

THE CONUNDRUM OF ACCIDENTAL LEADERSHIP AS NIGERIA'S QUAGMIRE

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Abstract

Nigeria, since independence has worn a toga of a land of immense untapped potentials. Sixty-four years have passed and the potential remains just that – a potential. With vast human and material resources, large arable land, and equable weather conditions, Nigeria manages to exist on the fringes of the global stage trapped in the quagmire of under-development. Nigeria's under-developed state has been underlined by insecurity, corruption, maladministration and clueless adventurers masquerading as political actors. All these are but symptoms of a deeper malaise that has held the nation bound: the bane of unprepared and accidental leaders. The problematizes the leadership factor as being the main factor responsible for the state of Nigeria's underdevelopment, situating the discussion at the intersection of the arrested development of Nigeria, the primacy of leadership and governance as a panacea for development and the historical reality of accidental and unprepared Presidents and Heads of Government in Nigeria. Pinpointed in the work is the menace of political godfatherism in Nigeria's political economy and the skewed leadership recruitment processes that overlook meritocratic, ethical, and inclusive leadership ethos that would harness Nigeria's diversities and differences into strengths, resorting instead to values of loyalty and narrow interests for leadership recruitment. The paper concludes that Nigeria requires a transparent, equitable, and responsible system for leadership recruitment at all levels of governance as a sine qua non for sustainable development.

Keywords: Leadership Recruitment, Accidental Leadership, Military Rule, Arrested leadership

1.0 Introduction

The oft repeated statement that Nigeria is a land of immense potential has continued to have jarring effect on global actors with its actuality eluding her decade after decade. With demographic projections of Nigeria being the world's fourth-most populous

country by 2050 and presently one of the four largest economies in Africa (IMF, 2024), Nigeria continues to struggle to realize and harness her potential sixty-four years after political independence. The World Governance Index (WGI, 2023) has consistently ranked Nigeria low in areas such as administration

governance effectiveness, political stability, rule of law, control of corruption. In addition, the United Nations 2023 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (UN GMPI, 2023) put Nigeria's poverty rate in 2023 to be 38.9%, with 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty line placing her as the world's second-largest poor population after India.

A myriad of research works and publications have implicated a number of causes for Nigeria's underdevelopment. One group posits that historically, most Nigerian communities had fairly developed local functioning administrative structures aligned to cultural nuances of the various tribes and a thriving agriculture economy before colonialism disrupted the local systems and transplanted in its place, a capitalist system that evolved into a dependency state of affairs (Alaye,2019, Rodney,1972). This group blames colonialism for the poor state of Nigeria's underdevelopment. Another group blames the weak foundation laid by regional/ethnic nationalists who led the independence movements as they were mostly local tribal champions without any sense of nationhood or national identity and thus could not have championed a virile Nigeria (Oke,2017). Yet still, another school of thought situates Nigeria perpetual potential without realization to the long periods of military incursions into

governance that eroded the fabric of the Nigeria's cohesion (Felix and Wilson,2011, Ekanem, 2010). A fourth school of thought identifies leadership to be at the root of Nigeria's underdeveloped state (Achebe, 1984, Kukah,2020, Albert, 2005, Imhonopi and Ugochukwu,2013, Dike,2010).

We argue in this paper that the leadership factor constitutes foundational base upon which Nigeria's underdevelopment rests. The paper problematizes leadership as being the main factor responsible for Nigeria's underdevelopment. All the other reasons listed above are mere symptoms of underdevelopment. We situate the discussion within the context the arrested development of Nigeria, the primacy of leadership and governance as a panacea for development and the historical reality of accidental and unprepared Presidents and Heads of Government in Nigeria since independence in 1960.

2.0 Nigeria Arrested Development: The Leadership Factor

Nigeria's governance architecture since 1960 has seen the emergence of leaders that have governed and exhibited similar leadership traits and nuances, be they military or civilian. A common thread that has ran through all the administrations highlights corruption, ill-

preparedness for office/accidental ascension of power, lack of respect for the Rule of Law, mismanagement of the economy; and a subjugation of state institutions to political control and a culture of abuse of office with impunity. All the above are symptoms of one fundamental failing - failure of leadership (Ekeng,1998). The Noble laurate, Chinua Achebe, in his book “The Trouble with Nigeria” (Achebe,1984) says that the problem with Nigeria is “simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership.”

Leadership is both a science and an art. Even though one may be born with natural leadership qualities, these, as divinely endowed as they are, require adequate preparation to make them harness-ably relevant to meet the challenges of a given environment. While Munroe defines leadership as the ability to lead others by influence which includes the capacity to influence, inspire, rally, direct, encourage, motivate, induce, move, mobilize, and activate others to pursue a common goal or purpose while maintaining commitment, momentum,

confidence and courage;(Munroe,1993), Maxwell (Maxwell,1999) itemizes indispensable qualities of a good leader. These include character; charisma (ability to draw people to you); commitment; effective communication; competence (ability to say it, plan it and do it); courage; discernment (ability to find out the root of a matter through intuition, intellect and experience); focus (to ensure prioritization, concentration and task completion); generosity; initiative; listening; passion; positive attitude; problem solving ability; relationships; responsibility; security; self-discipline; servanthood; teachability and vision. Leadership has been globally recognized as one of most important tools that ensure the success or failure of organisations and nations. Study after study link superior financial and organisational performance to leadership (Fulmer and Bleak, 2008). So conclusive has been the body of literature that some scholars have pointed out that everything rises and falls on leadership (Maxwell, 1999).

Drawing from the above definition and characteristics of leadership, we present the foregoing table that shows a tabular rendition of the heads of government of Nigeria since independence, their emergence, tenures, leadership qualities, experience and

preparedness/ill-preparedness for the office
they assumed.

TABLE

S/N	LEADER /DESIGNATION	TENURE	METHOD OF SELECTION
1	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa: Prime Minister – First post-independent leader of the Westminster parliamentary system of government	1960 - 1966	1. The leader of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) who was on the ballot, on winning the election, chose to remain as the Premier of Northern Region and instead selected his deputy, Balewa, a trusted lieutenant to be the Prime Minister of Nigeria. 2. Balewa initially declined his selection but pressure was brought to bear on him by influential elements within the NPC and he eventually accepted his selection as Prime Minister. (Ukonne, 2020) 3. Balewa ill-prepared for the onerous office which he reluctantly assumed upon pressure being mounted on him and lacked the capacity to chart a coherent course for national development owing to the sudden and unprepared nature of his assumption of office. (Fabiya, 2014)
2	Major General Aguiyi Ironsi – Military Head of State	January 16, 1966 – July 29, 1966	1. Major General Aguiyi Ironsi was brought up under passive and apolitical circumstances of the colonial military institution and he neither understood the meaning of politics in general nor was he able to diagnose the intricacies and dynamics of the Nigerian political system whose leadership was placed on his shoulders. He was neither confused nor misled, he was simply ignorant and naïve. (Fabiya, 2014) 2. Following the chaos that ensued after the failed attempt by young army officers led by Chukwuma Nzeogwu to take over power after killing the Prime Minister and other political actors, Ironsi assumed power. He was selected by the surviving Council of Ministers as an interim measure to stabilise the body polity of the nation. The selection was a compromise after the nomination of Bukar Dipcharrima was scuttled by Nwafor Orizu. 3. According to Walter Schwarz in his book, Ironsi was a convivial, hard-drinking extrovert and entirely non-political soldier, who showed no signs of political talent when he came to power and even fewer signs of ability to learn as he went along (Schwarz, 1968). 4. Nwankwo and Ifejika write that Ironsi was weak, phlegmatic and unprepared for the journey which chance thrust on him (Nwankwo and Ifejika, 1969)

			5. Ralp Uwechue (Uwechue, 1971) asserts that Ironsi came to power with an empty mind 6. Ben Gbulie (Gbulie, 1981) and Ademoyega Adewale (Ademoyega, 1980) assert that Ironsi was mentally ill-equipped to cope with the myriad of problems besetting Nigeria in 1966. 7. Alexander Madiebo (Madiebo, 1980) described Ironsi as a poor administrator and politically naïve (Oyewese and Okiyor, 1992).
3	General Yakubu Gowon- Military Head of State	August 1, 1966 – July 29, 1975	1. Gowon not among those who planned the counter-coup as he was attending a training course in the UK and only returned 2 days before the coup and despite the existence of several higher-ranking army officers, Gowon emerged as the head of state as a compromise candidate based on a careful calibration process to ensure the emergence of a senior northern officer. (Ukonne, 2020) 2. His age at assumption of office (31 years old) was a major weakness as he was unprepared by training or maturity to assume the overall Head of the Armed Forces and Head of State of country as diverse and complicated as Nigeria. Historians have stated that his governance trajectory would have been different and more matured if he had more experience before assuming office with Gowon himself agreeing that he was too young then for governance and he was indeed an accidental leader (Gowon, 2020) 3. General Yakubu Gowon's complacency and naivety which was compounded by inexperience led him to utter the famous statement that "Nigeria's problem has nothing to do with money but how to spend it!" and the statement and the decision-making processes thereafter led to extravagant and gigantic projects that were pipe projects and laid the foundation for financial recklessness in governance in Nigeria. Projects such as National Theatre at Iganmu, National Stadium and the National Arts Festival (FESTAC) were huge and money guzzling ventures not synonymous with sustainable development. (Gowon, 2014)

4	General Murtala Ramat Muhammed: Military Head of State	July 29, 1975 – February 13, 1976	1. Mohammed was nominated to be Head of State by the group of middle-ranking army officers who masterminded Gowon's overthrow. 2. Like his predecessors, Mohammed was ill-prepared for the challenges and vagaries that came with leading Africa's most populous and culturally diverse nation. The contending arguments of his legacies speaks to his brashness, kneel-jerk and off the cap decision making tendencies. (Ukonne, 2020) 3. Ostensibly to curtail corruption and reduce government spending, Mohammed dismissed more than 10,000 civil servants without benefits or due process. This singular act dealt a grave blow to the development of Nigeria's civil service bureaucracy, as the civil service lost decades of valuable institutional experience and manpower in one fell swoop and is yet to recover. In addition, that singular act served to elevate corruption given that civil servants no longer considered their tenures and appointments secure and tended to amass wealth before retirement.. (Ukonne, 2020)
5	General Olusegun Obasanjo: Military Head of State	February 13, 1976- October 1, 1979	1. Obasanjo had to be pressured before he reluctantly accepted to assume the appointment of Head of State. He was reported to have burst into tears in contemplation of the enormity of what he was taking upon him given that four of the preceding heads of government had been unceremoniously removed from office and three killed in the process. ((Siollun,2009), Ukonne, 2020) 2. General Olusegun Obasanjo himself confessed that he became the President accidentally (Punch, 2022).

6	Shehu Shagari: Shehu Shagari – Civilian President	October 1, 1979 – December 31, 1983	1. Shagari was initially only interested in contesting for a seat in the Senate and only ran for the Presidency after succumbing to pressure from his party after nights of horse trading and maneuverings spearheaded by the “Kaduna Mafia”, a Northern Nigeria political pressure group (Ukonne, 2020). He was therefore, an unwilling and unprepared candidate and this manifested in his lackluster performance in office (Ogunye, 2018). 3. Shagari was widely regarded by his associates as humble, unassuming and possessed a clear lack of vision and capacity for governance at that highest level of leadership. This lack of vision led to spiraling corruption, religious violence and an economic downturn. In addition, his laissez faire approach to governance, negligence of duty, permissiveness and lack of exhibition of a disciplined leadership led to his overthrow by the military at the beginning of his second term in office (Ogunye, 2018). 4. Shagari brought a flamboyance into governance that the economy could not support. For example, Mercedes Benz saloon cars became the official vehicles of government officials and a presidential jet was purchased triggering the ostentatious tradition of acquisition and maintenance of a wasteful presidential fleet, a tradition that continues to rule our lives as a country till date. (Ogunye, 2018)
7	Major General Muhammadu Buhari: Military Ruler		1. Buhari emerged the Head of State in a military coup he was not a part its planning nor execution. His unpreparedness for the office led to kneel jerk economic planning that impacted negatively on the economy alongside a draconian record of human rights abuses and press suppression on standards that even military dictatorship do not venture into. (Ukonne, 2020) 2. Buhari was by nature withdrawn and quiet and it became apparent that most of the tough reforms and policy initiatives that distinguished the regime were spearheaded and driven by his second in command, Idiagbon. He was merely a figure head and main power was wielded by Idiagbon (Adewole, 2022)
8	General Ibrahim Babangida: Military Head of State	August 27, 1985 – August 27, 1993	1. Nigerian historian, Max Siollun, notes this in his book, Soldiers of Fortune, that ‘Babangida was the first Nigerian ruler to come to power by design rather than by chance’ and had been involved in every successful coup attempt since July 1966 and had become adept at coup planning (Siollun, 1995).

			2. Even though the above characterization is factual in terms of scheming and maneuverings for coup plotting, it did not translate to good leadership attributes that enabled him to evolve plans and policies that would lead to sustainable planning for growth and development of the country. Babangida's regime was underlined by policy somersaults and missteps betraying a lack of readiness to lead (Awhefeada, 2021). 3. The government of Babangida has become synonymous with and a byword for corruption as the regime more or less institutionalized and amplified corruption as a business culture in Nigeria in ways that deeply permeated every strata of society unlike any previous era (Thabani, 2018).
9	Chief Ernest Adegunle Shonekan: Civilian Interim Head of State.	August 26, 1993 – November 17, 1993	1. Shonekan became the Head of Government under a hurriedly assembled Interim National Government that was cobbled together as a result of heavy local and international pressure arising from the nullification of a general elections that were adjudged free and fair and won by Chief Abiola. As a result of the hurried nature of its emergence, it was unprepared to grapple with the country's many nation-building challenges that included governance, corruption, democracy, federalism and ethnicity (Falode, 2018). 2. Shonekan's emergence was essentially as a delicate and deft political act following the annulment of Chief Abiola's election as President. The ensuing widespread unrest in the Western part of the country raised fears of another civil war and he was selected because he hailed from the same tribe and locality as the Chief Abiola in order to assuage the Yoruba tribe for the annulment of Chief Abiola's election and starve off accusations of political marginalisation of the Yoruba (Ayodele and Onor, 2024). 3. Shonekan's lack of preparedness for political office and the legitimacy questions that trailed his emergence denied him the ability to exert authority hence the short-lived tenure of his Interim National Government.
10	General Sani Abacha - Military Ruler	November 17, 1993 – June 8, 1998	1. The cluelessness and a lack of clarity and direction of the Abacha regime "resulted from his unrestrained personal rule; very close to the features associated with warlordism, nepotism, corruption, violation of human rights, procrastination over the implementation of a democratic transition, and the exploitation of ethnic, cultural or religious identities,

			also resulted in the accumulation of harshly repressed frustrations” (Amuwo, 2001). 2. The regime superintended over a pattern of policies and decisions that laid the foundation for democratic and civil rule recession that had far reaching “institutional, sociological, federal and international ramifications” (Amuwo, 2001). Erratic policies, mismanagement and corruption triggered stunted growth and declining standards of living, dissipating the middle class in the process, manuring communal tensions thereby weakening an already weak state apparatus (Amuwo, 2001).
11	General Abulsalami Abubakar: Military Ruler	June 9, 1998 – May 29, 1999	1. The emergence of Abubakar as a military head of state was a classic case of happenstance! He neither contested an election or plot/plan a coup and was in fact due for retirement from the military upon reaching the age of retirement when by an “inexplicable stroke of luck (Guardian, 2021) he got promoted to a full General and Head of State as a result of the death of President Sani Abacha. 2. He was neither prepared nor primed for the high office and was merely pushed into it accidentally by fate!
12	Olusegun Obasanjo: Civilian Head of State	May 29, 1999 – May 29, 2007	1. Obasanjo was elected civilian president a few months after release from prison. 2. He was handpicked and drafted into the Presidency as a “sheep led to the slaughter” by a band retired and active military men, who, as a result of accumulated wealth, controlled the political process. For a man who had just returned from four years imprisonment, he did not hide his lack of preparation for the job which he initially rejected the offer by saying “How many presidents will you make of me!” (Oke, 2017). There was no contemplation, preparation or pretense of readiness of any kind before the assumption of office.
13	Umar Musa Yar’adua – Civilian Head of State.	2007 - 2010	1. Yar'Adua's election was attributed to the support of outgoing President Obasanjo and not as a result of his sterling leadership qualities. Obasanjo “pulled all the stops, bruising noses, breaking limbs, threatening men of means and substance, all in his bid to ensure that Yarâ’Adua” won the elections” (Vanguard, 2011). 2. He never nursed any ambition to be president and had already got a teaching appointment at a Nigerian university (Vanguard 2011).

			3. He was known to be in poor health as at the time he assumed the office of the Presidency and ended up dying in office before the end of his first term in office.
14	Goodluck Ebele Jonathan - Civilian Head of State	2011-2015	1. Jonathan's only politically verifiable qualification for the highest office in the land was more of his "loyalty and simpleton attitude than the necessary experience, leadership qualities and relevant exposure the job demands" (Oke, 2017). 2. His rise to power has indeed been attributed to good luck. As Deputy Governor of Bayelsa, he was recorded to be "aloof and disconnected to governance" (New York Times, 2010) until the sudden impeachment of the Governor on corruption charges threw him up as the Governor. Barely two years into his tenure as Governor of the state, he emerged as a consensus candidate for the office of Vice President under backroom political dealings on the night of the ruling party's convention to select a Presidential candidate to run for office (Ateb, 2014). 3. On winning elections as a Vice Presidential candidate for Yar'ardua, he was the Vice President for only a little over two years when the President died and he assumed the office of President. 4. His meteoric rise has therefore been likened to good luck and chance but certainly cannot be attributed, by any stretch of argument, to preparation for the high office. Good luck, as earlier been argued by Shilgba, is not an enough of an ingredient for leadership and sterling performance, neither does it does not prepare or endue one to solve societal problems (Shilgba, 2010). 5. The administrative style and pace of Jonathan was so lethargic that the word "clueless" became a byword to describe the government and became a veritable tool in the hands of the Buhari candidate of the APC champagning against Jonathan (Oke, 2017).

15	Muhammadu Buhari: Civilian Head of State	29 May, 2015 - 2023	1. Buhari emergence as President in the 2015 elections seem to validate a major lesson of history - people don't learn from history. The tenure of General Buhari in his first stint as a military ruler was not one to be rewarded: it was an era of wanton abuse of basic rights of citizens and the implementation of policies that were both draconian and anti-people. His unpreparedness for office surfaced during his campaigns for the civilian presidency wherein he maintained a taciturn mien towards to people and press during campaigns and hardly addressed any campaign rally of note coherently for 15 minutes on any issue while the campaign lasted (Oke, 2017). 2. Buhari contested elections thrice to become a civilian President and that threw up an assumption that he had clarity as to a mission to govern with vision for sustainable development. However, on assumption of office, it took six months for him to just assemble a cabinet of ministers, a clear sign of lack of preparedness (Shehu, 2020). 3. In addition, it has been a matter of common knowledge in military circles that majorly, all the achievements in his first tenure as a military ruler were attributable to his deputy, General Idiagbon. Buhari came across as one that was stern, unforgiving and aloof, attributes that diminish the performance of leaders (Adewole, 2022). 4. Buhari's scorecard as the civilian President speaks for itself: fiscal and monetary policies and performance were below average, amid high interest rates and runaway inflation, heightened poverty levels across the country, alarming insecurity, herdsmen killings and kidnappings with security agencies imputed complicity and common place corruption within government circles; among others (BudgIT, 2023).
16	Bola Ahmed Tinubu – Civilian Head of State –	May 2023 - date	President Ahmed Tinubu stands out as one leader who meticulously planned to ascend to the presidency over the many decades and has in the process garnered extensive experience in governance at state and regional levels. If there was hope to be invested in one person prepared for leadership, he is one leader to be looked up to. His performance however will be determined as the rubber hits the road given that he is just over one year in office.!

2.1 Perspectives from the Table

The parade of leaders that have led Nigeria since independence in 1960 as rendered in the Table above betrays discernable patterns that abbreviate the political economy of Nigeria and speaks to the reasons for her poor socio-economic development. These patterns include Accidental Leadership/ill-preparedness, Faulty Leadership Recruitment Methods and Godfatherism.

2.1.1 Accidental and Unprepared Leadership

Williams Shakespeare, in his classical play, *Twelfth Night*, in Act 2, Scene 5 spoke through Malvolio that: “Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them.” The Table above shows fact that even though there are many routes through which greatness can be achieved, the overwhelming majority of leaders Nigeria has had since independence were not born great, neither did they achieve greatness. Essentially leadership was thrust on them accidentally, meeting them in an unprepared state under unplanned circumstances. Beginning with Balewa to Ironsi and then Gowon and Murtala Mohammed, none of these prepared to and ascended to the high office through a pathway of preparedness. The same pattern held sway

through all the other successive military rulers and civilian Heads of State and Presidents with the exception of Babangida, Buhari and the incumbent, President Tinubu. Even in the isolated cases mentioned above, of the two Heads of State that worked and planned their way to power either through forceful takeover of government or elections, their performances betrayed the second vice of leadership bedeviling the country – unpreparedness. While it can be said that they did not acquire power through an accidental route, their performances on assumption of office were inspiringly pedestrian, betraying a clear lack of vision and foresight but were long on leadership shortcomings – corruption, abuse of power, nepotism, lack of respect for the rule of law and the riding over institutions by strongmen in power masquerading as leaders. The timeline of the incumbent Head of State’s tenure is early for an informed review or conclusions.

Even though Babangida’s successes as a serial coup plotter did not necessarily guarantee his readiness to lead Nigeria, his experiences serving in successive military governments certainly appeared to better position him to govern than all his military predecessors, who had little or no administrative experience when they seized power. Notwithstanding the end product of Babangida’s government is a litany of institutionalized corruption as a business

culture in Nigeria (Ukonne, 2020). The same can be said of Buhari who contested the Presidency three times before winning. Notwithstanding the successive attempts which would be interpreted to mean someone with a vision and mission to govern, his tenure in eight years of governance below average Budget, 2023).

The often-overlooked reason behind the lack of visionary leadership in Nigeria is not the absence of good intentions, but rather the lack of the required experience, maturity, temperament, preparation and circumspection. In her formative years, Nigeria was ruled by a succession of unprepared, sometimes reluctant leaders (Ukonne, 2020). A fitting conclusion here is that for most of Nigeria's existence she has been governed by bad leaders (NESG, 2022) who have been, for the most part "administratively inept, politically naive or simply lacked the intellectual rigour to lead a nation as ethnically complex as Nigeria" (Ukonne, 2020).

Leadership Recruitment

Leadership recruitment process is the procedures used in selecting a leader for an organisation or country and the term refers to the mechanisms through which political leaders, government officials, and other influential individuals are chosen for key

positions in government, public institutions, and other sectors of society (Ayankoya and Osimen, 2023). Given the manner of emergence of leaders for Nigeria since independence, it is uncontested that the recruitment processes have either worked poorly or not at all, producing in the process inappropriate, accidental and unprepared leaders thereby putting round pegs in square holes. The Table above shows that over 90% of these leaders came totally unprepared, with no knowledge of the environment itself, little or no experience in public life, the bureaucracy or those who run the system, no knowledge of politics and power...."(Alaye, 2019) Whichever way leaders emerged in the Nigerian context either by way of elections or military coups, factors that have influenced their emergence have been other than competence, capacity, character, capability and vision. This state of affairs is paradoxical, given that while the less-than-competent leaders wobble on the nation's stage, her citizens that have become global leadership players has discharged themselves admirably. There are Nigerians in leadership positions across the world doing the nation proud. Amina Mohammed -United Nations Deputy Secretary General, Dr. Adewumi Adesina - African Development Bank President, Dr. Ngozi Okojie-Iweala - Director General World Trade Organisation. In addition, The World Medical

Association - Dr. Osahon Enabulele as President (2022-2023). The ten richest people in Africa include three Nigerians (Aliko Dangote, Abdulsamad Rabi'u and Mike Adenuga). Unfortunately, we have not been able to replicate good quality leadership in the political arena in Nigeria.

Leadership recruitment and selection has an all-encompassing impact on a nation's progress, affecting how policies are made, the extent of corruption, global relations, security, and stability. While sustainable development is promoted by "meritocratic, ethical, and inclusive leadership selection procedures; ineffective procedures can stall progress and prolong socioeconomic problems." (Ayankoya and Osimen, 2023). Therefore, maintaining a transparent, equitable, and responsible system for leadership recruitment at all levels of governance is central to Nigeria's long-term development goals and is key to the resolution of poor governance and national development (Jega, 2022).

2.1.3 Godfatherism

Godfatherism is one of the major culprits implicated in the poor quality of leaders Nigeria has produced since independence. The word 'godfather' conjures different meanings to different people and cultures. In the Nigerian context however, godfatherism refers to

political leaders who serve as 'clearing houses' (Albert, 2005) for political opportunities or powerbrokers cum gatekeepers in Nigerian politics. Godfathers are powerful individuals in a society who determine who, when, where and how persons emerge for leadership positions. They play a central role in determining who gets recruited and presented for leadership positions and they offer the services of their support in anticipation of some future gain either financial, pecuniary or other material returns rather than the godson service to the people for sustainable development (Edigin, 2010). Godfathers in the Nigerian political space take on several roles and shapes included being kingmaker, boss, mentor, and principal, while a godson is the beneficiary and recipient of the legacy of a godfather. It occurs when the godfather anoints a godson to win an election by using his influence, wealth, political structure and political experience and considers the support as an investment that should yield returns on the assumption into office of the godson (Albert, 2005).

In the Nigerian context, the historical tabulation in the Table above shows that each of the leaders emerged under a shadow of some higher, sometimes, but not always, benevolent, more powerful person or group or persons. Beginning with Tafawa Balewa who rose on the

shoulders or and in place of Ahmadu Bello to Aguiyi Ironsi who was a pawn in the chess game of disgruntled militia officers, one sees the emergence of Gowon who was away when the coup to remove Ironsi was planned as a “suitable” person chosen but army officers to protect the interest of the North then. Each of the later leaders (Shagari, Obasanjo, Yar’adua, et al, all were pawns in the chess game of regional political leaders, retired military offices and businessmen who all acted as godfathers masquerading as stakeholders and political leaders. Each of the leaders had a support base that propped them for a variety of reasons and for certain considerations.

The modus operandi of the political godfather is typically to court and build loyal group of followers around them and use their influence, strength and power to manipulate the manner leaders are selected, nominated and elected into office. Acting as political gatekeepers’ godfathers use their influence to block the participation of others not within their sphere of influence from the political space by dictating who participates in politics and under what conditions. The entire process is enforced and seen through by the utilization of a variety of tools included but not limited to money, a variety of other inducements, thuggery violence and kidnappings (Albert, 2005). The

pervasiveness of godfatherism and its effect in the Nigerian political space accounts for in large part to the poor leadership outcomes that have pervaded Nigeria’s governance space (Albert, 2005).

3.0 Conclusion

This paper has underlined the primacy of leadership to the success of any nation or organisation, positing that everything rises and falls on leadership. In addition, we have established a global recognition that leadership remains the most important tool by and through which that ensure the success or failure of organisations and nations is ensured.

Over the last over six decades, Nigeria has had sixteen Heads of Government yet only a very few can be considered mildly successful leaving a trail of rudderless leadership that have taken the nation almost to the abyss economically and politically. A majority of the leaders assumed office bereft of vision, direction, focus and determination to make a sustainable difference. The future portends gloominess. However, beckoning evidence from the Asian Tigers whom Nigeria was better off economically at independence, offer reassuring hope if the necessary leadership is in place to see to her ascent. With over 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria is the prototype of a

heterogeneous group with extreme complexities and dynamics interwoven in competing cultures and religions. Harnessing these diversities and differences into strengths requires a leadership that first understands, knows and shows these challenges for what they are and one that possesses a known pedigree of purposefulness and competency to transform Nigeria from a valley of despondency to an oasis of hope and prosperity. It remains to be seen whether Nigeria can rise from the ashes of its faulty foundations to realise its promise and take its place among Africa's most progressive nations. After all one point is settled: everything rises and falls on leadership (Maxwell, 1999).

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