

## Leadership Subterfuge and the Rise of Democratic Dictatorship: Implications on the Performance of the Nigerian Economy

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### **Abstract**

*This paper sought to critically examine leadership subterfuge and the rise of democratic dictatorship in Nigeria while underscoring the implications on the performance of the country's economy. The paper adopted content analytical method of secondary data exploration to deal succinctly and concretely on the nexus between leadership, democracy and the economy; but queried the subterfuge, dictatorship as having illicit implications on the Nigerian nation. The 'Non-dominance' theory was adopted so as to give a clear narrative from the theoretical and empirical point of view of the study. The paper argues that more now than ever before, Nigeria is witnessing leadership insensitivity, resulting from leaders' tactless attitude at its crowning, giving rise, not only to democratic dictatorship but also an overwhelming socio-economic downturn, orchestrating an economy enmeshed in abject poverty, hunger, unemployment and gross underdevelopment. The paper found that the hijacked elections in Nigeria and the recruitment system of who-knows-who characterised by impositions of candidates, the impunity among party stalwarts in the choice of party flag bearers in Nigeria, the accorded immunity and power clauses for elected leaders and the ethnic chauvinism, occasioned by the multiethnic nationalities in Nigeria, are the manifestations of leadership subterfuge and destructive leadership crumpling the Nigerian economy. The paper recommended amongst others that there should be earnest efforts channeled towards propagating strong leadership values of consultation, consensus, selflessness, transparency, accountability and above all patriotism. And that we must ensure to cleanse our political system from the emergence of accidental leadership and the enthronement of mediocre.*

**Keywords:** Leadership Subterfuge, Democracy, Democratic-Dictatorship and the Nigerian Economy

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### **Introduction**

Leadership is about inspiring and influencing other individuals to gain their support and cooperation at achieving common goals; and when it is democratic leadership, it implies leadership 'with all' and 'for all' such that the leader recognizes that he is a representative who must always take cognizance of the interest of the followers (Daniel and Josse, 2017). As a proclaimed democratic state, the Nigerian leadership is meant to extol the consent of the governed and protect their fundamental human rights, ensure equal opportunity for all with fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty, representativeness, majority rule, minority rights, popular consultation, right of choice between

alternative programmes, consensus on fundamental issues, and essentially respecting the peoples discretion in choosing their own leaders in elections. These in addition to the rule of law, social justice administration, accountability and transparency are the tenets of democratic leadership on which true democracy is consolidated (Arowolo and Aluko, 2017); however, it is rather disheartening and worrisome that from its inception as an independent state, ethnic cleavages resulting to ever ripe ethnic confrontations had always taken the center stage of Nigeria and thus as a nation, we have witnessed dictator-rulers than inclusive-leaders, majority of whom believe in personality rather than impersonality and common good. The conscious refusal to retrieve one's personality traits in leadership position has resulted to the concern of this study. This paper therefore, argues that that Nigeria is now, witnessing leadership subterfuge at its crowning, giving rise to democratic dictatorship brandishing an economy enmeshed in abject poverty, hunger, unemployment and gross underdevelopment.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopted Content Analytical method of secondary data exploration to deal succinctly and concretely on the nexus between leadership, democracy and the economy; but queried the subterfuge, dictatorship and degradation as the aftermath of them in the Nigerian nation. In examining the leadership phenomenon, we adopted the terms 'leadership subterfuge' and 'democratic dictatorship' to fully capture the dimensionality of destructive leadership and personality traits taking shape in Nigeria. It is no longer about querying ineffective or bad leadership since the evidence is all over the Nigerian scenery, revealed by different researches. It appears, our leaders have moved beyond making ironical promises of change, to the 'next level' of petty tyranny, abusive regulation/control and even strategic bullying. The institutions and the semblance of democratic groundwork that are the bedrock of any meaningful socio-economic development are shrunken, leading to weak economy, rising unemployment and inflation, poverty, criminality and life-shattering insecurity.

Depicting a clear narrative from the theoretical and empirical point of view, we adopted the 'Non-dominance' theory originally put forth by an Irish philosopher and political theorist, Philip Noel Pettit in his 1997 book titled "Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government". Thirteen years later, the theory was brought to intellectual limelight by Frank Lovett in his work on "A General Theory of Domination and Justice". The Non-domination theory addresses the inevitable social inequalities occasioned by having to live at the mercy of another when leadership is demonstrated as camouflaged tyranny (Colton, 2015). The hijacked elections in Nigeria, the recruitment system of who knows who with impositions of candidates, the impunity among party stalwarts in the choice of party flag bearers in Nigeria, the accorded immunity and power clauses for elected leaders snowballing into dictatorship in the rulership, are forms of democratic abnormalities the 'Non-dominance' theory argue against.

The tenets of the theory is premised on the notion of 'Freedom', 'Democratic self-governance' and 'Participatory State' built upon the ideology of individuals having a voice in decisions that affect them. Thus, the Republican conception of political liberty defines freedom as "Non-dominance" which is described as "the condition of not being subject to the arbitrary or uncontrolled power of a master. To this end, "Freedom is the status enjoyed by someone to the extent that no one else stands over them like a lord or master and interferes in their lives on an arbitrary basis" (Cabrelli and Zahn, 2017). Within the context of this study, the 'Non-dominance' theory best explains the arbitrary and predatory relationship between Nigerian leaders and the masses, such that Nigeria's fundamental approach to leadership is troubling. In every country, it is the responsibility of the leadership to protect the political, social, and economic interests of the citizens by making policies and finding solutions to their problems and guiding the polity to a prosperous economy. Deplorably, the primary

goal of assuming leadership position in Nigeria now tops that of self-enrichment, to also include exerting exclusive lordship over key positions in the society, and forcing through policies that would enable their group retain power for life, obviously contradictory to the notion of 'Non-dominance' theory and true democracy.

### **Conceptual Discourse**

**Leadership:** is one of the most critically debated issues in society, considered to be integral to goal attainment and/or any meaningful development. In fact, it is a universal phenomenon which breathes life into every human activity or endeavour. Adebayo and Bharat (2016) conceptualized leadership as a dynamic social influence process having as its sole purpose, the continuous elicitation of cooperation and keen support of individuals towards the actualization of a common purpose. In the same vein, Porter, et al. (2016) defines leadership as an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend significant changes that continuously reflect their mutual purposes. Even though there are different forms or styles of leadership including: autocratic, democratic, charismatic, laissez-faire, bureaucratic, transformational, transactional leadership, the shared view common to the foregoing definitions, is that leadership is an unending process that is dynamic and evolves overtime; it is an influence relationship or persuasive process that drives diverse groups of individuals towards goal attainment; and it is people oriented such that besides the leader, other people are involved i.e. the followers who give purpose to leadership intent and make the leadership process possible.

Accordingly, Aibieyi (2014:55) vividly describes leadership as a 'cooperative followership', arguing that without followers or subordinates, all the leadership wherewithal of the individual leading, will be irrelevant. He further explicates that it is those being led that give meaning to leadership, since the core task of a leader as an influencer, is to influence the conduct of the followers. As a result, the manner and extent the followers/subordinates are influenced, creates the compulsion to put in more efforts than they would have given towards any given course. The argument for this definition is evidenced by the widespread influence of democratic leadership in countries across the world; except for the differences in their political institutions with respect to: presidential and parliamentary system, unitary and federal systems, proportional and winner-takes-all system, two-party and multi-party system, majoritarian and consensual system, etc. Be that as it may, democratic leadership is defined as a type of leadership in which the people being led take a more participative role in the decision-making process (Hammond, 2016).

**Democratic Leadership:** is an insistence on the expression of the will of the people, such that leaders are held accountable and responsive to the expressed interests and needs of the people, not their own personal needs or selfish interests (Ndukwe and Ezika, 2019). The concept of democracy confers the opportunity to participate in decision-making on all the masses; making it a catalyst for accountability, transparency and responsive government; it repudiates arbitrariness and authoritarianism, and extols the consent of the governed that goes beyond opportunity of election. Gastil (2020) argues that though the centrality of elections to democratic process cannot be over-emphasised, democracy is not wholly centered on election devoid of liberality. Hence, democracy entails not only free and fair elections in terms of voting administration; it requires a more comprehensive fairness of political competition embodied in the concept of a just and open competition where the electoral arena is open, the playing field is reasonably level and the choices of the people are respected on and after elections.

**Leadership Subterfuge:** This is behavioral and depicts the deception of leaders in projecting the opposite of what they claim to be. Onimisi (2015) avows that office-bearers, particularly the elected representatives employ various types of campaign strategy to canvass for support/votes, making

humongous promises in the process for which the voters are supposed to hold them accountable to; but on attaining the position, they end up never delivering what they promised. Not only reneging in fulfilling their electioneering campaign promises, but their accessibility to the masses becomes an illusion in a democratic system. Krasikova et al., (2013) argue that leadership subterfuge goes deeper than unfulfilled promises, adding that it has the destructive element or aspect where the promises were never meant to be kept at all, but also an exploitative agenda where the initial intent was to rob the people of their public funds/resources, orchestrated by using a clever trick to deceive followers into supporting/voting them into office.

They described destructive leadership as volitional behavior by a leader that can detriment followers by encouraging them to pursue the leaders aims that contravene the legitimate interests of the public; and even going as far as employing a leadership approach that involves the use of harmful methods of influence with followers. In this case, they can be accused of moral dishonesty/fraudulence, and by not keeping faith with the followers their victory (attainment of their governmental position) was by subterfuge. Ominisi (2015) further argues that when a leader, any type whatsoever leads by deception, it actually entails that he has a lot to conceal, would like to if not already evading responsibility; thus, aims at escaping blame, hence accessibility becomes an issue after wards. Suffice it to argue that leadership subterfuge in another clime, is a deceptive stratagem meant to hoodwink followers to give their support and cooperation for a cause they believe in but one which the leaders do not mean to achieve.

**Democratic Dictatorship:** is a major correlate of leadership subterfuge, otherwise referred to as ‘false democracy’ (Paul, Orokpo and Ojo, 2017; Arowolo and Aluko, 2017; Nweke, 2015). According to the Universal Democracy-Dictatorship Index, the conceptualization of democratic dictatorship counts on rules regarding the existence of competitive elections. Thus for a regime to be considered as a democracy by the DD scheme, it must meet the requirement of the following four rules: (a) the chief executive must be chosen by popular election or by a body that was itself popularly elected; (b) the legislature must be popularly elected; (c) there must be more than one party competing in the elections; (d) an alternation in power under electoral rules identical to the ones that brought the incumbent to office must have taken place. Przeworski (2010) however, points out that some regimes may meet these rules, but in cases where the incumbent only allows elections as long as they keep winning, manipulate the system to win or keep winning, refuse to step down if they lost or threaten hostilities if they lost, and even subject the institutions/masses to their dictates when in power, such regime is a democratic dictatorship.

### **Challenges of Democratic Leadership in Nigeria**

It is deleterious that the misconception of Nigerian leaders, who perceive leadership as dominance or supremacy concept, has culminated in an alienated followership-leadership relationship. Nweke (2015) avers that democracy in Nigeria has three unique dysfunctional features viz: insulation of economic matters from popular participation, manipulation and monopolization of democratic process including the use of violence and electoral fraud to secure legitimacy and peripheral participation of citizens. Igbaekemen (2014) argues that these leaders lack the human relations attitude to foster participatory leadership to consolidate democracy in Nigeria. In analyzing the plethora of leaders that have spanned the Nigeria leadership ladder, Imhonopi and Ugochukwu (2018:81) were assertive that “selfish, mediocre, tribal leaders and opportunistic small money-minded people masquerading as leaders have continued to regenerate in Nigeria” Over time, it is now normal to cheer on unproductiveness, ineptitude, mediocre, parochial and ethnic-drunk leaders whose preference of self-preservation over national interest continues to undermine Nigeria’s attempt to liberate itself from the clutches of underdevelopment.

### **Recruitment and Election in Nigeria**

Elections in Nigeria have become mere formalities of virtual democracy, with recruitment and appointments exercised based on the dictates of the powers-that-be. Arowolo and Aluko (2017) assert that because democracy is practiced in such a way that responsible and competent people are scared away, the people who stand for election in Nigeria are not qualified candidates by the requirement of the law. A lot of Nigerians bemoan that in a country where there are millions of Professors and enlightened men in all sectors of the country, yet what we have is leadership that is piled-up with illiterates, not enlightened, not exposed, daftly-minded aging men (Okpata and Ezika, 2019). Thus, the issues of impositions of candidates and impunity among party stalwarts in the choice of party flag bearers is beyond appalling; and when the means of enthroning public leadership is faulty, the nation is headed towards destructive tendencies.

Democratization in Nigeria is bathed in electoral violence, manipulation of election results and constrained political participation. Paul et al., (2017) argue that elections in Nigeria are not only flawed but warped as the political parties are dominated by godfathers, money bags and ex-military leaders. Their party primaries (if/when conducted) are mostly selective, non-participatory and undemocratic; thus resulting in the corruption of the leadership, loyalty to god-fathers and patrons, and indifference to the electorate and citizens in their style of governance. These issues of faulty legitimacy and representative nature of the leadership in the country, is reflected in their lack of accountability and responsiveness to the constitution and to the electorate.

### **Imbalance in Resource Control and Power Sharing**

Originally, the vision for the federal character principle (which was later entrenched in Section 14:3 of the 1999 Constitution) was to ensure that in power relations and power sharing, government decisions on citing industries, building roads and other infrastructures, awarding scholarships, recruitment or appointment or employment of public office holders, admission and revenue allocations, etc. does not favour or alienate any particular group or ethnic region against any other. Dishearteningly, the initial intentions have been muddled up in ethnic power toggles where the ethnic region in power takes all. Okereka (2015) was quite vociferous in his explanation of ethicized resource control in Nigeria avowing that the situation is all about sticking to one's tribal group and favoring such against the many existing others within a society, with the seat of power and its economic benefits regarded as the exclusive preserve of some groups over the others. Most glaring is the lopsidedness amongst the geo-political zones and states within them rendered comatose due to ethicized transfer of resources from one region for the development of another and the underdevelopment of the region where the resources are based or extracted from. The imbalance in infrastructural development in Nigeria has murdered the humaneness of democracy in Nigeria and any semblance of equity, fairness and social justice; thus, culminating in rapid growth of Militias, bandits, and insurgent groups clamoring for their supposed rights.

### **Immunity and Power Clauses for Elected Leaders**

The immunity and power clauses for elected officials in Nigeria is one of the most pressing debates today as enshrined in section 308 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which confers immunity from legal proceedings on certain political office holders, including the office of President or Vice-President, and Governor or Deputy Governor. Okeke, Ojukwu and Nnamani (2020) aver that the immunity clause was meant to protect the President, Governors and their deputies from vexatious litigation, so that they can concentrate on the State affairs and carry out their duties efficiently; thereby protecting the dignity of the office. Opportunistically, politicians have used the clause to the detriment of true democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Fabamise (2017) argues that the

Nigerian experience of the immunity clause has been horrendous, traumatic and reflective of social anomaly in the sense of ill-governance and underdevelopment.

The underlying emphasis is that the immunity clause gives the incumbent an undue advantage over other participants in the electoral process through the means of manipulating the entire electoral process. At the federal and state level, the manipulation ranges from compilation of voters' register, to the appointment of electoral officers and members of electoral tribunal to protect stolen mandates, use of state instrument of coercion and apparatus to intimidate opposition parties and denial of access to state owned media houses to ensure they regain or elongate their tenure against popular will as well as the use of state funds for campaign. Okeke et al., (2020) was quite vociferous in their assertion that political leaders in Nigeria commit all sorts of atrocities with impunity because they feel untouchable under the shadows of the immunity and power clauses.

### **Implications on the Performance of the Economy**

In many developed nations of the world, effective leadership facilitates the progress of high standard of living with provision of critical infrastructure that render efficient services, ensures a sense of national unity and human capital development. Nweke (2015) asserts that when leadership is true, it provides an overarching sense of direction and vision, an alignment with the environment, a healthy mechanism for innovation and creativity, and a reservoir that invigorates and spurs national development. Unfortunately, Nigerian leadership has far fallen short of any semblance of true leadership; rather what exists is a subterfuge that has given rise to democratic dictatorship.

Arowolo and Aluko (2017) argue that a large number of the political leaders of Nigeria lack the vision, the passion, and the character to effectively govern the state and deal with the crumbling economy. Some of them do not have an iota of understanding regarding their responsibilities, while most of them are lost in thievery for selfish gains and are insensitive to the dehumanized plight of the people. The institutions and infrastructure that are the bedrock of the economy are allowed to rot away leading to weak economy if not a completely ruined economy considering the heightening stagflation (i.e. concurrent inflation, unemployment and recession), uncontrollable crime escalation, mass poverty, a widening unequal distribution of wealth, savage exploitation, open starvation, irrational waste, capital flight, brain drain, etc.

Nigeria is on the heels of the worst downturn ever in the country's history and the patch-up or economic comeback is very farfetched due to the personality of the administration. President Buhari's concept of building refinery, connecting rail and electricity in the north is only but a subterfuge as he is craftily tracing his way back to Nigel where he has now built a refinery, exporting Nigeria's crude oil to be refined there which is costing Nigeria a lot of the tax-payers money to the degradation of the economy. Munshi (2020) attributed Nigeria's dire economic prognostication to leadership deceit in planning and executing resource programmes, which has made the outlook of the economy fragile, clouded by uncertainty regarding the oil price trajectory, rising inflation, elevated unemployment, security challenges and social tensions. Nigeria inflation rate hit over three year high in 2021 from 11.4% in 2019 to 16.5% as at January 2021.

External debt increased by 5.8% of GDP, imports is at 52.4% compared to exports at 6.1%. The value of Nigerian currency is at 390 naira per a dollar as at March 12, 2021, while fuel pump price have risen to 212 naira per liter. Ironically, the national minimum wage remains the same with some state yet to fully implement the national minimum wage. This is a country where over 3% of its GDP is stolen from its treasury by leaders yearly, with over \$ 6.8 billion stolen in the past 7 years (Focus Economics, 2021). Of note is the rising insecurity which has escalated beyond control, especially the issue of herdsmen and banditry arising from political insensitivity invariably affecting the economy;

such that in the southwest, south-south and south-east, people can no longer access their farmlands freely without being dehumanized and/or murdered, with the agriculture sector going down drastically.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the contemporary political scenario in Nigeria, it can be innocuously argued that what exists in Nigeria as leadership is one by subterfuge leading to the destruction of the economy, where leaders say one thing and end up doing things that are completely opposite. A situation where the attitude and the personality trait of a leader, do not match with his campaign promises and the public position he occupies, is an aberration. Leadership in the circumstance, is therefore used to trick the followers in order for the leaders to achieve their selfish and self-centered separate goals. Despite the series of reform policies and restructuring initiated by successive governments in Nigeria to craft effervescently resourceful and productive Nigeria, leadership subterfuge and its correlate of democratic dictatorship have rubbished any meaningful progress made, taking the country and its economy backward, far beyond the reach of their false promises of 'change' and 'next level'. Initially, there was a huge expectation among Nigerians that the democratization of public sector leadership in Nigeria, premised on the people's own elected leaders would eliminate the problems of arbitrariness, corruption, mismanagement, embezzlement, favoritism, nepotism, tribalism, ethnicity, regional allegiance, and other governance ills that have undermined developmental efforts in the country. However, the leadership question and the search for answers continue to be a mere rhetoric causing even more disturbing concerns for the masses; and when leadership is a subterfuge and democracy is being abused, development and other dividends of good governance becomes elusive.

### **Recommendations**

There is need for total reformation of our electoral system and institutions as well as a re-orientation of our mindset as Nigerians. There should be earnest efforts channeled towards propagating strong leadership values of consultation, consensus, selflessness, transparency, accountability and above all patriotism. We must make every effort to curb our political system from the emergence of accidental leadership and the enthronement of mediocre through a well-developed electoral body that enjoy substantial independence of operation.

An unprepared personality and circumstantial leadership should henceforth be jettisoned by the electorate in any electioneering. And we must first of all comprehend that good governance is a right and not a privilege; therefore demand to be led in the right manner based on our consent and any leadership subterfuge or democratic dictatorship should not be excused in any way. We must stand for what is right at the polls laying aside our religion, ethnic and regional biases.

Likewise, there is great need to review the constitutional provisions of the immunity and power clauses to take full cognizance of the need for transparency, accountability, responsiveness, equity and social justice, ensuring that the excesses of elected political chief executives can be curbed while Nigerians can reasonably expect to reap more dividends of democracy, presently and continuously.

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