

**AN INVESTIGATION ON THE ILLUSIONARY OF NIGERIA  
DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP AND THE WAY FORWARD**

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.28191.89765

**Abstract**

*It is a fact well acknowledged that Nigeria as a democratic nation assumes the practice of democracy in her administrative and political system. This democracy so practiced has been raising question from well spirited individuals on whether it really captures the intention of the ancient Greek and Roman intellectuals that founded it during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These questions have been based on the premise that Nigeria government has always negated the real practice of democracy in her political, legal and administrative system. Hence Nigeria democracy is seen as tainted by all the obnoxious attributes of mindless military dictatorship that has crippled the Nation's economy and dehumanized the people through its anti- people policies, leaving behind its trail a visible caricature of our lofty hope and aspirations, with its definition as a government of people without conscience, by people without conscience and for the people without conscience. In this work, an examination of Nigeria democratic leadership will be done using a sociological method with a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism theory. The paper finds that there has been a rape in democracy as it is practiced in Nigeria today. It also observes that the ruling class has fashioned democracy in a way to suit their personal wills. It finally observes that there is a clear difference between what democracy is and what is obtained in present Nigeria. The paper therefore recommends that Nigeria leaders should revisit the nature of her democracy which will give way to an egalitarian society. It also recommends the bringing in of people that are willing to give room for democracy in the administration of Nigeria as a way of maintaining a democratic system*

**Keywords:** Investigation, Illusionary, Nigeria, Democratic, Leadership, Way forward.

## **Introduction**

Democracy is considered by many scholars as the best form of government, given its appealing prospects which have become evidently prevalent in the contemporary world's governance. As such, nations operating other forms of government have overtime strongly sought for democratic leadership. Having practiced military rule, Nigerians clamored for democratic rule and the nation has since 1999 witnessed civilian transitions of power within democracy. For Nigerians, the beauty of democracy lies in its inclination towards integral and sustainable national development. Hence, the thrust of democracy anywhere is determined hugely by the manner and style of leadership by which the system of government is run. Any democracy driven by bad leadership stunts nation building and engenders tour to political alternatives (Nweke, 2015).

Arguably, Akinola, Adebisi and Oyekunle (2015) assert that Nigeria's romance with democracy has suffered setbacks at various times from independence till date. Hence, of the fifty-nine years of her independence, democratic governance has long-winded on a number of occasions and thus, paving way for years of military rule. Lack of effective leadership in the country has contributed to lack of direction, unity and cohesion required for democratic sustenance and national development. Effective leadership from time in history has contributed to unity and development of nation states. More so, Omotola (2007) and Simbine (2000), posit that democracy is believed to stimulate development of which the Nigerian version has not succeeded in bringing the much expected since her democratic rule in 1999. The reason for this is as a result of corruption that has infected the political system of the country, most especially through the political leaders.

This gives credence to Musonda (2016) argument that the major enabling factor for democracy to sustain growth and development is the existence of institutions of accountability like checks on the executive, separation of powers, separation of politics from the civil service, independence of the judiciary, press freedom, and autonomy of academia and the private sector. In order words, the institutionalization of political power and the dispersion of centre influence ensure the functioning of public institutions in an impersonal, efficient and predictable manner. Hence, he submits that the determinant of the growth of democracy is political leadership. It is impossible to rate Nigeria among nations consolidating democracy because of human rights abuses, corruption, political

thuggery, anti-party activities, god-fatherism, violence, disobedience to the rule of law, violation of electoral processes, ethnic and religious conflicts that have continued unabated. The frequency of these crimes and societal anomalies backed by the lackadaisical attitude of the political elite to restore sanity into the system makes one wonder if Nigeria's democracy will ever be a reality or continues as an illusion. It is imperative that under the present democratic dispensation, Nigeria is still striving to make democracy visible in the scheme of things. It is against this backdrop that this paper is set to investigate the illusionary of Nigeria democratic leadership and to proffer a possible way of making democracy a workable principle in her administrative landscape.

### **Theoretical framework**

The work adopts the theory of Symbolic interactionism. This theory according to Alex and Greg (2015) provides a framework for understanding people's behaviour and viewpoints, where the researcher provides descriptions of processes of human interaction. The researcher examines human behaviour on the basis of the meaning individuals give to their environment; as they interpret significant symbols in their worlds. These symbols are seen to be stimuli of responses that are expressed as words in processes of interpretation. In this process of interpretation, the meanings are continuously being modified and reflected upon symbolically as individuals interact with one another. It views people as constructors of their own actions and meanings, with the focus on individual action rather than wider social structures. Individuals construct their own social realities and perspectives of their world using responses from the environment and different socio-cultural relationships with which they interact.

More so, Hall (2007) posits that symbolic Interactionism is a sociological theory that develops from practical considerations and alludes to people's particular utilization of dialect to make images and normal implications, for deduction and correspondence with others. This Hall's explanation was expanded by also viewing it as a frame of reference to better understand how individuals interact with one another, to create symbolic worlds and in return, how these worlds shape individual behaviours. It aids the understanding of how society is preserved and created through repeated interactions between individuals. The interpretation process that occurs between interactions help creates and recreates meaning. It is the shared understanding and interpretations of meaning that

affect the interaction between individuals. Hence individuals act on the premise of a shared understanding of meaning within their social context. Thus, interaction and behaviour is framed through the shared meaning that objects and concepts have attached to them.

Furthermore, Crossman (2018) maintains that symbolic interaction theory analyzes society by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviours. Subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believed that people behave based on what they believe and not just on what is objectively true. Thus, Crossman posits that the society is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People interpret one another's behaviour and it is these interpretations that form the social bond.

## **Conceptual clarifications**

### **Democracy**

Democracy is a concept that has gained many definitions because of many interest vested on it. This is in consonance with Ojo (2000) in Akinola, Adebisi and Oyekunle (2015) who posits that democracy does not lend itself to any universally accepted definition because of ideological, cultural, and historical contextualisation that underpins its several meanings. In trying a definition, Appadorai (1978) was noted to have maintained in Akinola et al (2015) that the word democracy means the form of government in which the ruling power of a state is vested in the member of a community. He goes further to maintain that power is not resting on any particular individual but on the general public which the leader is serving. This presupposes that the people have the right to withdraw or recall the leader whenever he fails to lead in line with the interest of the people. Oyewo (2014) sees democracy as a system of government based on collective decision, competition, political and economic equality, social justice, accountability and strict adherence to the rule of law. It is deductively seen from Oyewo that for one to say that democracy is in practice, there must be political and economic equality, justice, accountability and obedience to the rule of law. In his opinion, it can be inferred that any nation that does otherwise cannot be said to be practicing democratic government for in these attributes rest democracy.

Looking at the definition of democracy as postulated by Abraham Lincoln as government of the people, by the people and for the people, Gyekye (1997),

trying to do an interpretation on the phrase “of the people” opines that it is the people who govern; it is the people who choose those that are to rule and also find ways to control the rulers and see to it that the way they are ruled conforms to their wishes. This means that it is of the people to say what happens and how things should be done for the benefit of the general society. Several types of democracy have emanated owing to man’s quest to redefine it to suit his personal interest and wills, hence we can see liberal democracy, socialist democracy, direct and indirect democracy. All these levels and types of democracy have received attention but it is necessary to note Osaghae (1992) who posits that in spite of these differences, conceptualization and practices, all version of democracy share the same fundamental objective which is to govern the society in such a way that power actually belongs to the people. It is in line of this that one can see democratic governance as the exercise of power according to popular will. More so, democracies impose clear, legally established limits on what elected officials can do. All participants in the system must obey the rules regarding such principles as; open, free and fair elections, one person one vote, and acceptance of majority decisions while respecting a minority’s right to dissent ( Iboi, 2017).

### **Leadership**

Leadership is a phenomenon that has been defined in many ways. This involves the process of directing the behaviour of others in a predetermined way with the aim of accomplishing certain objectives. In the opinion of Utomi (2014), it is a behaviour that is goal directed in which a group is influenced to act relatively to some shared goals, in a manner that result in lower cost and have effective attainment of desired objectives. This definition buttresses the idea that a leader must be goal oriented and will always strive to achieve a goal which must be in line with the objective and plans of the organization. Furthermore, it is seen as a process by which one individual consistently exerts more impact than others on the nature and direction of group activity. In looking at the definition from its simplest form, Ologbenla (2007) sees it as the quality of being good at leading a team, organization or a country. It is the duty of the leader to go before the people he is leading and to lead by example.

According to Okadigbo (1987), leadership is the process through which one individual consistently exerts more influence than others in the pursuit of group behaviour. A leader is expected to have some qualities that make him exceptional from the led. These qualities in the words of Osaghae (2010) are

altruism, patriotism, moral uprightness, sense of historical mission, comprehension of developmental challenges and how to overcome them, courage, boldness and determination.

Following the above definition, Nweke (2015) posits that leadership in a democratic system of government remains the exercise of political powers within the frame of constitutional provisions duly legislated for common good. In his opinion, if one must say that he is a leader in a democratic government, it must be in line with the dictates of the constitution and for the good of the masses. In this regard, one can say that despite the laudability of democratic practice in Nigeria, the question still remains to what extent has democratic leadership in Nigeria been justified. It is true that Nigerians' clamoured for democracy that was propelled by the quest for good governance and aimed primarily at enhanced national development. It then means that Nigerians must have clamoured for the assurances of the general benefits of democracy which includes visions for real democratic governance. Nigeria as at today has not gone far from what it was in the pre-democratic period and this makes bold to lay credence to this paper as to assert that, the democratic leadership and system in Nigeria still remains an illusion of which all eyes are looking and expecting to see when it will become a reality.

### **Democratic leadership in Nigeria**

Democracy as a system of government is not new in Nigeria administration. This can be traced back to 1999 which brought to an end the military rule. The Nigeria democracy is basically represented in the three tiers and arms of government, of which the exercise of power is within the ambit of the arms of the government. In the democratic system, power belongs to the people but there has been a question on the form of Nigeria democratic leadership. In his opinion, Nwigwe (2003) sees it as a "Mafia governments". This according to him in Segun and Oni (2013) means a leadership plague-ridden with power-drunken, self-seeking, ideology-barren, and without orientation. The purpose of these leaders in their view is directed towards achieving self-interests and desires. Nweke goes on to maintain that the leaders in Nigeria as other countries are scarcely elected by the people but rather selected by their kind. There may be claims of democratic structure as evidenced in the three arms of government- legislative, executive

and judiciary, but has there been dissemination of power and the institution of check and balance in Nigeria; power is absolutely vested on the executive.

It is in line of this that Nweke saw democratic leadership in Nigeria as a paradox because the voice of opposition is not welcomed, no matter how constructive it is. Hence, Politics is seen as means of achieving wealth, and as a result, it is not aimed at service to the people but is indeed a quick way of making money. More so, Okafor, (2003) saw the situation in Nigeria as characterized by lawlessness which made him to see the societies as a “game without rules”, hence he posits that, “In Africa, the game of politics is played as though it had no rules even though it has, the politicians are the players. The referee is corrupt and was bribed by one of the teams. The spectators are the citizens who are bewildered by the manner of the game. Fouls are ignored when committed by one team; good players from the other team are penalized without reason. Rented fans cheer foul play from one team and jeer decent play from the other. Spectators are bewildered and dumb founded, security officials keep strict surveillance on the spectators and are poised to deal with protestation or any attempt to disrupt the game. And so the game goes on. In this order as seen in Nigeria, the favoured team must win by all means and the actual winners became losers.

This is why Adejumo (2019) lamented that since 1999, INEC has been composed with the Federal Government appointment which makes manipulation very easy by the Presidency and makes their removal possible based on feeble excuses. This to him can be seen in the removal of Humphrey Nwosu in 1993 following the Babangida's decision to annul June 12 election that was contrary to the commission's position. This makes the capability of the electoral body so constrain. Since the Federal Government appoints those persons at their will, it further makes the commission filled with people without professional competence to lead the body. This has always been the issue and it has been affecting the democratic election of leaders. The hallmark of it all was seen in the 2019 presidential election and the role played by the INEC chairman in making sure that the incumbent is returned to power which is not supposed to be so in a democratic government.

Adejumo (2019) goes on to observe that since 1999, there had been men who always want to have their personal interests met through briefcases and then disappear from their constituents and constituency after elections. Going further, he states that true democracy has been buried in the last 20 years of democratic governance as there is no difference between the PDP, APC and every other political party. The players of the game prioritize their survival and aim of

remaining relevant when things are not going fine. The democratic leadership in Nigeria is the one that witnesses the approval of several budgets with scary figures at the states and national level with unimplemented projects. Hence he maintains that trillions have been generated from our natural resources including crude oil but few infrastructural facilities or developments. While government officials continue to award contract to agencies and firms that do not exist, our roads remain death trap, children use underneath tree for school, underneath bridge for home, mortuary for hospital and many other facilities left untouched. Many workers at the state level are not paid properly which amount to governors leaving debt of unpaid salaries and abandoned projects to their successors.

The democracy practiced in Nigeria is the type in which members of the National Assembly use their capital/constituency projects fee for frivolities. He noted that this is one of the reasons why many of them love to return to the Senate and House of representative at all times in order to remain in Government. Many contracts awarded to associates of political office holders are arguably for syphoning funds for every next election. Government has remained in attending to Lagos-Ibadan, Lagos-Ore-Benin road and other express ways that have been budgeted since 1999 without any major positive impacts on the road. An average Nigerian is yet to feel the impact of democratic governance. In fact, democracy has been a representation of betrayal, while some countries would love to practice democratic governance for social and economic advantage; we have a democracy for the advantages of few in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the level of insurgence in Nigeria over the years is disheartening despite the huge budgetary amount on security yearly. Nigeria has become a country with kidnapping and terrorism as norms. While the militants continue to burst oil pipes and kidnap in the south east, the Boko Haram have become owners of various territory in the northern part and the herdsmen continue to butcher farmers in every part of the nation. While parents of Chibok Girls are still mourning, Dapchi Girls menace follows. All these have become disaster and pose major difficulties to democratic governance. Iboi (2017) posits that as ordinary Nigerians are concerned, democracy is not for them but for the politicians and their cronies. The masses are yet to reap any dividend of democracy. What the masses are expecting to see is genuine, real and concrete improvement in their standard of living, and not fleet of foreign flash luxury cars, mansions and paraphernalia. It is high time Nigeria stopped living in a world of illusion, deception and hypocrisy. Democracy around the world is

changing very fast, smaller countries, less endowed than Nigeria have gone far in terms of human and economic development and Nigeria is still as she was many years back without much positive changes.

### **Challenges of Nigeria democratic leadership**

Nigeria democratic leadership has a lot of challenges that are confronting it. This is why for many years, there is no much positive impact in the betterment of the society. In this regards, Fagbadebo (2007) in examining the current leadership situation of Nigeria, maintains that the Nigerian State is a victim of high-level corruption, bad governance, political instability, and a cyclical legitimacy crisis. In his opinion, Nigeria is filled with authoritarian leadership which faces a legitimacy crisis, political intrigues, in an ethnically differentiated polity, where ethnic competition for resources drove much of the pervasive corruption, and profligacy. Nweke (2015) in support of the above point opines that democratic leadership in Nigeria has not seen the light of the day because it has been filled with leaders that are Military-in-Civilian Garb. He maintains that the 1999 democratic military-to-civilian transition saw the emergence of retired army General Olusegun Obasanjo as the first fourth republic Nigerian President. That administration was fraught with a subtle militarization of a civilian government.

Also he sees public sector corruption in Nigeria as another challenge. In his opinion, corruption is not a term specific to the nation's democracy but a reality rooted and developed within the military era. He sees the definition by Transparency International as "the use of entrusted power for private gain" and thus corruption in any political setting represents gross betrayal of public trust. Again, ethnicity and religion are seen as another challenge. He maintains that Nigeria is a country of over two hundred ethnic nationalities united into three major tribes (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo) with two major religions (Christianity and Islam), Nigerian governance, from the point of colonial independence, has been a display of ethnic/religious politics. Within the current democratic setting, ethno-religious politics entrench strong leadership tussle between the North (Muslims) and South (mainly Christians) giving rise to series of ethno-religious crises resulting in religious bigotry, born to- rule orientation, incessant killings and wanton destruction of property, insurgency and terrorism.

Akinola et al (2015) having pointed out corruption as a challenge also noted that political instability has been a hard nut to crack since independence. This is so in

the reaction of President Bush in addressing the Nigeria president in 2003, thus, "I leant Mr. President, that in your country you always have a constitution for every President". This statement by Bush is an indication that the Nigeria democracy fluctuates and is not static. The constitution is directed by any leader that comes to power to suit his personal interest. Social and Economic Development vision is another challenge of democratic leadership in Nigeria. In this regards, Akinola et al (2015) posit that political economy of Nigeria is intentionally structured to serve political end at the expense of real development. In their words, the Nigerian political considerations are often valued at the expense of survival of most corporations established by Nigerian government. Citing an instance, during the second republic, Ajaokuta was the only place where Steel Rolling Mill was to be originally located. Olaniyi (1999) sees lack of democratic leadership as demonstrated in the shifting of Steel Mills to areas not suitable for them which was not considered by the leaders. Hence he posits that, due to political consideration, "Steel Rolling Mills were eventually located in Oshogbo, Aladja, Jos and Katsina without minding their economic viability".

Oni and Oluye (2017) point out some challenges of democratic leadership in Nigeria to include among others, corruption, false hopes, local leaders, lack of ideas, creativity and innovation, poorly baked policies, poor planning and continuity, irresponsibility, lack of rule of law, lack of competence and ill preparedness, oppression, suppression and intimidation. They also go on to point the use of political offices as objects for settlement, lack of accountability, transparency and due process, lack of patriotism and nationalistic consciousness. All these points have been limiting the process of democracy to have its full operation in Nigeria and until these issues are addressed, the idea of democracy will still not be seen as a reality but yet as an illusion. This is not far from the opinion of Odey (2005: 52) who maintains that the democratic leadership in Nigeria is a homemade democracy which is aimed at personal aggrandizement. Buttressing this point, he posits that "it is a democracy under which one man who goes by the name president holds everybody to ransom, rules the nation as a personal estate, makes mockery of the constitution, tells the army and the police whom to deal with ruthlessly as if they were his personal watchdog, controls the nation's coffer and dishes out our money to other countries at will as if it were his personal account and so forth". This is the point Nigeria has seen herself and it has kept the nation in a stagnant position and without a better

future. He finally posits that Nigeria democracy is a negation of democracy and that democracy remains an illusion and not yet a reality in this country.

### **The way forward**

The Nigeria democratic governance and leadership will still remain as an illusion until there is readiness by the authority to make changes that will bring about a positive perception in the administration. In this view, Ejimabo (2013) posits that Nigeria government needs a leadership reform which is possible by a deliberate and good understanding and institution of decision and policies. The government should be prepared to involve the people and carry them along by caring for their wellbeing and interests. Nigeria as a nation no doubt has not clearly spelt out the nature of her leadership and made sure that the process is followed to the letter. We need leaders that are ready to listen to the yearning of the people and provide what they need.

More so, Ejambo (2013) asserts that the leadership style in Nigeria is not working effectively and could be addressed through the guidelines of the Northouse concept of leadership. Leaders and followers are involved in effective leadership processes. Leaders need followers and followers need leaders to accomplish desired goals and outcomes. It is expected that Nigerian leaders and decision makers should be influenced by collaborators while working together to achieve the common goal of the nation. Nigeria leaders should make judicious use of the rule of law, and check and balances in her administration. This is necessary in checking the excess behaviours and wastage in the administration and putting the administration in an acceptable way and order that is in consonance with other countries of the same practice.

Northouse (2004) in Ejambo (2013) suggests that democratic leaders should be sociable which helps to give way for acceptability in leadership. In his opinion, sociability refers to leaders' inclination to seek out pleasant social relationships. Leaders who show sociability are friendly, outgoing, courteous, tactful, and diplomatic. They are sensitive to others' needs and show concern for their wellbeing. Social leaders have good interpersonal skills and create cooperative relationships with their followers. According to Mumford, Zaccaro, and Harding (2000), Nigerians need problem solver leaders who are endowed with the skill of solving the numerous problems in the nation that are posing as a threat to democracy. In their words, problem-solving skills refer to a leader's creative

ability to solve new and unusual, ill-defined organizational problems. Nigeria needs problem-solving skills of leaders to help fight fraud and corruption in the country.

In order to truly clean up the bad leadership and corruption in Nigeria and return Nigeria to what it is expected to be that made Nigerians to cry for democratic leadership, there is needs for sound ethical leadership that is rooted in respect, service, justice, honesty, and commitment. Leaders who place fairness at the center of decision making, including the challenging task of being fair to individuals as well as to the common interest of the community they serve (Northouse, 2004). In agreement to this, Adejimi (2005) opines that the country needs people who are educated, sincere and honest both in administration and leadership styles. In the Nigeria leadership situation, selfless and charismatic leaders are needed to amend the wrong. Nigeria needs leaders that are ready and willing to change the bad condition of the nation and take the nation to a better and desired level where rule of law and equality before the law will be guaranteed.

## **Conclusion**

Having examined and investigated the illusionary of Nigeria democratic leadership, it is germane to posit that in Nigeria, the decision-making process belongs to a special interest group of people. This group of people also have the power for decision making because they are powerful and influential leaders and politicians, who control and manipulate the judiciary system in the country to suit their special and individual interests. We have looked at what democracy is from its elementary definition as government of the people, by the people and for the people. This in Nigeria context is just a theory of which if leaders are to lead exactly according to that principle of democracy, things would be different in Nigeria.

In the Nigeria of today, the interest of the people and the image of the country are overlooked. The lawmakers and some leaders and policy makers with money and power do not appear to have the interest of the common people at heart. Laws are made for the common people and not for the leaders. The decision-making process under the current situation is not base on the analysis of the

needs of the people. Instead, it is based on political advantage and exists to favour the rich and the special interests of those in authority in the entire country. The laws and rules in the present Nigeria situation are made to represent special interests and the power that matters. Most of the time, the laws are enforced only on the weaker ones and implemented for the common people in the society.

It is in view of these anomalies and practices in Nigeria of which some people still maintain strongly that democracy is in its practicality that this work is set to look at this topic at hand of which the paper has looked into the meaning of democracy and leadership. It has also examined democratic leadership in Nigeria and a critical understanding on the challenges of democratic leadership. The work has been made to submit that the democratic leadership in Nigeria is an illusion and has suggested ways forward which will help to redirect the concept of democracy to what it is entailed in other nations and thereby give way for equality and egalitarian society.

### **Recommendations**

It is the interest of this paper, having gone through this work to recommend that

The Nigeria nation should make sure that the rule of law is enthroned and made supreme above every individual in the nation be him a president or a governor. This is because the negligence to the rule of law has been a serious threat and slap in Nigeria democracy.

Leaders should know that Nigeria as a nation has many tribes in it with different interest groups of which should not be followed in her administration if we must see ourselves as one Nigeria and work for the interest of all. Hence, collective interest should take the precedence if democracy will be enthroned as against what is seen today as homemade democracy with the interest of a particular set of people against the entire nation.

Nigerians need a democratic leader that is unbiased and undivided in his decision. In this regards, there is need for a leader that is ready to unite the

nation together and fight against divisions that are predominant in the nation today.

Nigeria leaders should be able to understand the diversity tribes, tradition, customs, and languages of the different people in Nigeria to enhance a better and comprehensive leadership style and effectiveness in governance of the people.

The paper further recommends that Nigeria leaders should revisit the nature of her democracy which will give way to an egalitarian society. This is because the concept of democracy as it appears in Nigeria today is just an illusion and not a reality. It is clear that until it becomes a reality, Nigeria will still be as it is.

It finally recommends the bringing in of people that are democratic conscious in the administration of Nigeria as a way of maintaining a democratic system. There are people that are already biased in their mind and once they come to the position of leadership, it affects their way and pattern of leadership. It is important to note that only democratically conscious leaders will be ready to make a change in the democratic leadership of the nation.

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