering his close relationship with both of them, whereas he had little chance of winning. Again, Babangida formally declared his intention in September 2010 to compete for the presidency in the 2011 elections (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2006; 2010). Though he gained some support, he faced strong resistance from Nigerians, particularly those in the Southwest. Once more, on the advice of his cabal in the military, he withdrew his candidature.

The military, with its foundation in discipline, loyalty, and patriotism, and its centralised command structure, could have effectively controlled every segment of Nigerian society, unlike civilians who are often divided by political party affiliations. If the military had viewed the Nigerian society as its constituency, akin to its counterparts in Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan, it could have united and integrated Nigeria and its people, harnessed the energies of Nigerians for productive purposes and instilled virtues of patriotism and loyalty in the public. But, owing to its sectional, parochial, and ethnic nature, the military was plagued by the same divisive forces that affected civilian politicians. This resulted in an unhealthy struggle, akin to that observed in civilian politics, between various ethnic groups for control of the Nigerian state and resource allocation. Given this scenario, one cannot refute but agree with Achebe's (1983) averment that the problem with Nigeria is a failure of leadership and the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibilities and challenges of personal example that are the features of leadership.

In America, military service is sometimes regarded as the pinnacle of patriotism, with the primary objective of ensuring the security of American States. Citizens voluntarily choose to protect their nation by joining the military out of conviction, not obligation. For example, over the years, members of the All-Volunteer Force have been driven by loyalty, pride, and principle - by a desire to be a part of the American ideal and a deep love of their country. To many veterans, patriotism is also a devotion to the values spelt out in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, as epitomised in the lives and acts of American leaders like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ulysses Grant, John Kennedy, George Bush, Theodore Roosevelt, among others who later became leading American presidents (Parsons,2024).

As Americans build their lives around a free commitment to military service, they grow into leaders. Indeed, two-thirds of US presidents are war veterans, which has influenced their elevation to the nation's highest executive office (O'Brien, 2021). This crop of leaders passes on their knowledge to future generations of Service Members. Over the years, the American military has recruited and maintained devoted and talented individuals from all areas of life, resulting in a more professional and effective Joint Force. Today, the United States Armed Forces are the strongest in human history, and they set the worldwide standard for military professionalism.

The preceding analysis furnishes ample evidence that Nigeria lacks heroic or committed leaders comparable to American figures like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ulysses Grant, John Kennedy, George Bush, and Theodore Roosevelt, among others. Nigerian leaders, both military and civilian, tend to favour a patrimonial approach to governance over a rational or efficient one. This approach involves the privatization and commercialization of state offices, allowing office-holders to use their positions and resources for personal gains and that of their supporters (Joseph, 1987; Callaghy, 1987). Since state offices represent the quickest path to wealth, political competition for these offices becomes fierce and often ruthless (Ake, 1985; 1991; Diamond, 1988). This intense competition is a key reason why elections in Nigeria are marked by ruthlessness and ferocity. Also noteworthy is the fact that most Nigerian leaders enter the national political scene as leaders and representatives of their respective ethnic groups.

Leadership and Development Challenges: AWake-Up Call for Nigeria

In any political setting, devoted national leaders wield influence because their followers believe in their exceptional qualities. They emerge when their unique abilities align with prevalent societal challenges and issues. Nevertheless, their relevance tends to fade once the problem is resolved, unless they continue to address

other ongoing challenges. In American history, leaders have struggled to balance their political interests with the broader national interest, a challenge that persists today. In Nigeria's colonial period, the primary challenge was decolonization and achieving national independence (Umo-Udo &Ita,2021). Many of our leaders have been most vocal about their relevance in this area; beyond this stage, they have not demonstrated the skills necessary for nation-building. Instead, they have excelled at mobilizing ethnic and sectional energies, often competing to dominate the country to develop their respective regions. National leaders tended to view national policies through ethnic and regional lenses, leading to decisions that prioritized ethnic and sectional interests over national interests. Their primary focus was on their regions, with national interests often taking a back seat.

Despite their efforts to secure political independence, Nigeria's past national leaders failed to create a unified and integrated nation, which is essential for development (Ita, Ebong & Inimo-Etele, 2019). The struggle for independence, while significant, did not involve a war of independence akin to those seen in the United States, Zimbabwe, Guinea-Bissau, and Namibia. Nigerian nationalists' commitment to nation-building during this period is viewed by some as lacking depth and sincerity. There was often unhealthy rivalry among leaders, and particularistic interests sometimes superseded nationalist ideals. In contrast, the American Revolution and the War of Independence notably strengthened nationalism among American elites and the masses.

As Nigeria contends with the crisis of national development, the current crop of leaders does not inspire. If today's youth are encouraged to emulate their past leaders, it would reinforce sectionalism and regionalism at the expense of national unity. Unfortunately, many current leaders are influenced by the same divisive politics as their predecessors. For example, Northern leaders often claim to emulate the paths of Ahmadu Bello, while those in the West align themselves with Obafemi Awolowo, while leaders in the East associate themselves with Nnamdi Azikiwe. To foster development, Nigeria must move beyond the politics of division perpetuated by these celebrated leaders. With the world moving towards global citizenship, Nigeria still struggles with achieving true national citizenship, as its citizens often feel like strangers outside their regions as a result of the divisive politics ingrained in the society by our leaders, past and present (Ita & Bassey, 2022).

Moreover, the challenges confronting Nigerian society in the twenty-first century differ significantly from those of the twentieth century. As other nations progress while Nigeria lags, the developmental gap continues to widen. In the 1960s, Nigeria was more advanced than Malaysia, but today the situation is reversed, with a significant development gap between the two countries. This gap is not due to a lack of resources, but a failure of leadership. Nigeria grapples with acute

underdevelopment despite its abundant material and human resources, stressing the absence of effective leadership to harness them for meaningful development. Consequently, many Nigerians yearn for the emergence of dedicated leaders who can address these calamitous circumstances.

Unfortunately, this aspiration faces challenges, particularly in underdeveloped states like Nigeria where the state plays a central role in policy-making. Individuals cannot circumvent the state, underscoring the importance of ensuring that leaders who comprehend the essence of development, are genuinely concerned about poverty and underdevelopment, and possess the capacity to initiate and sustain development are elected into power. These criteria should serve as the yardstick for evaluating merit and guiding the electorate in selecting their leaders. While Nigeria previously fought against colonial domination to secure political independence, the current political landscape is marred by instability and unconsolidated democracy. Addressing these quagmires requires leaders who are willing to confront various irregularities in the political system, including ethnicity, electoral fraud, lawlessness, injustice, corrupt practices, as well as disrespect for the constitution and other statutes. In essence, Nigeria urgently needs leaders who possess the courage to speak out against these political maladies and take decisive actions to rectify them.

In Nigeria, the urgency for devoted leadership is most acutely felt in the economic realm. The challenge lies in combating foreign dominance and dependency, necessitating the rise of economic nationalists and compatriots. What Nigeria requires are individuals committed to developing indigenous technologies and utilizing them to manufacture goods and services for the benefit of the nation and its citizens. We need entrepreneurs aspiring to emulate the success of major manufacturers in America, Asia and Europe. Rather than settling for conventional business practices like agency-distribution and trading, we need visionary industrialists whose operations are rooted in local technological and raw material resources. Economic nationalists are essential for re-orienting the country towards internal economic production and self-sufficiency.

These economic nationalists should instil a spirit of healthy competition with foreign firms, surpassing them in productivity and curbing their dominance in the economy. By assuming such roles, they would emerge as the true heroes of Nigeria, exerting considerable influence in the political sphere to dismantle the hostile economic environments inhibiting domestic production. Unfortunately, the scarcity of such individuals in Nigeria today undermines their potential impact on the nation's trajectory. Instead, what persists is a collusion between political and economic elites and foreign business interests, resulting in the exploitation of Nigerians. While past leaders may have played a significant role during the nation's

formative years, their legacy is marred by critical errors that should serve as cautionary tales for future generations. They often prioritized ethnic and regional interests over the collective welfare of the nation, perpetuating a cycle of divisive politics that hindered Nigeria's progress. Continuing to uphold these leaders as sources of inspiration risks perpetuating the mistakes that have impeded the nation's development.

It is instructive to note that at the core of Nigeria's leadership challenge are the crises of identity, legitimacy, penetration, participation, integration, and distribution (Pye, 1971) which manifest in the declining capacity of the state to cope with a range of internal political and social upheavals. Identity crisis in Nigerians arises from a state of origin and deep divisions among major ethnic groups, such as Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. A lack of shared value makes individuals identify with their ethnic inclination before identifying as Nigerian, leading to ethnic solidarity, rivalry, and competition. Participation and legitimacy crises become manifest in the way and manner electoral competition is played at a zero-sum level, leading to controversies and allegations of political corruption. These include rigging, distortion, lack of discipline, and excessive monetization of politics. More so, penetration, integration, and distribution crises are visible in terms of political violence and instability, resulting in various issues such as ethnic and religious crises, domestic terrorism (Boko Haram, kidnappings and banditry), civil disobedience, and political disturbances.

Moreover, the challenge that Nigeria is facing has evolved beyond mere political independence to encompass economic self-reliance in a globalized world. The nation urgently requires new leaders equipped with the spiritual, mental, and intellectual fortitude to tackle these contemporary challenges. Unlike their predecessors, these leaders must prioritize economic independence and strive to achieve tangible results rather than merely assuming positions of authority for symbolic purposes.

Conclusion

From the comparative analysis, it is obvious that commitment to leadership is ingrained in American culture, with its leaders exhibiting selflessness, dedication to service, and effective management of both human and material resources which are conducive to national development, whereas Nigeria has not yet reached such heights in its political history, with leaders often prioritizing ethnic and regional interests over national interest - an act antagonistic to national development. Again, Nigerian leaders often fall short of exhibiting a willingness or capacity to rise to the task of setting a personal example that other leaders would be proud to follow - the quality that distinguishes great leadership. It is hardly surprising that Nigeria cannot

attain national development with leaders of this kind. To attain significant national progress, the political leadership class in Nigeria has to completely shift its mindset. In contrast to local and regional interests, leadership duties and responsibilities must be people-centred and national in scope. The country must resist giving in to those who steal money to satisfy their desires. At all times, national interest and loyalty ought to come first. Devoted and capable leadership is essential to realising these potentials for national growth.

For Nigeria to attain and maintain national unity, nation-building, and progress, the country requires competent and dedicated leadership. Nigeria may be liberated from the irritating problem of development with the aid of devoted leadership. Thus, for Nigeria to measure up with the United States and successfully navigate its challenges of leadership and development, it is imperative that individuals who will bear the brunt of leadership in the future have a complete understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and duties. Additionally, they need to be aware of and equipped to handle the pressures of leadership in Nigeria, as a growing country. Nigerian leaders should uphold the rule of law, patriotism and national consciousness so as to effectively identify and put national interests above their personal and ethnic interests. Regardless of their racial or religious orientations, Nigerian leaders must regard themselves as the people's servants, not their masters, and steer them along national development objectives.

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