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Political Leadership Recruitment and the Challenge of Public Policy Implementation: The African Experience

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Abstract-- Nations, particularly those practicing democratic governance or civil rule, elections remain the chief legitimate means of leadership recruitment. Thus, political leadership recruitment and public policy implementation, remain pivotal to good governance in every modern state like Nigeria. Therefore, given the importance of leadership in Nation-building, the paper interrogates the processes of political leadership recruitment and their effect on public policy implementation. Methodologically the study relied on secondary data sources relevant to the study as the Elite theory was deployed as an analytical paradigm. The study was centred on the following thematic areas. (a) Political leadership recruitment process and its implication on public policy implementation (b) the nexus between political leadership recruitment and public policy implementation (c) Clientele politics and godfatherism as a brand of Nigerian politics. Given also that Nigeria has experienced leadership recruitment through colonial administration, military rule and democratic governance, the paper concentrated on democratic political leadership recruitment. This however, appears to be a major drawback in the implementation of public policy as the fulcrum of good governance, hence, the essence of government as an institution of the state. Recommendations as a panacea to the challenge were drawn from the findings of the study.

Keywords-- Leadership, recruitment, policy, implementation, public, political

I. INTRODUCTION

The institution of the state ushered in law and order in human relations after man exited the state of nature as aver by the social contract theorists of Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke (Agi, 2003). Thus, the modern state system is organized according to established norms as spelt out in the constitution of such a state. Government, particularly in the modern era where democracy or civil rule is in practice, representative government is largely the order of the day due to, but not limited to the following factors; (a) land mass (b) population (c) technology etc.

Landmass: Given the small population size of humans in societies where they live, people could congregate and collectively take a decision on what is to be done for their collective good and jointly implement what they have agreed upon. This practice was common in the ancient Greek-city state of Athens assembly (Ecclesia) of all citizens (Appadorai, 1977). Sequel to the explosion in population and the vast nature of the society, the direct democracy could no longer be feasible, hence the need for a representative as a leader of the people who speak and takes action on their behalf.

Moreso, technology has equally contributed in no small measure to the inevitable need for a representative political leadership. For instance, like what David Harvey (1989) would refer to as time-space compression, wherein the global community has been reduced to a global village through the use of information communication technology (I.C.T), giving rise to the near obliteration of distance in human relations. This advancement in civilization and the organization of government in the 21st century modern state system, have equally enabled representative political leadership in state institutions as practice in Nigeria.

In view of the exponential growth in human population and technological advancement, state and interstate relations have become increasingly blurred and complex as no one state is strong enough to operate independently in pursuit of her objectives. Arising from the above, it is axiomatic that politics is local, thus political leadership recruitment must be locally done. Politics is local as maintained by this study. On the contrary however, political leadership is not local as a leader competes among other interests beyond the local environment for the provision of the local needs of the citizenry that are outside his locality. At this level, leadership prowess must be backed up by cognate experience, competence and administrative skills, integrity and accountability and a sound knowledge of policy science, commitment to public interest as well as adequate leadership and decision making ability among others.



These qualities as mentioned, however, cannot be properly consummated without a good level of academic attainment in the contemporary times of technologically driven society.

Thus, the paper intends to bring to the fore the nexus between political leadership recruitment and the challenge of public policy implementation in Nigeria and the way forward.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the relevance of theory in understanding social phenomena, the study adopts the Elite theory as an analytical and explanatory paradigm. It is in this regard that Varma (1975; p.144), stress on the relevance of the theory by observing that “it offers satisfactory explanations of political phenomenon and has since inception continued to serve a useful purpose as a descriptive tool”. In the same vein, the Elite theory gives much insight into electoral process since it decides the means by which the elite come to power. Thus, political leadership recruitment has largely been consummated through elections believed the world over to have predominantly been an elite affair, hence the deployment of all forms of gerrymandering to ensure the recruitment of their loyalists into leadership positions.

Meanwhile, the elite theory developed alongside group and power theory was used by a number of writers like Jose Ortega (1932), to explain political process as they existed in the country. The origin of the elite theory can be trace to the writings of some European scholars drawing their concern with regards to the growth of facism in Italy in particular. Among these scholars includes; Pareto (1939), Mosco (1939) both are Italians, Michels (1949), a Swiss and Jose Ortega (1932) Spaniard.

The central thesis of the elite theory is the idea that every society is made up of two categories with the first consisting of a select few who are capable and therefore, have the right to supreme leadership and the second made up of the vast masses who are “destined” to be ruled (Varma, 1975; p.143). Central to Pareto’s variant of elite theory however, are the concepts of the circulation of the “Elite” and residues. He posits that history is replete with aristocracies, and that in every society there is constant movement of individuals and elite from higher levels and lower to higher levels resulting in a considerable increase of the degenerate elements in the classes, while still holding on power. On the other hand, there is an increase of elements of superior quality in the “subject classes”. This Pareto asserts, lead to the ultimate extinction of every elite group in the society culminating to social equilibrium.

As Mosca (1939), suggest, every society has two classes of people, ruling class and the class that is ruled. The first class, always less in number performs all political functions monopolize power and enjoys the advantages that power brings. Whereas the second, that is more in number is directed and controlled by the first class that is now more or less legal.

In Nigeria for instance, the emergence of colonialism saw with it a class of elite who mediated between the colonial masters, and the locals. Ake (1996) and Chinweizu (1978), stress that to understand the character of the Nigerian elite, we must recall that colonialism was a stage in the phase of capitalist expansionism. Given the character of capitalism, the Nigeria governing elite had been fashioned after the likeness and similar attitude of western bourgeoisie regarding their social position, economic pre-eminence and even value and personalities were shaped by colonialism. In the same vein, Nkurumah (1980) suggests that elitism is an ideology of the bourgeoisie that gain prominence during the 19th century. It emphasizes the domination of the society by a minority that has access to the machinery of government.

However, with economic power in the hands of the Nigeria elite, they therefore find it easy to also control the politics. According to Barongu (1983), political struggles becomes a do or die affair with the elite fighting to sustain and maintain themselves in power. In the same line of thought, Pareto (1939; p.14) observes that “self-perpetuation and maintenance in power is achieved through the use of force and cunning”. In line with Pareto’s view, political leadership recruitment in Nigeria is an affair of political party elite who deploy all manner of antics emerge victorious in party primaries that qualifies such a person to contest and win in the general elections. Thus, the challenge of public policy implementation start from this manipulated process from the parties primary elections that abinitio produce a candidate that lacks the understanding of public policy, that throws the country into economic hardship as a result of lack of understanding on when and how public policy should be implemented like fuel subsidy removal policy of 29th May, 2023 that is largely believed to be the cause of the country’s hitherto economic quagmire.

Applied in this context therefore, the elite theory enable us to understand the fact that self-perpetuation and maintenance is the central purpose of the elite group in political leadership recruitment in Nigeria. The elite theory therefore explains why the ruling class is interested in political leadership recruitment given the nature of party politics in Nigeria as the chief determinant of economic outcomes or affluence.



In view of the above, the strength of the elite theory lies in its descriptive and predictive properties to project into the future and predict what a given situation may turn out to be regarding the public policy outcomes of a particular administration. Thus, the goal of the elite is to acquire power, prestige, wealth and social position for themselves and their families in complete negation of democratic principles when it comes to political leadership recruitment, hence a challenge to public policy implementation in Nigeria.

Political Leadership Recruitment Process and its Implication on Public Policy Implementation

Like it is in Nigeria, so it is in most occidental states largely seen as bastions of democracy. Broadly speaking, political leadership recruitment could be seen as a process of identifying, selecting and bringing individuals into political position of authority. The process involves both citizens and governmental institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Judiciary as regulatory bodies in Nigeria. Political leadership recruitment as its concerns this study, case is a process that evolves from the political party structure starting from party primaries elections, that culminate into the general elections where the leadership of governmental institutions like the legislative and the executive arms of government are elected by the electorate.

Political parties remain crucial in this process as they are at the basement of the recruitment process, and as such, a threat to nation-building if without a transparent, inclusive, dependable, knowledgeable, reliable and functional umpire to midwife the process. Electoral political leadership however, started in Nigeria as far back as the early 1920s (Ogon and Udo, 2014). This, brought about the formation of the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1923 by Herbert Macaulay considered in the annals of Nigeria's political history as the curtain raiser for the formation of political parties in Nigeria, hence, a platform for leadership recruitment.

In Nigeria, political parties are the major leadership production mechanism use for the consummation of government policies as observed above. It is apposite therefore, to state that in Nigeria's political history, electoral political leadership was introduced by the Clifford constitution of 1922 that saw the election of four (4) Nigerians into the legislative council.

However, as it were, this election was not done by popular franchise as a group of oligarchies white colonial masters mid-wived the process which has snowballed to the contemporary political leadership recruitment process as an elite affair as graphically captured by Igboeche (2007;p.15), below; Political parties are organized at various levels, from the wards, local government, state and national levels. At the National level, we often have the National Executive, the National working committee and the Board of Trustee of the political parties. These bodies control the entire activities of the party. The decision of the National Executive Council (NEC) is binding on the party members at the other levels. At the National level we have the National Headquarters of the party presided over by the Chairman and other top executive members of the party. The party policies and programmes are drawn up by the National Executive council, and such policies and programmes are subject to approval by the entire member. Or the representatives of party members from local and state levels in agreement with the National Executive Council, National working committee and members of the Board of trustee can take decisions on behalf of the members.

Given the above nature of the hitherto organizational pattern of political parties in Nigeria, electoral leadership is largely an elite affair as whoever the party decides as its candidate to stand for election at whatever level, is a decision of the national Headquarters of the party in conjunction with other relevant organs of the party at that level. Thus, who becomes a representative of the people at any level of governance is a decision taken by the elite on behalf of the people who are supposedly more knowledgeable about who becomes their Leader with regards to political representation. The interest of the elite is on capturing state power with the control of societal property as the ultimate aim. The capturing of state resources has clandestinely cause them to always remain in power directly or through a representative of their choice as a puppet regime. At this level, policy implementation regarding who gets what, when and how (Lasswell, 1936) becomes at the whims and caprices of the elite.

Political parties, being the only legal platforms that political leadership recruitment is done in a democracy as practiced in Nigeria, the process of this recruitment largely lacks the ingreience of internal democracy given the litany of litigations court after primary election of political parties.



For example, Peter Obi and Labour party in 2022. Obi emerged as the candidate of the party as which was challenged in court. The court of appeal in Abuja on 8 February 2023 are affirmed as Obi candidacy as presidential candidate of the Labour party.

Litigations arising from party primaries in People Democratic Party (PDP) were also challenged in court. For instance PDP and Oladipo Adebute versus Jimi Adebisi Lawal SC/CV/1347/2022 in Ogun state governorship primary where Jimi Lawal as an aspirant challenged the validity of the primary. Another example was in Kogi state; PDP V. John Ibrahim Uche from the Idah/Igalamela/Ofu federal constituency in suit No. SC/CV/1402/2022 decided by the supreme court on 6 January 2023. Litigations in this regards, demonstrate the lack of legitimacy of the leadership recruitment process as not people oriented but elitist.

This is particularly so as the nomination of a candidate for elections is mid-wived and delivered by the party's hierarchy that is made up of a select few. Thus, who becomes the candidate of the party and eventually wins the general elections is not the choice of the electorate, but that of the elite who to a large extent dictate the formulation and implementation of policy to be carried out by the representative. How then do the citizens participate in the electoral process where they exercise their rights to vote and be voted for in a democratic society? (Ebegbulem 2008; p.165). Thus, here lies the challenge of public policy implemented in Nigeria as the essence of government and the end point of good governance in a democracy. Moreso, in support of the importance of political parties in policy implementation, where ever there are in power, Ijere (2015; p.130) suggest that "Nigeria operates a multiparty system. Being a democracy, at least in name, Nigeria has ruling and opposition parties that articulate and aggregate views on policy matters". Hence, the point of convergence

The Nexus Between Political Leadership Recruitment and Public Policy Implementation

The quality of leadership is largely believed to be directly proportional to the quality of policies that are implemented. A leader with competence garnered from experience and level of academic attainment priorities the welfare needs of the citizens in the policy choices to be implemented as he practically shows commitment. When the leadership lacks competence as one of its pivotal components, it affects administrative coordination negatively as it creates gaps in inter-agency collaboration resulting in the general abysmal performance of government agencies.

As Ijere, (2015 p.121) observes "When a policy option or alternative is decided upon, the implementation phase of the policymaking process begins". Thus, no matter the soundness of a policy at the level of formulation, its legitimacy is seen at the level of implementation. On this note, public policy is largely seen here as the most serious aspect and the core of governance. Given this importance, the qualities of the policymaker must be of great concern to the public and not to be reduced to the consideration of party elite as tacitly practice in Nigeria in recent times.

Policy formulation and implementation may sound simplistic, but very complex and rigorous exercise that requires reasonable level of academic attainment. At the least, a first degree or its equivalent from a recognized university from such an individual. The advancement in human society orchestrated by technology has exacerbated the complexities in policy sciences which Uchendu (2015; p.37) defines as "disciplines whose research activities help to clarify the choices that are made for a global society by its political managers". Policy making in the 21st century is not to address local or internal problems faced by the country only. In line with this view, Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999; p. 53) holds that "the development of international agencies and organizations has led to significant changes in the decision-making structure of world politics. New forms of multilateral and multinational politics have been established involving government, IGOs and a wide variety of transnational pressure groups and International Non-government Organization (INGOs)." The internationalization of nations in the areas of trade, education, military, health and social security etc, have expanded and intensify the scope of policymaking and implementation beyond national boundaries. Hence the intellectual sophistication of the political power wielders giving the increasing global interconnectivity of countries. In fortification of the above, Agbor and Bassey (2015; p.15) citing Yehezkiel Dror (1968; p. xi) maintains;

There is a significant gap between the ways individuals and institutions make policy and the available knowledge on how policies can best be made. This gap between knowledge and practice will widen at an accelerated rate unless some radical changes are made in policy-making methods, in policy making organization, and in the qualifications of policy-makers.

However, the challenge Nigeria faces in recent times with regards to the delivery of good governance is not due to the short supply of good policies, but largely due to the political will of the political managers to implement such policies.

Agbor and Bassey (2015,p.17) went further to state that “The formulation of public policy has been considered less problematic in Nigerian policy landscape unlike the implementation process that defines the translation of theory into practice”. Political will of the political managers to implement policies is influenced by certain indigenous factors, chiefly among them is the factor of clientele politics (clientelism).

Clientele Politics and god-fatherism as a brand of Nigeria Politics

Clientelism has been used as a subterfuge and a strong factor in the recruitment of political leadership in Nigeria democratic space for the past two and a half decades in particular. This has become literally inevitable given the nature and character of Nigeria’s political parties structure. Political parties are structured in an hierarchical order with a group of elite at every level which includes; the ward, local government, state and national levels in-charge of leadership of the party. Thus, in the words of Joseph (1991; p.55) “clientelism is a fundamental element of the socio-political system which affects and often determines the allocation of public goods in Nigeria”. Clientism has been a challenge to the quality of Nigeria’s leadership recruitment process as the elite who is the “god-father” in this case, determines who becomes or occupies what position in government using the party’s structure as represented by the Executive Committee.

Clientelism and godfatherism have remain a strong factor in political leadership recruitment due to the inability of the political power seeker who may have the intellectual capacity to lead, but do not possess economic resources to enable them attain such position in government. Given this scenario, the power seeker enters into a relationship of agreement with those who have the economic resources or where withal to put such a power seeker in office, who in return pays back to the patron “god-father” in cash or in contract award. This scenario produces a leadership that may not be able to deliver on people oriented policies as the patron that sponsored or responsible for the emergence of that leadership, to a large extent holdsway. In a clientele political environment political power seekers do not hope to aspire or acquire something of significance or occupy elective or appointive positions in government unless such a person seeks the protection of a patron (god-father), who are in this particular case the President of the country and the state governors that are in control of government in such states.

As the case may be, whether it involves the nomination of somebody to contest election for a particular office, loans, employment, contract awards, scholarship, etcetera (etc), such a person must be recommended (climb on the back of an “Oga”) in order to be considered irrespective of the capacity to deliver productively. Considering the nascent democracy of Nigeria if comparative analysis is anything to go by, an example of clientele politics is the case of Chief Chris Uba as the patron and Dr. Chris Engie of Anambra State in the 2003 General Elections. The disagreement between Engie (client) as the governor and Uba (patron) saw the client out of office before the end of his tenure as the patron (god-father) was no longer comfortable with the behaviour of the “god-son” Governor who refused to take further directives as issued by the “god-father” on certain policy decisions.

Another graphic example of clientele politics is seen between Lamidi Adedibu as the godfather and Rashidi Ladoja as the godson in Oyo State in the 2003 governorship election. The election was largely believed to have been sponsored by Adedibu seeing Ladoja emerging as the governor. However, Ladoja reneged from the agreement entered with his godfather after his victory in the election as governor. This disagreement resulted in a plethora of crisis across the state ranging from street violence, armed thuggery, arson, impeachment and the eventual dysfunctionality of governmental institutions in the state.

Political godfatherism appears to have become a normalized abnormally in the political lexicon of the Nigerian democratic space. Not limited to the few examples that this study may have captured, Alhaji Olusola Saraki dominated the political space of Kwara State from the second republic (1979-1983) as the godfather to the present fourth republic where he made his son (Bukola Saraki) Governor of the state. The incumbent President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, has practically been in charge and dominated the political space of Lagos State as the godfather where it is believe that he has been responsible for the recruitment of political office holders from 1999 to date. Hence, it is largely believed by political pundits that he singles handedly refused Akinwunmi Dapo Ambode who ruled from 2015-2019 a second term in office as governor.

Most recently too, the minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Nyesom Wike, as the godfather and the Governor of River State as the godson, have been in an irreconcilable political antagonism on who controls the state since the victory of Siminalayi Fubara as the Governor of the State in 2023.

Wike, is believed to have been responsible for the nomination and the victory of Fubara as governor. The refusal of Fubara as the godson from allowing his godfather access to the resources of the state which include appointments and contracts, has seen both the FCT minister and the governor in a perpetual political battle for the soul of the state..

More so, the minister seeing the refusal of the Governor as an affront and disloyalty to him (godfather), caused the state to become ungovernable that culminated in the declaration of a state-of-emergency by the President of the Federal Republic, Ahmed Bola Tinubu in 2025. This declaration saw the governor out of office for a period of six months. Upon the return of the Governor to office following the expiration of the state-of-emergency, they were threats of impeachment from the State House of Assembly by members believed to be loyal to the FCT minister. The political hullabaloo went unabated with the final withdrawal from the second term ambition of the Governor as orchestrated by the FCT minister, whom with utmost vehemence on national television (channels, and AIT, 2025) vowed not to allow the Governor get a second term in office, and his words did not go void.

Given the above scenario, the crux of the matter between godfathers and godson is the refusal of the godfather access to state funds, appointments and control of contracts. Attempt by the godson to allow the godfather access to state resources, public policy implementation becomes private policy implementation defiting the essence of government which is established for public good.

III. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian State as hitherto experience in the fourth republic democratization is inundated with a plethorer of public policy implementation challenges. As observed in the study, these challenges as manifested in the short supply of social amenities as well as social security needs of the citizens, is a function of the faulty political leadership recruitment process. In line with the above, the study periscope the nature of political leadership recruitment process and discovered the malaise it is shrouded in. To graphically understand how leadership recruitment process is a challenge to public policy implementation, the elite theory as captured in the writing of scholars like Jose Otega (1938), Pareto (1939), Moses (1939) and Michel (1949) was brought to the fore. The Elite theory summarily see the society as being divided into two classes. The elite class that is of a select few decide who get what in the society and the masses who are of the majority class and “destined” to be ruled.

The study revealed that political leadership recruitment in a democracy like it is in Nigeria is within the powers of political party’s structures. As observed in the study, the selection of the candidate a party present for election is largely and tacitly done by the elite class of the party. Thus, resulting in clientele politics seen in the paper as a drawback to credible political leadership recruitment process as well as an anathema to public policy implementation as the essence of government and good governance.

Clientel politics is now the order of the day as demonstrated by political actors in what could be described as a “political enterprise” where patrons (godfathers) and clients (godsons) reach a bargain, so to say, before what so ever leadership position is made possible by the godfather. A number of godfatehrism squabbles were discussed in the paper with the conclusion of how such alliances have empirically proved to be “unholy” and not for public good but for the interest of a select few as represented in this particular case by the godfather. In summary, political leadership with regards to public policy formulation and implementation is largely a public concern that has suffered a reasonable deal of obfuscation as a result of the political leadership recruitment process in Nigeria. To address this abnormally as discovered therein, the following recommendations are reached.

- Political leadership recruitment space must be expanded beyond the constitutional entitlement of registered political parties to include the enlistment of independent candidacy in the contest for political office in Nigeria. This is the practice in occident countries (USA, Britain, France, etc) described as bastions of democracy in the world.
- If political office holders come from among the people, they must be involved in the process of their emergence as leaders. Hence, the option A4 method of electing leaders that involves the general electorate from the electoral ward as the smallest units in representative democracy to the national level. In this case it is not only the political party leaders who decides who becomes a leader and as such answerable to them (elite) as it appears to be the practice in recent times in Nigeria.
- The life style of political office holders does not tell of a country that lack the resources for the welfare needs of her citizens as practically is the case in Nigeria. The sudden change to a life of affluence by a political office holder who have lasted just a few months in office, keeps the ordinary Nigerian in perpetual amazement about the change as practically seen in the number of cars and houses own by such an office holder within a period of three or four years in office.



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Given this scenario, Ake (1996), argues that the premium on political office is astronomically high that political competition has turned to a war fare. Given also this warlike posture of political competition, well educated people and intellectual stay aloof from politics. Hence, such premium should be reduced as it will inadvertently reduce godfatherism.

- Qualification for political leadership office should be kept at the level of first degree from a recognized institution in any part of the world across the tiers of representation. Given the technological advancement in the 21st century resulting in the complexities in human relations, a political representative at whatever level should have a fair or a good depth of knowledge on global affairs and act locally.

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