



Political Miscalculation the Bane of Leadership Failure in Nigeria: An Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

Political miscalculation has emerged as a significant factor contributing to leadership failure in Nigeria, undermining the country's potential for growth and development. This appraisal explores how inaccurate assessments, flawed decision-making, and poor judgment by political leaders have led to governance breakdowns and societal discontent. Key areas of miscalculation include faulty policy formulation, underestimation of public sentiment, ethno-religious mismanagement and misjudgement of political opposition. These errors have resulted in a loss of public trust, weakened institutions, and political instability. The study emphasizes the need for Nigerian leaders to adopt inclusive governance practices, enhance accountability, and prioritize accurate information in decision-making processes to mitigate political miscalculations and improve leadership outcomes. Addressing these failures is critical for ensuring sustainable development and political stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Political, Miscalculation, Bane, Leadership Failure and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the development and progress of any nation. In Nigeria, the recurrent issue of leadership failure has been a significant impediment to the country's growth and development. Nigeria have suffered myriads of problems ranging from corruption, election fraud, terrorist attacks, herder-farmer conflict, armed banditry, and police brutality, to insensitivity in policy making and execution by her leaders. Citing the work of [1] on leadership debacle, they opined that a leader can be described as anybody that can influence others to perform beyond their formal authority. Leadership emerges because every society is organized. The masses cannot lead. Citing [2] in their study pointed out that there is a need to have a few people who will lead. Leadership is both the adhesive that binds a work group together and the catalyst that triggers employee motivation, thereby having major influence on organization performance [3]. In his study, [4], describes leadership as an essential oil that keeps the wheel of government working without any difficulty. According to him, leadership makes the difference between success and failure in a country. It involves giving direction to citizens who are the critical assets of the nation by making the right judgement on decisions. In the words of [5], the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or the inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmark of true leadership since her independence. A critical factor contributing to this failure is political miscalculation—errors in judgment and strategy by political leaders that have far-reaching consequences. Political miscalculation refers to errors in judgment made by political leaders or countries regarding political actions or strategies, which can negatively impact their standing or effectiveness. It highlights errors in evaluating the consequences of decisions, often leading to missteps in political campaigns or governance. Political leaders in Nigeria have failed in several fronts in making the right judgement about the policies that affect the common masses. This article appraises how political miscalculations have undermined effective leadership in Nigeria, leading to socio-economic stagnation and political instability.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts qualitative research design to gain an insight into the nature and character of leadership and political miscalculation in Nigeria and the categorical imperatives. The researcher used descriptive analysis to examine the issues of leadership and political miscalculation in Nigeria. The paper which is theoretical in nature draws its argument basically from secondary data which include journal publications, textbooks and internet sources. Statistical data were also used where necessary as empirical evidence portraying researches' argument. To improve on the reliability and validity of the paper, multiple secondary sources were used to minimize risk of error. To realize these objectives and for ease of analysis, the paper is modelled into the following sections: The first section chronicled introduction and methodology. The second section examined

conceptual and theoretical issues central to the discourse. The third discussed the interface between leadership and political miscalculation. The fourth x-rayed challenges of leadership, corruption and governance in Nigeria. The fifth proffer the way forward in the context of the identified problems; then conclusion and implications.

Leadership failure and political miscalculation: Conceptual and theoretical insights.

Conceptual framework

Leadership

Some concepts in social and management sciences do not easily lend themselves to universally agreed definitions. This makes every definition perhaps only relevant within the parameters set for a given investigation [6]. The concept of leadership evokes several meanings and studies elaborating different dimension of it abound. They further stated that Leadership is both the adhesive and catalyst which bind citizens of a given country together and triggers their motivation towards the achievement of individual and group objectives. In their research on leadership failure and insecurity in Nigeria, [7] opined that leadership is the ability to guide, inspire, and influence individuals or a group toward a common goal or vision. It involves the skills, qualities, and actions that enable a person to motivate and direct others effectively. It can be deduced that leadership is like a compass that stirs the ship of a country, a people, an organisation, a community or nation towards expected goals. [8], asserts that leadership is not limited to formal positions of authority but can be demonstrated at various levels and in different contexts, including personal, organizational, community, and political settings. Going further, the concept of leadership is essentially embraced from a personality perspective which proposes, for example, that leadership is a combination of special traits or characteristics, which individuals ought to possess so that they can persuade others to accomplish tasks through effective governance practices, [9]. This means that leadership is the ability to influence others to participate in the process of achieving collective goal of association, organisation or country.

Leadership Failure

[10], defines leadership failure as when negative unintended consequences occur as the result of mistakes, errors, ignorance, lack of expertise, flawed communication, and inability to lead. The unintended consequences can have a minor or major impact on the organization being led, the public being served, and the surrounding internal and external environment. In some situations, the failures can lead to death and have a long-term catastrophic impact. It can be inferred from the above definition that leadership failure entails leaders not being sound in their judgement of policy and decisions. In the words of [11], in his book "The Trouble with Nigeria", leadership failure is the unwillingness or inability of leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership. He argued that leadership is the inability of leader to show examples of self. To further buttress leadership failure, [12], opined that when leaders take an active role in styles, patterns, systems and processes of good leadership, they change the narrative because they become more passionate about the functions attached to their positions and the need to give it their best shot to enhance better living for the people.

Theoretical framework

The framework chosen for this study are Rational Choice, and Decision-Making Theories.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory assumes that individuals, including political leaders, make decisions based on the maximization of their personal benefits, weighing costs and benefits rationally. The proponent of this theory is Adam Smith in his work "*The Wealth of Nations*" (1776) as a political economist. The basic premise of rational choice theory is that the decisions made by individual actors will collectively produce aggregate social behaviour [13]. When leadership failure is linked to political miscalculations, this theory can help explain how leaders in Nigeria may make decisions based on incorrect assumptions, flawed calculations, or short-term gains rather than long-term societal benefits. This theory is particularly useful in analyzing why leaders prioritize personal or political interests over national interests, leading to governance failures.

Public Choice Theory

Public Choice Theory, a branch of economics applied to political science, analyzes how political leaders, like individuals, pursue self-interested goals, often leading to miscalculations in governance. This 19th-century precursor of modern public choice theory was the work of Swedish economist Knut Wicksell and John C. Calhoun, which treated government as political exchange, a *quid pro quo*, in formulating a benefit principle linking taxes and expenditures. It can be used to explain leadership failures where political leaders prioritize policies that serve personal or political gains rather than the public good, resulting in poor governance and policy missteps. In relationship to political miscalculation as the bane of leadership failure in Nigeria, these theories are better deployed to explain the reasons behind leadership failures in Nigerian.

Understanding Political Miscalculation

Political miscalculation refers to the failure of political leaders to accurately assess situations, predict outcomes, or make decisions that align with the political reality or public needs. It often stems from overconfidence, lack of information, poor judgment, and self-interest. Political leaders may misjudge the level of public support, the consequences of policies, or the dynamics of political opposition, leading to decisions that harm governance and public welfare [14]. In Nigeria, political miscalculations are widespread due to several

factors, including the dominance of political elite, ethnic divisions, and the prioritization of short-term political gains over long-term national interests [15]. These miscalculations often manifest in flawed policies, poor implementation strategies, and a disconnection between the leadership and the electorate, resulting in leadership failure.

Political Miscalculation and Leadership Failure in Nigeria

Poor Policy Formulation and Implementation

One of the most glaring manifestations of political miscalculation in Nigeria is in policy formulation and implementation. Successive governments have introduced policies aimed at addressing socio-economic challenges, but many of these policies have failed due to a lack of proper assessment and planning. For example, the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, introduced to stabilize Nigeria's economy, ended up worsening the living conditions of ordinary Nigerians. Leaders miscalculated the social and economic impacts of these policies, leading to widespread poverty and public discontent [16].

Underestimating Public Sentiment

Another common form of political miscalculation in Nigeria is the failure of leaders to gauge public sentiment accurately. Leaders often underestimate the frustration and dissatisfaction of citizens with issues such as corruption, unemployment, and poor infrastructure. This disconnect has led to political instability, mass protests, and violent uprisings, such as the #EndSARS movement in 2020. The government's initial miscalculation of the intensity of public anger allowed the protests to escalate, ultimately forcing a national reckoning on police brutality [17].

Ethno-Religious Miscalculations

Nigeria's political landscape is deeply influenced by ethnic and religious divisions. Political leaders frequently miscalculate the complexities of managing these divisions, resulting in policies and actions that exacerbate rather than alleviate tensions. For instance, leaders may focus on securing support from one ethnic or religious group at the expense of national unity. Such miscalculations have led to increased sectarian violence and a lack of cohesive national leadership [18].

Misjudging Political Opposition

Political miscalculations also arise from the failure to accurately assess political opposition. Nigerian leaders have often overestimated their control over political rivals or underestimated the influence of opposition parties. This was evident in the 2015 presidential election, where the ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), underestimated the strength of the opposition coalition, which led to the victory of Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC). This shift in political power was largely due to the ruling party's failure to recognize the growing dissatisfaction among the populace and the effectiveness of the opposition's campaign [19].

Causes of Political Miscalculation

Political miscalculation in Nigeria is often rooted in several factors, including a lack of strategic foresight, overconfidence, and the underestimation of political opponents. According to [20], many Nigerian leaders have historically failed to accurately assess the political landscape, leading to decisions that undermine their leadership and the country's stability. For instance, the reliance on ethnic and religious sentiments as tools for political mobilization often backfires, resulting in divisive governance and societal polarization [21]. Additionally, the pursuit of short-term political gains at the expense of long-term national interest is a common trait among Nigerian leaders. This myopic view, as noted by [22], leads to policies and actions that may win elections but fail to address the root causes of Nigeria's socio-economic challenges. Political leaders often miscalculate the public's response to these policies, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and a loss of legitimacy.

Manifestations of Political Miscalculation

One of the most prominent manifestations of political miscalculation in Nigeria is the frequent inability of leaders to manage the expectations of their constituents. The promises made during election campaigns are often unrealistic, and when these promises are unfulfilled, they lead to disillusionment among the electorate. As noted by [23], the gap between political rhetoric and actual governance is a significant source of leadership failure in Nigeria. Moreover, political miscalculation is evident in the mismanagement of political alliances. Many Nigerian leaders have failed to maintain crucial political coalitions, resulting in weakened governments and the inability to implement key policies. The collapse of the alliance that brought former President Goodluck Jonathan to power in 2011 serves as a prime example of how political miscalculation can lead to leadership failure [24].

Implications for Nigeria's Development

The implications of political miscalculation for Nigeria's development are profound. Leadership failure resulting from these miscalculations has led to policy inconsistencies, economic instability, and a loss of public trust in government institutions. As observed by [25], the frequent change in government policies due to leadership instability disrupts economic planning and development projects, hindering progress in critical sectors such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Furthermore, the political miscalculations of Nigerian leaders have contributed to the deepening of ethnic and religious divisions, which pose a significant

threat to national unity. The inability to build inclusive governance structures has resulted in the marginalization of certain groups, leading to conflicts and unrest that further destabilize the country [26-28].

RECOMMENDATIONS

To mitigate the impact of political miscalculation and address leadership failure in Nigeria, several measures can be implemented. First, there is a need for Nigerian leaders to develop a deeper understanding of the political environment and adopt a more strategic approach to governance. This includes engaging in thorough political risk assessments and considering the long-term consequences of their decisions [27]. Before formulating policies, Leaders should ensure they have accurate information about the socio-political context and the potential impact of their decisions. Second, fostering greater inclusivity in governance is essential. Leaders should move beyond ethnic and religious politics and focus on policies that promote national unity and development. Building broad-based coalitions that reflect the diversity of Nigeria's population can help ensure more stable and effective governance [28]. Where citizens are actively involved in decision-making processes, it can bridge the gap between leaders and the populace, reducing the chances of misjudging public sentiment. Finally, promoting transparency and accountability in government is crucial. By setting realistic goals and communicating them clearly to the public, leaders can manage expectations and build trust. This approach can reduce the likelihood of political miscalculation and enhance the legitimacy of leadership in Nigeria [29]. This can be achieved by fostering institutions that hold leaders accountable for their actions. Strengthening civil society and the media can help monitor and check leadership miscalculations.

CONCLUSION

Political miscalculation has been a significant factor in the leadership failure that has plagued Nigeria. Whether through poor policy decisions, underestimating public sentiment, or mishandling ethnic and political divisions, Nigerian leaders have repeatedly made errors that have had lasting negative impacts on governance and national development. The inability of leaders to accurately assess the political landscape and the consequences of their decisions has led to widespread instability, economic challenges, and social division. Addressing these issues requires a shift towards more strategic, inclusive, and transparent governance. By doing so, Nigeria can begin to overcome the leadership failures that have hindered its development and build a more stable and prosperous future.

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