BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW
This research seeks to interrogate the Nigerian leadership problem, identify the origin, determine the challenges of leadership and evaluate the prospects of the search for a nationalist governing class that is dedicated to national entrepreneurship, somewhat autonomous development, people-based development agenda, genuine economic and political governance institutions. The leadership question has become a recurring issue in the discourses on the Nigerian project. The governing class has been target of pillory, vilification, condemnation and disdain in view of the pervasive and persistent socio-economic and political crisis. The economic domain has been characterized by huge external debt overhang, net capital flight, disinvestments, collapse of social infrastructures, food crisis and insecurity, over-devalued national currency, pervasive poverty, homelessness and underdevelopment, unpopular, repressive and alienating economic policies. The socio-political space is riddled with the collapse of social values, kleptocracy, political corruption, transition crisis, the manipulation of electoral process, unstable, weak and vulnerable political structures and institutions, as well as brigandage. The intrusion of the military class into the political terrain altered the context of power politics. It assumed the character of a fraction of the hegemonic class that determines policy outcomes. However, the prolonged military rulership exposed it to its contradictions and politicization. It bastardized the officer corps and deepened the Nigeria political crisis in the context of transition politics that manipulated the nature and context of political recruitment. Military rule also led to the concentration of political power and resources in the central authority thereby undermining the leadership process in the units.

The Nigerian state had political independence without a concomitant economic autonomy needed to evolve an autonomous state. The emergent governing class contested the political terrain within the context of ethnic based parties and a fragile federal structure. The contradictions led to the collapse
of the first republic and subsequent, political discontinuities. The implications are frequent leadership change, lack of ideology, policy reversals and weak institutional patterns. The perception rating of the ruling elite is jaundiced by intense power struggle to access statist structures, private economic accumulation, flamboyance, profligacy, poor management of economic resources, ill-conceived projects and programmes, the repressive and malevolent nature of the state, preoccupation with political struggle to the neglect of critical development issues. Against these backdrops, the critical appraisals of the Nigerian crisis often identify the leadership as a major variable to correctly historicize the nature, character and dimensions of the Nigerian problem. The failure of policies, programmes and perceived national decay are usually linked to the leadership question. The country’s inability to pursue a vibrant foreign policy is also tied to the absence of internally cohesive political leadership. The next sub-heading will offer the theoretical context of the leadership question.

THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION: A THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The leadership question is hinged on the interface of structure and behaviours, dialectic of persons and institutions. Actors who create, implement or interpret the laws that are binding on existing social institutions play the state roles. The behavioural concern is the impact of personality trait, attitude and values on political governance. The extant literature on leadership offers the theoretical context and philosophical departure to explain the motives and character of the governing elite. Since the idea of organized society, there have been debates on who governs, who should govern, what the basis of political authority in a community should be, when, why and how should political actors obtain and appropriate influence. Plato, Marx, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, had raised philosophical interventions on these issues (Cranston, 1964). However, these writers differ on methodology. For instance, Locke and Rousseau rely on the prescriptive method to set the criteria for generalized ideas on the nature of man, society and authority (Abbott, 1947; Cranston, Ibid). The works of Marx thrives on the historical materialist theory (Cranston, Ibid).

There is link among the concept of leadership, power and influence. The interface will be examined in the latter part of this research. Leadership is the process through which one individual consistently exerts more influence than others in the pursuit of group behaviour. Political leadership is the decision on social policy and resource allocation, as exerted by partisan representatives.
These definitions suggest that the leadership process is hinged on the capacity to allocate scarce resources, which determines the locus of power. The concept of leadership is also appraised at the structural, behavioural levels. These problematic are further deepened by the implications of the concept of power, legitimacy and hierarchy. Therefore, a detailed analysis should appraise the imports of identified variables for leadership inquiry. Do these factors strengthen or limit political authority, and within what context?

The literature analyses leadership theories such as the trait, behavioural, attribution, charismatic, transformational and visionary. The trait theory identifies the attributes of confidence, iron-willed, determined and decisive. It also identifies traits that differentiate the leaders and non-leaders. These are ambition and energy, the desire to lead, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, intelligence and knowledge. However, this approach ignores the need of followers, fails to clarify the relative importance of various traits and the strength of situational factors (Robbins, Ibid). The behavioural theory appraises the conduct that specific leaders exhibit. In this context, the leader initiates structure, value experimentation, seeks new ideas, generates and implements change. The attribution theory suggests that leadership is an allusion to how the followership characterizes the leaders. These include intelligence, out going personality, strong verbal skills, and aggressiveness. This theory emphasizes the perception approach as a basis to interrogate the leadership issue (Robbins, 1998). The charismatic theory is hinged on the features of self-confidence, vision, and ability to articulate the vision, strong convictions about the vision, extra-ordinary behaviour. When successful, these behaviours evoke surprise and admiration. The charismatic leader is viewed as an agent of radical change rather than the status quo. These leaders are able to make objective appraisals of environmental constraints, and resources needed to foster change. The transformational leader is imbued with charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, vision and sense of mission, instil pride; attract respect and trust. The visionary leadership is the capacity to create and articulate a realistic, credible, attractive vision of the future. This leadership is imbued with the ability to explain and strengthen the vision through definite oral and written communication and behaviour. (Okadigbo, 1987; Conger, et al 1988; Bass, 1990; Robbins, 1998).

The preceding analysis on theories shall provide the framework to interrogate the interplay of structures, institutions and the governing elite. These theories will
also constitute prescriptive measures. It is useful to interrogate the interface of leadership and ethics. The ethical question is linked to political end, thus the leadership theories canvass ethical issues as guide to political behaviour. For instance, the charismatic theory identifies leaders with ethical consciousness as a basis of political governance as against mal-governance. The ethical issues include the abuse of power, trust, honesty and integrity. To this extent, the leadership process is not value free. It involves the means of political rulership, ethical context and the moral content of the goals. The next sub-heading will discuss the challenge of leadership in the Nigerian state.

THE NIGERIAN STATE, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Nigerian state emerged as a colonial state where the foreign bourgeois class dictated the economic and political content. It organized the socio-economy under the direct control of global capital. This state attained political sovereignty in 1960 thus expanding the basis of capitalist accumulation to include the local bourgeois class. Meanwhile, the economic structures were skewed to sustain the hegemony of global capital in a peripheral state. Thus, the emergent leadership secured political power within the context of dependency, peripheralization and neo-colonialism. This political class pursued power within the framework of the British parliamentary system. It is based on the fusion of powers among the organs, principle of collective responsibility, biccephalous executive system, strong party discipline and strong opposition. The polity was administered on the premise of a regional structure within the context of the federal system. The nature of the federal system allowed the regions to pursue policies and programmes hinged on their historical specificities. Besides, the parliamentary system evolved leadership that had immense followership and legitimacy. These strengths were used to mobilize the people behind policies. The regions under Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello and Nnamdi Azikiwe respectively had visionary and charismatic leaders whose behavioural leanings and attitudes set the pace and context of politics and governance. The parties had ethnic origins and somewhat ideological contexts that constituted the fulcrum of political and economic governance. However, the situational factors like the 1962 and 1965 Western Regional crisis, 1962 and 1963 census crisis, and 1964 General Elections crisis accelerated the collapse of the First Republic.

The military rulership has had far-reaching impacts on the Nigerian political economy. The military
supervised transitions that defined the nature and context of leadership transfer. The crescendo was the annulment of the June 12 elections that precipitated national crisis, secessionist agitation, social dislocation and economic crisis. The military sought to re-engineer the political domain, cultivate a new political culture, reduce the influence of money in the political process and evolve a new political class. However, these intents were undermined by the cancellation, personalization of political power, the re-emergence of ethnic irredentist groups and ethnic politics (Akinterinwa, 1997). Also, its economic agenda and social policies sought to instill social discipline, fiscal and budget discipline, self-reliance and sustained national economic growth. The Buhari regime pursued a strict economic policy, which sought to reduce the imperialist influence in the Nigerian political economy. The strict posture on external debt and negotiations with the Bretton Woods ideologues on economic reforms incurred the wrath of the Paris Club and the G8. However, these populist measures were undermined by human rights abuse, detention without trial, muzzling of the media and selective application of laws.

The Babangida regime pursued the structural Adjustment Programme that sought to restructure and diversify the economy, private sector growth and capitalist based development hinged on the market logic. However, critics like Bangura, 1991; Olukoshi, 1991a, 1995; Adejumobi, 1995 cohere on the adverse social implications of economic reforms in the adjusting states. The contradictions were heightened by the personalization of state power by the military President, General Babangida and the institutionalization of corruption. The Pius Okigbo report indicted the Babangida regime on the inability to account for $12.2b oil windfall. Furthermore, the Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery policy of the Babangida government sought to correct the Nigerian attitudinal problems, which negatively affected the economy and politics. However, this policy was contradicted by the divide and rule tactics of the junta, unpopular economic programmes, repressive policies and human underdevelopment (Adejumobi, Ibid; Olukoshi, 1995, 2000).

The Abacha regime was characterized by jaundiced transition programme, repressive policies, harassment and killings of critical opposition and declining economic fortunes. The military junta led by General Sanni Abacha, had a morbid dislike for the intellectual class and progressive political class. This disdain heightened with the mounting opposition against the
authoritarian disposition of the government. The military ruler, Sanni Abacha, was a reticent person, shunned public appearances, hibernated in the Presidential Villa, sponsored military goons who traversed the country to humiliate, harass and intimate critics, shunned intellectual discourses, opted for brute force and brigandage as instruments of political governance.

The Obasanjo government emerged in the context of the hegemony of the military class over the political terrain. The President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, won the 1999 and 2003 Presidential elections amidst critical opposition to pseudo-military rulership. Overtime, the President had been pilloried by civil society groups, trade unions and other parties. He was perceived as intolerant, arrogant, combative, bellicose, cantankerous and pedantic. This leadership style is linked to his military background and orientation, personal attributes and demeanour. Furthermore, his rulership is critically perceived for national insecurity, rising inflation, collapse of local businesses, growing human poverty, homelessness and despondency, epileptic, unreliable and inefficient social facilities, over bloated bureaucracy, half heart struggle against corruption. Here, we had discussed leadership and governance under civilian and military regimes within the context of specific policies, institutional framework, motives and attitudes of the major political actors.

THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

The previous analysis suggests there is a leadership crisis. To properly historicize the issue, we should link it to the nature of the Nigerian state and character of the ruling class. This state lacks autonomy and enmeshed in the struggle among fractions of the political class to control the political domain. The political elite is not a productive class, but rely on the control of state structures to access economic rewards. The over politicization of the Nigerian state is also understood in the context of the unmediated struggle for power, influence and patronage. The nature of political contest ensured the emergence of a local governing class without ideological commitment. Rather than pursue political contests within ideological frameworks, politics became a contested terrain for shallow, self-centered political gains.

The nature of the Nigerian state evolved a predatory political class that was concerned with power struggle, consolidation, alignment and realignment in the context of hegemonic control (Obi. 2000; Seteolu. 2003). The challenge of leadership is to evolve a
political class based on ideology. This shift to issues and ideology should refocus politics and governance to critical development imperatives. The liberalization of the political space and the subsequent emergence of moderate and leftist parties like the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP); Justice Party (J.P); Democratic Alternative (DA); National Conscience Party (NCP), had the potentials to energize the political process, expand the basis of political participation and canvass alternative policy agenda. However, these parties are less likely in the immediate future to control political power especially in the centre. This is linked to the lack of ideology in the political space, monetization of the political process, and the influence of primordial factors. For clarity, the Nigerian state is governed by a predatory political class hence personal rulership, political corruption and underdevelopment. To transcend the current economic morass and political lethargy, we should evolve a nationalist class that will alter the texture of politics, balance politics with economic imperatives, respond to the dynamics of globalization, and consolidate democratic structures and programmes hinged on the people and autonomous development. To evolve a new political culture and leadership, we should moderate the intense struggle for political authority. The principle of proportional representation is a strategy to mitigate political contestation, narrow the zero sum pursuit of political power, share power, influence and authority and foster political stability. This option is canvassed as against the simple majority system that encourages non-power sharing and alienating politics. The principle is more appropriate for multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies that aspire to national cohesion, integration and political development. True federalism and democratic governance should mediate this process.

The Babangida regime created the Center for Democratic Studies as a basis to evolve a new political culture and political class. Here, the political class or new breed political elite was exposed to leadership training, retraining and simulations with a view to deepen their knowledge of the governance process and its complexities. However, this class did not justify its new experiences in the quality of governance, but preoccupied itself with private gains. The selfish, parochial nature of the governing class has increased overtime. The political terrain is perceived as the easiest means to wealth, relevance and influence. The face-off between the executive and legislative organs over privileges in the Fourth Republic underscores the mindset of the governing elite. While there were occasional differences on the budget, the greater disputes bothered
on political spoils or rewards. In view of the parochial nature of fractions of the political class, there is a prescription for tutelage politics. It is a feature of the British parliamentary system where the political elite is exposed to different levels of political responsibility. Here, the politician develops through the party hierarchy and subservient to party control and discipline.

The search for genuine, nationalist governing class should involve the civil society organizations. Overtime, the non-state actors had evolved as credible platforms of political socialization, leadership recruitment and policy options. The military dictatorship under General Babangida engendered the growth of human rights organizations, and the Campaign for Democracy as a rallying point for socio-political movements. It is useful to observe that the Democratic Alternative and the National Conscience Party had evolved through social movements, which canvassed alternative policy agenda. The leadership search should interrogate the option of independent candidature as a basis to attract professionals, intellectuals, business and industrial elite to contest political office without partisan platforms. This option will likely enhance the quality of politicking, promote issue-based politics and recruit new entrants into the political class with somewhat personal integrity and pedigree, and reduce the cost of political power. The independent candidate as a political type will more likely suit the local levels of governance where community attachment, honour and integrity as opposed to party influence or domination are the determinants of political choice.

CONCLUSION

We had examined the leadership question in the Nigerian state against the backdrop of contextual influences. We affirmed there is a leadership crisis, which constitute a core problem. However, the analysis should include the followership link. The genuine leadership will need an honest, courageous and credible followership, which is less vulnerable to the manipulation politics of the ruling elite. It should possess knowledge, sound judgment and committed to specific cause and ideas. The pursuit of people-based economic programmes has the potential to foster democratic governance within the context of quality followership. This class should secure democratized access to economic resources and political objects foster trust, confidence and commitment. The leadership discourse should include the private domain as a viable means of leadership recruitment and consolidation. The industrial class may likely offer new insights into the
governance process. This potential was shown in the June 12 elections debate when the business class organized interactive sessions and debate between the Presidential candidates. Chief Moshood Abiola of the Social Democratic Party and Alhadji Bashir Tofa of the National Republican convention. The civil society groups, community-based organizations and independent candidature may likely constitute blocs to evolve leadership that approximate the features of the charismatic, visionary, transformational types. This project should be tied to the democratization of the Nigerian state to strengthen its autonomy in relation to the propertied class and the exploited class, and reduce accumulative politics. Where there are new structures and institutions, these should be linked to new attitudes and values as basis of a new political culture. The institutions should reflect the historical backdrop of the people and include enforceable checks to achieve transparent, responsive and responsible political elite.

The leadership discourse is not restricted to macro politics, it includes the local institutions and local governance. Hitherto, the discourse on governance and leadership had emphasized national politics, the local politics trajectories and governance are less studied. The local level constitutes the margin of society whose politics and social evolutions are least interrogated. Yet, this governance level constitutes the fulcrum of social and economic expansion and the leverage to national politics (Adejumobi and Seteolu, 2003). The Nigerian 1999 constitution specify its functions to include provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education, the expansion of rural agriculture, sewage and waste disposal, birth and marriages, registration of deaths, assessment and collection of tenement rates, control and regulation of out door advertising, license and control of the sale of alcohol. However, the local government is weak in the management of finances and accountability. The uncertainty on the supervisory agent for the local council has made the issue of probity and responsible leadership difficult (Jega, 2003). Meanwhile, two critical issues are pertinent. First, there is poor and inefficient running of government business. The 774 local governments had shown dismal performance amidst growing apathy and disdain to local governance. Secondly, the local government is replete with corrupt practices.

The elected chairmen and councillors privatized public finances through huge personal emoluments, imprest accounts, inflated contracts and connived with contractors and party clients to defraud the local councils. Consequently, the
institutions of informal governance such as community-based organisations assure local service delivery and local development, thus raising their relevance, legitimacy and loyalty. These bodies are alternative centers of power as against the perception of the local government as an aspect of the alien state (Adejumobi and Seteolu, Ibid; Osaghae, 2003; Yaqub, 2003).

The foregoing analysis has problematized the governance crisis at the local level. The dilemma is that the local government is assumed to reflect, aggregate, canvass and pursue local interest, but these assumptions are contradicted by the predatory nature of the local governing elite. The political attitude of the local political elite derives from the character of the national bourgeois class. These contradictions pose the challenge of alternative governance structures and leadership. The community-based organizations seem to respond to this imperative thus expanding the political space. The implications are the fact that the local government is receding as a viable unit of political recruitment and the growing relevance of informal structures as vehicles of social reform and participatory governance. The leadership challenges are immense, complex and multi-dimensional, thus necessitating conscious, deliberate, systematized responses, action and interventions.
NOTES & REFERENCES


