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ABSTRACT
This study is basically on political administration of the country. From 1979 to 2007, Nigerians suffer the fear of leadership failure and socio-economic insecurity arising from civil misrule and military oppression Prompted by the antecedent of militarization and democratization of the country’s polity. The people began to think more and more of fending for themselves to the extent that some citizens procured arms and light weapons to defend themselves. The political class in Nigeria is dependent, parasitic and very corrupt in nature including its style of mal-administration. From the 1980s, as a result of the mismanagement of the economy unemployment became a key factor in the labour market even as the cost of living rise beyond the reach of the low income earners. Nigerians are amazed and dismayed about their leaders’ display of power, affluence and financial recklessness. There appears to be a leadership conspiracy over the mass majority of the peoples of Nigeria particularly since 1979.

Introduction
This paper focuses on leadership challenges in Nigeria with particular emphases on the period from 1979 to 2007. It discusses the various civil and military regimes starting with that of President Alhaji Shehu Usman Shagari in 1979, and terminates with the regime of President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo which commences in 2007. It is unfortunate that from 1979, Nigerians suffer the fear of leadership failure and socio-economic insecurity arising from civil misrule and military oppression.

Although some have argued that the fundamental problem which hindered Nigeria’s political and economic advancement is leadership ineptitude, the truth still remains democracy cannot thrive on the basis of a skewed leadership and a disoriented society where decisions are made against the wishes and interest of the electorates by the government. Violence and crime rate is bound to increase in a situation where the people began to think more and more of fending for themselves. This study is a critical assessment and appraisal of both the military and the return to full blown democracy which Nigeria has had since 1979. The social, economic structure to make the citizens feel compel to be patriotic are lacking. There seem not to be any indication to end of poverty. The study is basically on political administration of the country and the socio-economic challenges faced by the entire citizenry.
The study conclude that forty nine years after independence Nigerians are disillusioned about their leaders who have failed to deliver the good governance, secure the welfare of persons on the principles of freedom, equality and justice and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of the people. The 1979 and the 1999 constitutions granted enormous power to the man at the centre i.e. the President thereby making him look like a ‘junta’. This has also made the centre to be highly competitive such that whichever ethnic group finds itself in power at the centre automatically lord it over other groups.

**The Shagari and Buhari Regimes 1979-85**

The Second Republic was born on 1st of October, 1979, when the military handed over power to a democratically elected government headed by President Shehu Usman Shagari. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari won majority in the election, while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Chief Obafemi Awolow which had the second largest votes formed the opposition party.¹

The real character of the Nigerian political class was enacted during the Nigerian Second Republic which lasted briefly from 1979 to 1983. The Second Republic ushered in the regime of President Alhaji Shehu Shagari as civilian President in 1979. During this regime the basic needs of humanity, food, housing, clothing and other basic necessities of life such as ownership of a vehicle became a preserve of the privileged few. There was the uncontrolled expenditure by the federal government on imported rice and other essential commodities, which drained the limited foreign exchange which left the country with the huge foreign debt of about US$15 billion by 1984. Added to this was the problem of distribution which led to large-scale corruption on the part of party functionaries and other public officers.²

Going by the social contract theory, the question of citizen’s patriotism, justification for patriotism and the issue of whether the citizens fill compelled to be patriotic is determined by the quality of leadership for, the state. The people and the leadership are held together in a symbiotic relationship. The citizens owes allegiance to the state, the state in return shoulders the citizens responsibility by making his life worth living.³On the contrary during the Shagari regime there was an army of idle full-time legislators who because of the small number of laws to pass or of lack of a will to analyze public policy issues before them, they had to look for jobs to keep themselves busy. These included setting up of ad-hoc committees to provide opportunities for disturbing private sector institutions and organizing overseas tours etc. Indeed, there was a bazaar of human activities, of little relevance to the governance of the country.

The Shagari regime had no sense of direction in tackling the country’s economic problems and foreign debt incurred by the Shagari administration was estimated at $15-16 billion.⁴From the early 1980s, the standard of living of Nigerians continued to degenerate, even as the cost of living keeps rising spirally. Prices of some essential commodities rise almost above the reach of the low income earners. Infrastructures including facilities provided by the community to help those in need gradually collapsed.⁵ The World Bank underlined the importance of social infrastructural services and the need for adequate social infrastructures which helps to determine a country’s success or
failure in diversifying production, expanding trade, coping with population growth, reducing poverty, or improving environmental conditions. Good infrastructural services raise productivity and lower production cost. Infrastructural services also help the poor and the whole society to contribute to environmental sustainability.

Beginning from `1983, the productive sectors of the Nigerian economy could not acquire plants, machinery, equipment and spare parts at reasonable prices and also the consumers could not acquire the product satisfaction at reasonable prices. Thus, the real income levels could not be maintained or made stable. Inadequate infrastructural services adversely affected manufacturing activities. Most manufacturers and commercial establishments had to generate their own electricity and sink bore hole to ensure their private water supply. The extra cost on production was shifted to the consumers. Inadequate clean water, poor sanitation and pollution were the order of the day in the urban areas. There was shortage of housing accommodation in the urban areas due to overpopulation caused by rural-urban migration. Only a small percentage of households particularly in the suburbs of the urban centres had refuse disposal services.

The supply of electricity which is the force behind the modern economy started to become erratic during the Shagari regime. Energy utilization is often used as a developmental index. Electricity generation in Nigeria was almost the exclusive preserve of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), a public corporation which generated about 99.5% of the total electricity consumed. Transportation which played an important role in a country’s economic life and the overall economic development of a state became truncated. The various transport modes in Nigeria namely; road, water, rail and air were poorly maintained.

Shagari again was elected, on August 6, 1983, to a second term in office. Again his keenest rival was Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Awolowo made a prediction as to the ills which would befall the country if the polls were rigged. As he rightly predicted, ills did befall the country and returned the country to military rule. On first January 1984 the military seized power and ruled the country for another thirteen years. The military in its central command image concentrated so much power at the central government and weakened the component units. The General Mohamadu Buhari’s regime which took over power on January 1, 1984, after overthrowing the Shagari regime, had a sense of direction in tackling the country’s economic problems and foreign debt incurred by the Shagari administration.

The Buhari regime was able to identify that part of the debt incurred by the Shagari administration resulted from non existent transactions by which millions of dollars were illegally siphoned by unscrupulous Nigerians and their foreign collaborators in the Shagari cabinet. The Buhari regime was credited for in 1984, was the only full year in the 1980s and 1990s in which Nigeria paid promptly for all imports with foreign exchange earned by the nation not borrowed from any international organization outside Nigeria. This re-established Nigeria’s image in the foreign market. As a result of the various measures taken to conserve the foreign reserves and control the foreign debt level, the Nigerian currency (naira) regained its strength all through 1984-5.
The Buhari administration was determined to make every Nigerian disciplined in his public life as a step towards nation building. The War Against Indiscipline (WAI) crusade soon made the people to imbibe the discipline of queuing in public places. What went wrong with the regime was the harshness with which officials given the responsibility for handling foreign exchange dealings handled the affairs. Many of these officers corruptly enriched themselves in the process. There was public outcry over the manner in which former political office holders suspected of financial mismanagement were sent to jail and many died in detention. The regime has also been criticized for the way and manner it disposed public fixed assets in improper working conditions declaring them falsely as unserviceable. Nigerians also saw the Buhari regime as been too autocratic and harsh on them.

**The Babangida, Abacha and Abdulsalami Regimes 1985-1999**

General Ibrahim Babangida took over the administration of the country on 27 August, 1985 because according to his team, General Buhari was autocratic and that there was abuse of human rights of individual Nigerians. The administration went into nation-wide consultation on the conditions of the proposed International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan to Nigeria towards reducing or clearing its foreign debts. The federal government reaction was to take the alternative course of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) designed for the nation by the World Bank as a condition for its support.

By the time General Babaginda assumed office as the sixth military Head of State Nigeria’s external debt had dropped to $21.2 billion, but in addition to $17.8 billion owed to the private financial market. The situation of the oil glut at this time which made the price of oil to drop to $14 per barrel as happened in late 1970’s during Obasanjo era, affected, not only government finances but also investment activities. The net result was that by early 1990s important construction activities dropped by 10% and some projects abandoned making Nigeria’s landscape to be doted with capital and development projects in various stages of completion partly because they were not properly planned and partly because of politics of development. This development was due in part to the failure of oil to have direct linkage with other sectors of the economy such as agricultural – related manufacturing concerns and companies to process mineral resource which should have expanded the employment base.

It was in order to overcome the economic problems that in October 1985 Nigeria witnessed the imposition of an economic state of emergency for a period of fifteen months and later extended to 1988. It was later supplemented by the Structural Adjustment Programme conducted under the slogan ‘liberalization, rationalization, and optimization,’ to correct the inherent structural imbalance in the economy. SAP was designed to correct the superficial nature of the economy and redirect it to the part of self-reliant sustainable long-term development. With the devaluation of the local currency all sorts of extra-ministerial parastatals were established as an adjustment to SAP.

Thus, because Babangida’s administration lacked the strict financial discipline which economic revivalist strategy such as SAP entails, Nigeria, which was among the twenty economically independent nations in the world immediately after independence later ranked among
the 13th poorest nation. The result of this development was the sporadic IMF riots across the country. This was due largely to the fact that the reforms were too sharply focused on micro-economic target. Social services were badly hit especially as majority of the population of the country had little access then to operate private businesses. Babangida’s administration institutionalized corruption as if it was a cardinal state policy.16

When General Sanni Abacha assumed office on 17 November, 1993, after overthrowing the Interim National Government (ING) under Chief Earnest Shonekan that was put in place by General Babangida, he declared that his administration inherited an economy which was characterized by grave debilities and instability. To put the economy on a better footing he produced a budget of N110.2 billion and introduced a tight monetary policy. In addition, to demonstrate his readiness to achieve economic management in 1994, especially as it concerns corruption, he promulgated the failed bank (Recovery of Debts) and financial malpractices Decree, as well as the money laundering Decree of 17 December, 1994. As novel as these were, Abacha turned them into tools for settling personal scores and a lot of people such as Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki and the Sultan of Sokoto were jailed.17

Abacha’s administration was notorious for tampering with and looting the public treasury. He and members of his family became some of the richest people in the world. He served himself and allowed his lieutenants to serve themselves as well. For instance, after his death, Chief Anthony Emeka Ani, his finance Minister refunded the sum of $45 million allegedly given to him by his master, Abacha for managing the crumbled economy well. This “Ani Gift” was said to be his share of the $1.5 billion over-charged by Abacha administration for debt buy-back which entailed the paying of some $500 million for a $2.5 billion Russian debt on the white elephant Ajaokuta steel project, which itself swallowed some $7 billion. Ani’s steel counterpart. Power and steel Minister Alhaji Bashir Dalhatu, got DM5 million from Abacha’s son, Muhammed who brokered the deal.18

Under the Abacha administration several public utilities collapsed. The four refineries stopped production of petroleum products, thereby creating a severe domestic shortage which led to Nigerian importing fuel on a massive scale. By the last quarter of 1994, when Abacha’s insincerity to national interest began to have a serious negative impact on the economy foreign investors started divesting capital out of the country. By the time his regime came to an end occasioned by his sudden death, capital flight, associated with uncertainties surrounding his self-succession bid, had caused the naira to devalue to the extent that exchange rate went up to N93/$1 from N85/$1.19Abacha’s attempt to re-direct the economy was a colossal failure.

General Abacha suffered humiliating criticisms in the hands of the pro-democracy activist after he abandoned his promise to revisit the annulled June 12, 1993 elections. He quickly reassert his authority by striking at those whom he had a grievance and his perceived enemies – either real or imagined. Top on the list of his victims were, Bashorun M.K.O Abiola himself. He was arrested and detained on June 23, 1994 for declaring himself President a year after the annulment of the June 12 1993 elections. He was charged for treason in the Abuja High Court. Chief Abiola’s attempt to regain freedom from detention through judicial process was frustrated. The last time he came to
court was in 1994. He never appeared in court again until he was suspected to be poisoned in detention and died of cardiac arrest in 1998.\textsuperscript{20}

Abacha’s dictatorship laid the country waist in moral. Citizens were disillusioned, disenfranchised and pauperized. Political antagonism among groups and nationalities was heightened. A huge percentage of the national income had been spent on security for the dictator’s image making. During the regime industry and agriculture recorded very low growth. Incomes were static. Prices rose beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen. Education standard was seriously affected. Many could not afford the cost of schooling. There was acute fuel scarcity. The economy was at the mercy of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Nigeria became a pariah state in the comity of nations.

When General Abdulsalam Abubakar came to power he attempted to revamp the economy but failed. However, available evidence shows that General Abubakar was able to pay Nigeria’s external debt which reduced from $7.7 billion to $4 billion. He also recorded a budgetary deficit of N100 billion.\textsuperscript{21} Official corruption was also evident during the Abdusalam’s administration particularly in the award of contracts as in the case of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Defence and Police Force Headquarters.

Following the recommendation by a salaries review committee under the chairmanship of Vice Admiral Mike. Akhigbe then the Chief of General Staff (CGS) the government approved N3500 minimum wage for federal government workers and N3000 for state government in 1998. The increase in wage was intended to cushion the effects of inflation on workers, and to motivate productivity. General Abubakar considered the option of privatization of government agencies and public corporations to revamp the economy.\textsuperscript{22} This policy has been seen as no simple panacea to solving the sufferings of the mass majority of the people.

On May 29, 1999, after holding unto power for fifteen years, the military handed over power to a democratically elected government headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo. It was by the junta power that Obasanjo was strategically released from prison custody, pardoned and bank-rolled to become president of Nigeria. This action was to pacify the very vocal and politically volatile Yoruba ethnic group who felt betrayed by the controversial circumstances that led to the death of Chief Moshood Abiola, the acclaimed winner of June 12, 1993 presidential elections.

This was seen as a political masterstroke that helped to douse the tension in the polity. Nigerians never had a right to decide who should be their president. President Obasanjo himself realized this anomaly which was why he reorganized the military to become more professional in accordance with his own plans and investigated human rights violations from 1984 up to 1999 (this was condemned by some as unnecessary). The Obasanjo cabinet itself was a regrouping of enemies of democracy and unrepentant military cronies especially the henchmen of General Sani Abacha. There was no demonstration of intention to break away from the past.

From May 27, 1999 when President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo was sworn into power in Nigeria up till 2009, which covers part of the new regime of President Umaru Musa Yaradua Nigeria has witnessed series of civil disturbances across the country. The civil disturbances which
rocked the early years of Obasanjo’s regime were compounded by religious riots across the country emanating from the imposition of the Sharia legal system in some states by some state governors.

Governor Sani Yerima of Zamfara State had enforced the Sharia Islamic legal system in Zamfara state. The imposition of sharia made it mandatory for every residence of the state to be subjected to summon before the Islamic court. The Sharia riots which ensued in most parts of Northern Nigeria caused a mass exodus of Christians from the southern part to their homes of origin or find habitation elsewhere.

The neglect of social infrastructures and the refusal to cater for the basic needs of the citizens over the year by subsequent administrations in Nigeria whether military or civilians, has resulted to growing disaffection and serious tension and in some cases communal clashes, religious riots, militant youth violence and other societal unrest such as the recent clash between the Birom and the Hausa community in Jos, the Ogoni people and other communities, mostly from Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa-Ibom states have become vocal and agitating over their dissatisfaction about official disregard to their well-being. The economic situation in Nigeria under President Umar Musa Yardua who assume office on 27 May, 2007, is less better than his predecessors. Nigeria cannot be said to be making meaningful progress in catching up with the advanced countries of the world. Nigerians are getting impatient daily about the kind of leadership in the country.

Conclusion
The paper has discussed the Nigerian leadership from 1979 up till 2007 and the style of governance by various administrations in the country. We have seen that most government policies are not tended towards solving the economic problems of the country. Rather the Nigerian leadership is corrupt and greedy. People are generally dissatisfied about the leadership of the country. Although some have argued that the fundamental problem which hindered Nigeria’s political and economic advancement is leadership ineptitude, the truth still remains democracy cannot thrive on the basis of a skewed leadership and a disoriented society where decisions are made against the wishes and interest of the electorates by the government.

Recommendation
The study recommends that only men who would not be petty or mean, being above physical or material pleasures, devoid of emotional ties and economic considerations should be allowed to hold power.

Since power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely only trustworthy people should be allowed to compete for power or contest election. Only good and honest men should be allowed to become political leaders and occupy public office.

The study recommends that the only guarantee for peace, stability and an enduring democracy in the Federal Republic of Nigeria is good government, founded on the principles of constitutional democracy, the rule of law, separation of powers and a good human, social and economic agenda.
End Notes


10. Ibid, 115.


15. Ibid, 4-5.


17. Ibid, 11.

18. Ibid, 11-12.


22. Ibid, 16-17.

References


