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### **PATRIOTIC LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED STATES AND NIGERIA - INSIGHTS AND LESSONS**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Patriotic leadership is integral to a country's development and is desirable for effective state-society interactions. Such leadership is often characterized by selflessness, legitimacy, dedication to service, and efficient administration of resources, both human and natural. This paper examines the import of patriotic leadership to national development in the America and Nigeria's context. The paper employs a historical and descriptive investigative approach with an element of comparative design. It utilizes relevant data collected from documentary sources, which were analysed qualitatively within the framework of Lucian Pye's modernization theory. From the analysis, it became obvious that America's history abounds with leaders who, in their private and public lives, have worked assiduously to attain national unity, liberty, equality, and civic rights, hence facilitating national development. In contrast, Nigeria lacks patriotic leaders instilled with vision and commitment to genuine national development. Besides, patriotism and commitment to leadership are ingrained in American culture, which are conducive to national development. In contrast, Nigeria has yet to reach such heights in its political history, with leaders often prioritizing ethnic and regional interests over national interests antagonistic to national development. Consequently, the paper recommends, among others, that for Nigeria to match up with its America counterpart, its political leadership class must undergo a total attitudinal reorientation to embrace national interest and commitment to patriotism and national consciousness. The study offers valuable insights for improving political leadership in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for a nationalistic leadership approach to foster development.

**Keywords:** Leadership, national development, national dilemma, national interest, patriotism.

## INTRODUCTION

At first glance, comparing the political issues and governance structures of the United States of America with those of Nigeria might seem futile, especially given the contrast between a developed nation and a developing one. It is possible to assume that the two countries' glaring disparities make any meaningful study impossible. Before dismissing the endeavor, it is pertinent to take cognizance that even comparing ostensibly similar countries can be challenging due to the inherent difficulty of aligning structures, processes, and citizen engagement across different political landscapes.

In contrast, the United States boasts stable democratic institutions and deeply ingrained political processes. A significant majority of its citizens accept and support these structures, resulting in minimal violence stemming from disagreements over the political system's structure, institutional arrangements, or process outcomes. In Nigeria, the democratic institutions are notably unstable and lack legitimacy. The country faces numerous political crises, some severe enough to destabilize the entire polity. Additionally, the ability of Nigerian democratic system to function effectively is hampered by the prevalence and widespread politicisation of ethno-religious disputes (Dode & Ita, 2018, 2019; Ita, 2022). Besides, the Nigerian state is governed by a predatory political class, leading to personal rulership, corruption, and underdevelopment. Many civilian and military leaders prioritize selfish personal goals over broader national interests, fitting them into what Apter (1960) described as 'instrumental' or 'consummatory' leaders.

Plato's ideas and notion of the "Ideal State" provide insight into patriotic leadership. When Plato (1955) theorized the Ideal State and the philosopher king or leader as its central figure, he believed that until philosophers become kings in this world, or until those we currently term kings and rulers genuinely become philosophers, there is no other path to true pleasure, either for society or the individual. He emphasized that when man's highest power combines with the greatest knowledge and temperance, the best laws and constitutions emerge; otherwise, they do not exist. For Plato, an 'Ideal State' under a philosopher was an admirable and commendable heavenly establishment. The philosopher king was the ideal leader because he would be least motivated to exploit power for personal gain. The goal of leadership was everyone's general well-being; thus, it needed skills and credentials just like any other duty (Wolin, 1960). A philosopher would possess the attributes of a leader, such as bravery, honesty, high-mindedness, frankness, chastisement, fairness and the capacity to direct affairs in the best interests of his subjects. Again, he would be above material and physical pleasures, not petty or mean, and free from emotional attachments and financial concerns. Finally, he would be wise and public-spirited. Based on these qualities, a philosopher ruler is tantamount to a patriotic leader.

Within the scope of this paper, patriotic leaders are individuals whose personal examples inspire their fellow citizens toward noble actions that contribute to nation-building and national development. These leaders wholeheartedly embrace and align themselves with their nation's goals and aspirations, primarily centred on unity, cohesion, and the integration of the people into a cohesive political entity with a shared destiny. They actively work towards expanding the nation's power militarily, economically, and culturally, positioning it competitively among other nations. Patriotism, for them, transcends individual interests, prioritizing the nation over personal or sectional concerns. Patriotic leaders are not opportunistic or latecomers to nationalism; rather, from early on in their lives, they prioritize national interests over local ones. Given that every nation encounter challenges, particularly in its formative years, emerging leaders are crucial in addressing these crises. Hence, patriotic leaders play an indispensable role in the prosperity and well-being of their nations, Nigeria inclusive.

Clearly, not everyone has the necessary leadership abilities and qualifications to run an establishment, let alone rule a nation. Furthermore, no nation could anticipate to have infinite supply of outstanding and remarkable leaders along the lines of Charles de Gaulle of France, Winston Churchill of Britain, or Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States. Certainly, too, no society can operate properly with nincompoops, fools or miscreants as its leader (Graebner, 1987). A society, nation, or state without a leader is akin to a ship without a rudder. It is the leader who guides the ship of governance in a state. James Madison (1788, p.337) candidly expressed the importance of leadership and governance in his contention that:

If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.

By this expression, Madison suggested that angels are flawless creatures who require no regulation or oversight. More so, Madison recognized that humans are imperfect, driven by self-interest and ambition, and susceptible to corruption. Furthermore, he justified the need for government while also advocating for constitutional limits on political power.

The above understanding has led to a consensus among many political theorists that while government is essential, it must be subject to constraints and limitations. For instance, Edmund Burke (1975, cited in Curtis, 1977, p.24) glowingly alluded to this fact when he asserted:

Government is a human-created device for meeting human needs. Men have the right to expect that this wisdom will meet their needs. Society demands not only that individuals' desires be submitted, but that men's inclinations be constantly blocked, their wills controlled, and their passions brought under submission. This can only be accomplished by a power independent of themselves, and not in the practice of its role, subject to the will and passions that it is their duty to bridle and conquer. In this view, men's rights include both limitations and liberties. However, because freedoms and constraints change with the periods and circumstances and allow for endless variations, they cannot be fixed by any arbitrary rule; and nothing is more ridiculous than discussing them on that basis (*modern rendition*).

Above passage underscores the value of democratic governance, which is commonly perceived as a system where all individuals have an equal voice in decisions impacting their lives. Ideally, this entails equal participation, to varying degrees, in proposing, developing, and enacting legislation into laws. It also encompasses social, economic, and cultural conditions conducive to the free and equitable exercise of political self-determination. In effect, effective democratic leadership anchored on patriotism is essential for addressing the fundamental needs, concerns, aspirations, and expectations of the populace.

In view of the foregoing, and in comparing patriotic leadership and national development in America and Nigeria, the following questions constitute our problem:

- (i) How does patriotic leadership significantly influence national development in the United States and Nigeria?
- (ii) What leadership behaviors and patterns of the United States and Nigerian leaders have either been conducive to or hindered national development in both countries?
- (iii) What lessons can Nigeria learn from the United States experience with patriotic leadership to address its leadership challenges and foster national development?

Flowing from the problem, this paper aims to investigate the significance of patriotic leadership for national development in America and Nigeria. It also seeks to authenticate the assumption that Nigeria is bereft of patriotic leaders imbued with vision and commitment to genuine national development. In contrast, America's history is replete with leaders who, in their private and public lives, have worked assiduously to attain national unity, liberty, equality, and civic rights, hence facilitating national development. Furthermore, the paper attempts to substantiate American and Nigerian leaders' leadership and behavioral patterns, vis-a-vis personal and national interests and other factors, that have either been conducive or antagonistic to national development in both countries.

In furtherance of the above objectives, the paper analyses leadership and Nigeria's developmental challenges. It also offers insights into America's experience, which Nigerian leaders can use to leverage the nation's abundant assets, both human and natural, for the country's development and citizens' welfare. Central to the paper's argument is that national leaders should not only exhibit patriotism but also be perceived as dedicated citizens consistently committed to the political, economic, and social development of their countries.

This paper contributes significantly to a better theoretical understanding of leadership and its role in driving national development. It offers fresh thoughts and facts to the existing literature on the subject matter. The paper also serves as a guide for political leaders to develop a political culture that supports genuine growth and development, a challenge faced by Nigerian political leadership before and after independence.

## **CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATION**

### **Patriotism**

Patriotism and nationalism have often been used interchangeably by scholars to mean the same thing, whereas both terms entail distinct attachments. Nincic and Ramos (2009) posited that nationalism refers to loyalty to a broad social group sharing common physical traits or symbols, often encompassing the desire for a unified national state. Patriotism, on the other hand, involves attachment to a country, encompassing both the social group and the established norms and institutions forming the foundation of the existing state. Obviously, there is a consensus that patriotism is a strongly felt emotive relationship to one's nationality (Conover & Feldman, 1987) or the level of affection and devotion an individual has for his/her country (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989).

Kateb (2006) conceives patriotism as a willingness to sacrifice for an abstract ideal, while Merry (2009) sees it as a profound emotional bond with one's homeland. This bond may manifest in various ways, potentially leading to ethnocentrism and often fostering a perception of one's homeland as superior to others. While patriotism can evoke strong emotional responses from individuals who celebrate their country's founding principles, anthems, and historical figures, it transcends mere sentiment. It involves

a sense of duty to defend the honor, integrity, and safety of fellow citizens, often guided by reasoned principles. Ultimately, patriotism represents a clear affection for fellow citizens or state, striving for their greatest advantages and power, even if it comes at the expense of others.

## **Leadership**

There are numerous perspectives on leadership, each offering its own interpretation. Generally, leaders translate their beliefs and visions into reality by exerting control and influence over others (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Leadership is thus defined by the actions taken to establish and pursue group goals while maintaining cohesion. As conceptualized by Heywood (2011), leadership is either a behavioral pattern or a personal quality exhibited by individuals seen as leaders. As a behavioral pattern, leadership entails influencing an organized group to plan and coordinate actions toward predetermined objectives. As a personality trait, leadership is characterized by charismatic qualities that allow certain individuals to influence the behaviour of others.

Bass (1990) views leadership as an interaction between group members that often involves restructuring situations and shaping perceptions and expectations. Yukl (2002) expands this definition to include influencing members to recognize and agree on shared goals and strategies and facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve them. Uduigwomen (1997) states leadership is the capacity and aptitude to lead. Being a leader, therefore, cannot be attributed to one's position; rather, one must lead by example, and in this case, leadership is defined as having a multiplier impact on issues such as good governance, peace, tranquility, and the welfare and wellbeing of the populace. Consequently, a person might be regarded as the most successful leader even without a designated title.

Das and Choudhury (1997) approach leadership from a political perspective, focusing on the role of chief executives. In developed countries, chief executives face new challenges, particularly on the international stage, while in developing countries, they are often tasked with addressing endemic issues like poverty and underdevelopment. Effective identification and utilization of leadership are crucial for implementing development plans smoothly and swiftly. In developing countries, political leaders often rally personal followership through populism, positioning themselves as national figures responsible for economic decisions and resource allocation. Therefore, studying leadership in modern political systems often revolves around analysing the roles of chief executives.

## **National Development**

National Development is a complex concept, encompassing a combination of factors that lead to positive and desirable growth within a nation. Raji (1999) conceives national development as progress across three major political, economic, and social dimensions. Politically, national development involves nation-building through the establishment of stable political institutions and processes; economically, it implies increased productivity in both goods and services, leading to economic self-reliance and a high standard of living; and, socially, it entails promoting cultural and religious diversity, resolving conflicts, and enhancing public culture.

For the author, national development is a continuous aspiration that leaders inspire their people to achieve. Success in this endeavor requires the citizenry to perceive tangible achievements by their leaders, fostering hope for a better future. Yet, if the citizens doubt the sincerity and selflessness of their leaders, believing little or nothing has been accomplished, their hope for the future diminishes. National development goals are not fixed; as society progresses, new challenges emerge, making complete

attainment of goals impossible and pushing them into the future. This continuous striving and growth characterize development. Unfortunately, Nigeria is notably deficient in all three dimensions.

Abimbola and Adesote (2012) opined that national development entails improving societal welfare by providing services such as quality education, clean water, infrastructure, and healthcare to citizens, as well as improvements in housing, sound transportation, communication systems, and overall economic prosperity. These conceptions emphasize people's centrality and quality of life in national development, highlighting the positive impact changes in various sectors should have on society.

## **METHOD**

Due to its qualitative nature, the paper adopted the library research method and employed a historical and descriptive investigative approach with an element of comparative design. It utilized relevant data collected from several documentary sources such as books, encyclopedias, peer-reviewed journals, periodicals, newspapers, and other archival records and online materials. Data gathered were selected based on thematic relevance and analyzed using the content analysis method.

## **THEORETICAL DISCOURSE**

This paper is theoretically grounded in modernization theory, as articulated by Lucian Pye. During the 1960s and 1970s, modernization theorists, including Alex Inkeles, David Apter, Gabriel Almond, Karl Deutsch, Lucian Pye, Marion Levy, Myron Weiner, and Seymour Lipset, among others, produced a substantial body of literature on national development, particularly focusing on political development (Gilman, 2003). Particularly, Pye (1971) postulated that real political development occurs when a political system is compelled to address specific problems or crises, such as identity, legitimacy, penetration, participation, integration, and distribution. *Identity crises* are associated with disputes among elite and popular cultures, such as territorial nationalism or divisions that threaten national cohesion. *Legitimacy crises* arise when governing organizations vie with one another for influence or when the general populace rejects the ruler's claim to power. *Participation crises* occur when the ruling class considers the requests or actions of people or organizations trying to get involved in politics as improper. *Penetration crises* involve demands on the ruling class to innovate or adjust institutionally. *Distribution crises* are characterized by ideological, material, and human resource issues and issues with the institutional scenery. The sequence in which these crises are addressed and resolved determines the political system's development trajectory.

A political system's specific sequence of crises influences its capabilities and performances (Bender, 1971). Pye (1971) noted that in England, these crises occurred in a particular order with significant time gaps between each crisis. In contrast, in new African and Asian states, these crises often emerged simultaneously. Handling these crises is easier when they occur sequentially, but becomes more challenging when they arise concurrently or in rapid succession. This perspective suggests that patriotic leadership must adopt a crisis mentality towards national development. Leaders should approach political, economic, and social development as urgent crises requiring immediate attention. This approach distinguishes leaders as heroes, as they emerge during crises with effective solutions. Their actions are driven by the broader national interest, transcending personal and parochial concerns.



Patriotic leaders are integral to a country's historical development. These individuals are physically, mentally, and emotionally strong enough to endure pressure and take decisive decisions during critical moments. These leaders exhibit exceptional qualities and often make significant sacrifices for their nations' survival, independence, territorial integrity, and advancement. Through their dedicated service, they earn the admiration of the populace. In the realm of patriotic leadership, historical figures like Charles de Gaulle of France, George Washington of the United States of America, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kemal Mustafa Ataturk of Turkey, Mao Zedong of China, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Winston Churchill of Britain, Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi of Italy stand out. These leaders demonstrated self-confidence, vision, and genuine patriotism during times of crises, earning the trust and respect of their fellow citizens (Obiolor, 2017). Their leadership was instrumental in guiding their nations through challenging times.

### **PATRIOTIC LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE**

The United States stands out for its clear record regarding its foundation and the explicit roles of its leaders. A prime example is **George Washington**, who, according to Lipset (1998) founded and helped America to develop a national identity and institutionalised a republic and competitive electoral democracy. He fostered a great deal of trust and, more than anybody else alive at the time, he helped to shape the institutions and culture required for a sound, legitimate, and functioning democratic government. The contention is that in the early years of America's history, conditions that could eventually cause the collapse of post-revolutionary administrations, typical of newly formed states, were present, however, the country's competitive electoral democracy and republican institutions survived its first 75 years of existence largely due to Washington's charismatic credibility and legitimacy.

Lipset also noted that, unlike many successful individuals, Washington's ambition was not for power or wealth, but for his reputation and how he was perceived by others. He aspired to be seen as a man of morality and integrity, declining to take a salary as president or commander-in-chief, and eagerly anticipating retirement to his plantation at Mount Vernon. Washington was devoted to a just society and recognized the importance of substantial legitimacy, understanding that he was the key figure in creating and sustaining allegiance to the new American nation. He cultivated respect by constantly acting appropriately, standing by his moral principles, and providing a positive example for others to follow.

Additionally, Washington was instrumental in institutionalising the principle of civilian supremacy over military personnel. During the "Newburgh conspiracy" of 1783, disgruntled members of the Continental Army, upset over the government's failure to pay them, planned to seize the government through a coup d'état. Several politicians, including as Robert Morris and Alexander Hamilton, attempted to capitalise on these complaints to increase support for a more powerful central government headed by the executive branch. Although agreeing with their objective, Washington disapproved of their strategy, cautioning that 'playing with the Army might be perilous'. His skilful defusing of the situation guaranteed the stability of the newly formed nation and preserved civilian authority over the armed forces (History.Com, 2024a).

Finally, Lipset (1998) noted that Washington's leadership charm was crucial. He, undoubtedly, made a substantial contribution to the United States' transition to a system of legal domination by unwaveringly

declining to abuse his position. Washington turned down every proposal to adopt an authoritarian regime or to become president for life. Washington understood the importance of setting an example and stepping down, lest people think he could not do without the 'sweets of office'. Dedicated to the laws and spirit of the country, he retired while in excellent health. His choice to retire set a precedent as the first president of a modern state to transfer power to a validly chosen successor, John Adams. This move was important because it established a tradition of peaceful transition of power. Notably, if Washington had served out his term in office, ensuing presidential successions would have been more acrimonious, with defeated candidates either suing for re-election or trying to hold onto their positions.

Washington's dedication to upholding the rule of law and comprehension of conditions necessary for a stable republic compelled him to retire, embodying a leadership and integrity unparalleled in history. His compelling leadership style had a profound impact on stabilizing the advancement of America's civilization. It is no misnomer that Thomas Jefferson summed him perfectly when he remarked that 'Washington was a model of which the history of the world furnishes no other example' since he had meticulously observed the law throughout his civil and military career.

The next American patriot is **Thomas Jefferson**, one of the America's Founding Fathers, champion of democracy, primary drafter of the Declaration of Independence (1776), and third President of the United States (1801-1809). He was not well-known for his public speaking skills, but his written correspondences were full of eloquence. He wrote more than he spoke for the cause of patriotism in forums such as the Virginia House of Burgesses and the Continental Congress. Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence in 1776 while functioning as a quiet Congressman. He put out much effort to bring its ideals to Virginia, particularly by drafting a legislation that guaranteed freedom of worship, which was endorsed in 1786 (Makokha, 2020). Jefferson implemented significant fiscal reforms, which included slashing the budget, eliminating the whisky tax in the West, and decreasing spending on the Army and Navy. He dispatched a Naval troop to counter the Barbary bandits, that posed a threat American commercial venture in the Mediterranean.

Jefferson prevented the United States from entering the Napoleonic Wars, even in the face of meddling from France and England about the neutral rights of American trade vessels. As a realist, Jefferson acknowledged the inevitability of partisan politics in a representative government. But as an optimist, he was adamant that most Americans had similar objectives, even though their methods for reaching them varied. He held that each person owed their country a duty of service and emphasized the need for honorable leadership that put the country's good ahead of personal benefit. Jefferson believed that patriots would prioritise the nation over party and make the American experiment in self-governance a success. His inauguration address perfectly expressed this sentiment when he stated: 'We are all republicans: we are all federalists' (The White House, 2024).

**Theodore Roosevelt** assumed office at age 42 as the youngest president in American history after President William McKinley was assassinated. Roosevelt gave the presidency fresh vitality and strength, inspiring Congress and the American people to support progressive changes and a strong foreign policy (Milkis, 2024). He greatly raised the prestige and power of the presidency. During the second part of the 1800s, Congress served as the primary arm and centre of government activities; however, the presidency started to gain a measure of power in the late 1880s, but Roosevelt brought the executive branch up to speed and strength. Using his powerful personality and forceful executive action, place the President - rather than Congress or political parties - at the heart of American politics, hence in 1913, he could declare, 'Although I did not seize power, I did significantly expand the usage of the executive power' (The White House, 2024). He disagreed with popular ideas of limited government



and individualism, holding that the President should act as a ‘guardian of the people’ and be able to exercise any and all powers unless expressly forbidden by the law or the Constitution. He maintained that the people should use the government as a catalyst for change (History.Com, 2024b).

Roosevelt’s administration enhanced the legitimacy of the progressive movement by endowing welfare legislation, governmental control, and conservation with the prestige of the White House. He aimed to establish economic opportunity for every American in a just and equal society. Roosevelt pursued a robust foreign policy to further American interests because, for him, America had a duty to the world. He traveled to Latin America, supervising the talks for the Panama Canal and acting to maintain regional peace in Venezuela and Santo Domingo. To balance world power, he negotiated peace accords and attempted to fortify the US Navy against any threats (History.Com, 2024b).

Roosevelt’s presidency also revolutionized presidential style, introducing charisma and a direct appeal to the public. He was the first to be elected president based on his candidature rather than the party, even as he exploited the media to sway public opinion. His ability to influence attitudes, mold issues, and win votes contributed to his popularity. Roosevelt continued promoting his principles even after leaving office (The White House, 2024).

Our last patriot for consideration is **Ronald Wilson Reagan**. After taking office on January 20, 1981 as the 40<sup>th</sup> American president, Reagan manoeuvred Congress to enact laws promoting economic expansion, reducing inflation, boosting employment, and fortifying the country’s security. Even though defence spending resulted in a significant deficit, he pressed for a reduction in taxes and government spending. By 1986, Reagan had completely overhauled the income tax system by eliminating several tax withdrawals and excluding millions of individuals with low earnings from payment. Under his leadership, the United States experienced a return to prosperity at home and the implementation of the ‘Reagan Revolution,’ an innovative program designed to re-energize the people and lessen their dependence on the government. For a certainty, America was going through its longest stretch of peacetime prosperity - one devoid of either a recession or a depression (The White House, 2024).

Reagan pursued a foreign policy of ‘peace through strength’, which included attacking Libya in retaliation for its involvement in the assault on US soldiers in a nightclub in Berlin and declaring war on global terrorism. Also, during the Iran-Iraq conflict, he issued a directive to naval forces in the Persian Gulf to ensure the uninterrupted flow of oil. In line with Reagan Doctrine, he backed anti-Communist efforts in Africa, Asia, and Central America. In general, Reagan’s reign witnessed a return to affluence, which advanced the goal of bringing about peace via strength. As his tenure ended in 1989, Reagan felt he had lived up to his campaign promise to bring back the grand, self-assured roar of American progress, development, and optimism (The White House, 2024).

The foregoing historical records demonstrates that patriotism is ingrained in American life and is a fundamental aspect of its public culture (Ita & Edet, 2018). American statesmen, private and public, have consistently worked to protect American values such as national unity, constitutionalism, liberty, equality, civic rights, and religious freedom (Ikpe, 2004). The revolutionary and Union formation periods were marked by exceptional patriotism, setting a standard for future leaders. Hence, all American presidents exemplify this tradition of patriotism and as well demonstrate unwavering loyalty and dedication to the ‘American Creed’ embodying the essence of American patriotism.

## **PATRIOTIC LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Patriotism in Nigeria takes on a distinct character compared to its American counterpart. In analyzing political leadership and its impact on Nigerian polity, it proved beneficial to review the activities of Nigerian leaders, particularly those who have held significant political executive positions at the national or regional/state level and whose portraits adorn the nation's currency notes. Notable figures in this regard include Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, and Murtala Muhammed.

**Nnamdi Benjamin Azikiwe** is perhaps the only leader who began as a nationalist but ultimately emerged as an Igbo patriot. Serving as the Secretary-General of the Igbo Union, in 1948 he proclaimed that the gods of Africa had selected the Igbo race to lead the African liberation from colonial oppression. This declaration was perceived by other Nigerian leaders as an effort by Azikiwe to portray Igbo as a superior race. When Azikiwe lost the 1952 election to the Central Legislature in the Western Region, he returned to the East and utilized ethnic solidarity to disrupt the regional government led by Professor Eyo Ita, a minority from the Efik-Ibibio tribe (Achebe, 1983). Again, Azikiwe fully supported Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu when he declared the Eastern Region as Republic of Biafra in 1967, resulting in a 30-month civil war in Nigeria.

Moving down the roster of leaders, **Chief Obafemi Jeremiah Oyeniyi Awolowo**, the first premier of the Western Region and founder of the Action Group, emerges prominently as progenitor of divisive ethnic politics in Nigeria. He played a crucial part in the ethnic tensions that precipitated the downfall of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), the first significant nationalist political organization in Nigeria. Awolowo also orchestrated Yoruba solidarity efforts, prompting elected members of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in the Western legislature to defect to the Action Group. He even threatened to secede the Western Region from Nigeria following the British decision to excise Lagos, then the nation's capital, from the Western Region (Crowder, 1978). Awolowo and several other prominent members of the Action Group were convicted and imprisoned for treasonable felony in 1962 (Post and Vickers, 1973).

Another notable leader is **Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa**, a Nigerian politician who served as the first federal Prime Minister (1957-1966) and deputy leader of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC). In addition to supporting reform and Nigerian unity, Balewa stood up for the specific interests of the north. He eminently declared that the North would resume the Usman dan Fodio-led Jihad towards the Atlantic Ocean - a campaign he claimed was halted by British imperialism (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2024). Balewa was not actively involved in any nationalist organizations. The federal government system limited his authority as Nigeria's prime minister, which bestowed greater powers on the regional governments. Evidently, Balewa was incapable of defusing the mounting hostilities between 1964 and 1966, which included army unrest, violent outbursts in the Western Region, and a partial boycott of the 1964 election (Zaccheus Onumba Dibiaezue Memorial Libraries, 2024).

**Alhaji (Sir) Ahmadu Ibrahim Bello**, often known as *Sardauna of Sokoto*, was a conformist Nigerian statesman and a prominent Northern politician. He served as the Northern region's first and only premier from 1954 until his assassination in 1966, during which time he exerted significant influence over national issues. His focus was on the North to achieve northern dominance in Nigerian politics, and for that reason, he became hesitant to embrace independence (Franz, 2009). In contrast to other Nigerian political stakeholders who anticipated a unified nation after gaining independence from the British, Bello considered that his major obligation was to protect the welfare of the North and its people.

In pursuit of his interest, Bello founded the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), a political party characterized by the slogan: “One North, One People, One Destiny” (Ita, 2018; Dickson & Ita, 2022). Although his party gained power at the centre, Bello remained in the North as the Premier, leveraging his influence as the Sarduna of Sokoto to coordinate regional NPC activities. In one of the debates during plenary in the Northern House of Chiefs on March 19, 1965, Sir Ahmadu Bello stated, as cited in Albert (2003, pp.59-60) that:

The Northernization policy does not only apply to clerks, administrative officers, doctors and others. We do not want to go to Chad and meet strangers catching our fish in the water, and taking them away to leave us with nothing. We do not want to go to Sokoto and find a carpenter who is a stranger nailing our house. I do not want to go to the Sabon Gari, Kano, and find strangers making the body of a lorry, or to go the market and see butchers who are not Northerners.

Bello’s advocacy for Northernization policy never aligned with the ideals of national patriotism since his major priority was to bring the Northern region up to the political and economic level of the Eastern and Western regions (Shillington, 2005). This mentality influenced the choice to swap the Southerners and Europeans with Northerners in the region’s government services, a move that was criticised by Southern Nigerian nationalists.

The last to consider is **General Murtala Ramat Muhammed**, a Nigerian Civil War veteran, who later ruled Nigeria from July 30, 1975, until his assassination on February 13, 1976. He led the July 1966 Northern counter-coup troops in toppling General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi military administration that eventually paved the way for Northern dominance in Nigerian politics, against the coup’s original goal of Northern secession (Kurfi, 1988). His national prominence stemmed from the perceived anti-corruption campaign he led after overthrowing General Yakubu Gowon’s government. Muhammad’s impact in Nigerian history is still complex and contentious. The hallmarks of his tenure were harsh repression and economic success, which significantly raised Nigerians’ standard of living. Wide-ranging social and economic reforms were made possible by his extremely flexible dictatorial approach. Throughout his rule, he consistently pursued authoritarianism, federalism, national federalism, pan-Africanism, and highly centralised administration (Peoples Daily, 2023; Suleiman, 2020). Despite being regarded as the most widely acclaimed heroic figure in modern Nigerian history, Muhammad was charged with using dishonest methods to profit himself during the Civil War, which resulted in his being court martialled (Office of the Historian, 1975).

## **THE MILITARY AND PATRIOTIC LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA AND UNITED STATES**

It might be assumed that the military, as a nationalistic institution, comprises patriotic officers and soldiers dedicated to national interest. This is not entirely true of the Nigerian military, which has been heavily politicized since its inception. As far back as 1960, 50 percent of officer enlistment was reserved for the Northern region, leading to an overemphasis on one’s ethnic and regional background for becoming an officer in the Nigerian Army. Even with the current state-equality quota system, the issue persists, since there are more states in some ethnic groups than others, resulting to a higher proportion of officers from those groups (Ikpe, 2004).

The Nigerian military had a significant opportunity to contribute to national development but failed due to the parochial nature of its leadership. The first coup plotters, who had patriotic intentions, did not

seize power, which was unfortunate for Nigeria. Subsequent coup attempts were motivated by ethnic or personal interests. Therefore, it was not the military mentality, as some have argued, that hindered Nigeria's development during military regimes, but the lack of patriotism and effective leadership among military leaders. In contrast, the military in countries like Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan played crucial roles in their development. In Nigeria, the military became involved in corrupt practices, leading to weak command and dispirited effort at national development (Ita, 2024).

During the military regimes, officers often chose political positions over professional military postings due to the opportunities for private wealth accumulation. This trend worsened during the regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. During this period, the term 'settlement' was introduced to replace bribery. Particularly, General Ibrahim Babangida had the potential to enhance political stability and strengthen democracy in Nigeria. Still, he squandered this opportunity by engaging in corrupt practices, brutally suppressing opposition, and in 1983 annulled the most open and free election ever held in Nigeria. Despite this, he is regarded as a hero by some, with many roads and public buildings across the country named after him.

In August 2006, Babangida indicated interest in contesting for Nigeria's presidency in 2007. However, he later pulled out of the race, claiming it would be a 'moral dilemma' to contest against both General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau and Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, considering his close relationship with them, but he had little chance of winning. Again, Babangida formally declared his intention in September 2010 to compete for presidency in the 2011 elections (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2006; 2010). Though he gained some support, he faced strong resistance from Nigerians, particularly those in the Southwest. Once more, on his military cabal's advice, he withdrew his candidature.

In America, military service is sometimes regarded as the pinnacle of patriotism, with the primary objective of ensuring the security of American States. Citizens voluntarily choose to protect their nation by joining in the military out of conviction, not obligation. For example, over the years, members of the All-Volunteer Force have been driven by patriotism, pride, and principle - by a desire to be a part of the American ideal and a deep love of their country. To many veterans, patriotism is also a devotion to the values spelt out in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, as epitomised in the lives and acts of American patriots like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ulysses Grant, John Kennedy, George Bush, Theodore Roosevelt, among others who later became leading American presidents (Parsons, 2024).

As Americans build their lives around a free commitment to military service, they grow into leaders. Indeed, two-thirds of US presidents are war veterans, which has influenced their elevation to the nation's highest executive office (O'Brien, 2021). This crop of leaders passes on their knowledge to future generations of Service Members. Over the years, the American military has recruited and maintained patriotic and talented individuals from all areas of life, resulting in a more professional and effective Joint Force. Today, the United States Armed Forces are the strongest in human history, and they set the worldwide standard for military professionalism.

While there is no doubt that patriotism is a powerful stimulus in the lives of American service personnel and veterans, their definition of patriotism is a little more complex than what can be found in the ordinary dictionary (US Department of Defence, 2023). For many military members, patriotism implies more than simply expressing strong support for one's nation; it entails duty, sacrifice, and the opportunity to serve and protect one's country and its values.

The military, with its foundation in discipline, loyalty, and patriotism, and its centralised command structure, could have effectively controlled every segment of Nigerian society, unlike civilians who are often divided by political party affiliations. If the military had viewed the Nigerian society as its constituency, akin to its counterparts in Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan, it could have united and integrated Nigeria and its people, harnessed the energies of Nigerians for productive purposes and instilled virtues of patriotism and loyalty in the public. But, owing to its sectional, parochial, and ethnic nature, the military was plagued by the same divisive forces that affected civilian politicians. This resulted in unhealthy struggle, akin to that observed in civilian politics, between various ethnic groups for control of the Nigerian state and resource allocation. Given this scenario, one cannot refute, but agree with Achebe's (1983) averment that the problem with Nigeria is basically a failure of leadership and the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibilities and challenge of personal example that are the features of leadership.

The preceding analysis furnishes ample evidence that Nigeria lacks heroic or patriotic leaders comparable to American figures like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ulysses Grant, John Kennedy, George Bush, Theodore Roosevelt, among others. Nigerian leaders, both military and civilian, tend to favour a patrimonial approach to governance over a rational or efficient one. This approach involves the privatization and commercialization of state offices, allowing office-holders to use their positions and resources for personal gains and that of their supporters (Joseph, 1987; Callaghy, 1987). Since state offices represent the quickest path to wealth, political competition for these offices become fierce and often ruthless (Ake, 1985; 1991; Diamond, 1988). This intense competition is a key reason why elections in Nigeria are marked by ruthlessness and ferocity. Also noteworthy is the fact that most Nigerian leaders enter the national political scene as leaders and representatives of their respective ethnic groups.

### **NIGERIA-AMERICA'S LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES: A WAKE-UP CALL FOR NIGERIA**

Patriotic leaders, often seen as charismatic leaders, wield influence because their followers believe in their exceptional qualities. They emerge when their unique abilities align with prevalent societal challenges and issues. Nevertheless, their relevance tends to fade once the problem is resolved, unless they continue to address other ongoing challenges. In American history, leaders have struggled to balance their political interests with the broader national interest, a challenge that persists today.

In Nigeria's colonial period, the primary challenge was decolonization and achieving national independence (Umo-Udo & Ita, 2021). Many of our leaders have been most vocal about their relevance in this area; beyond this stage, they have not demonstrated the skills necessary for nation-building. Instead, they have excelled at mobilizing ethnic and sectional energies, often competing to dominate the country to develop their respective regions. National leaders tended to view national policies through ethnic and regional lenses, leading to decisions that prioritized ethnic and sectional interests over national interest. Their primary focus was on their regions, with national interests often taking a back seat.

Despite their efforts to secure political independence, Nigeria's past national leaders failed to create a unified and integrated nation, which are essential for development (Ita, Ebong & Inimo-Etele, 2019). The struggle for independence, while significant, did not involve a war of independence akin to those



seen in the United States, Zimbabwe, Guinea-Bissau, and Namibia. Some view Nigerian nationalists' commitment to nation-building during this period as lacking depth and sincerity. There was often unhealthy rivalry among leaders, and particularistic interests sometimes superseded nationalist ideals. In contrast, the American Revolution and War of Independence notably strengthened nationalism among American elites and the masses.

As Nigeria contends with the crisis of national development, the current crop of leaders does not inspire. If today's youth are encouraged to emulate their past leaders, it would reinforce sectionalism and regionalism at the expense of national unity. Unfortunately, many current leaders are influenced by the same divisive politics as their predecessors. For example, Northern leaders often claim to emulate the paths of Ahmadu Bello. At the same time, those in the West align themselves with Obafemi Awolowo, while leaders in the East associate themselves with Nnamdi Azikiwe. Nigeria must move beyond the politics of division perpetuated by these celebrated leaders to foster development. With the world moving towards global citizenship, Nigeria still struggles with achieving true national citizenship, as its citizens often feel like strangers outside their own regions due to the divisive politics ingrained in the society by our leaders, past and present (Ita & Bassey, 2022).

Moreover, the challenges confronting Nigerian society in the twenty-first century differ significantly from those of the twentieth century. As other nations progress while Nigeria lags, the developmental gap widens. In the 1960s, Nigeria was more advanced than Malaysia, but today, the situation is reversed, with a significant development gap between the two countries. This gap is not due to a lack of resources but a failure of leadership. Nigeria grapples with acute underdevelopment despite its abundant material and human resources, stressing the absence of effective leadership to harness them for meaningful development. Consequently, many Nigerians yearn for the emergence of patriotic leaders who can address these calamitous circumstances.

Unfortunately, this aspiration faces challenges, particularly in underdeveloped states like Nigeria where the state plays a central role in policy-making. Individuals cannot circumvent the state, underscoring the importance of ensuring that leaders who comprehend the essence of development, are genuinely concerned about poverty and underdevelopment, and possess the capacity to initiate and sustain development are elected into power. These criteria should serve as the yardstick for evaluating merit and guiding the electorate in selecting their leaders.

While Nigeria previously fought against colonial domination to secure political independence, the current political landscape is marred by instability and unconsolidated democracy. Addressing these quagmires requires leaders who are willing to confront various irregularities in the political system, including ethnicity, electoral fraud, lawlessness, injustice, corrupt practices, and disrespect for the Constitution and other statutes. Nigeria urgently needs leaders who have the courage to speak out against these political maladies and take decisive actions to rectify them.

In Nigeria, the urgency for patriotic leadership is most acutely felt in the economic realm. The challenge lies in combating foreign dominance and dependency, necessitating the rise of economic nationalists and patriots. Nigeria requires individuals committed to developing indigenous technologies and utilizing them to manufacture goods and services for the nation's and its citizens' benefit. We need entrepreneurs aspiring to emulate the success of major manufacturers in America, Asia and Europe. Rather than settling for conventional business practices like agency distribution and trading, we need visionary industrialists whose operations are rooted in local technological and raw material resources.



Economic nationalists are essential for re-orienting the country towards internal economic production and self-sufficiency.

These economic nationalists should instil a spirit of healthy competition with foreign firms, surpassing them in productivity and curbing their economic dominance. By assuming such roles, they would emerge as the true heroes of Nigeria, exerting considerable influence in the political sphere to dismantle the hostile economic environments inhibiting domestic production. Unfortunately, the scarcity of such individuals in Nigeria today undermines their potential impact on the nation's trajectory. Instead, a collusion between political and economic elites and foreign business interests persists, resulting in the exploitation of Nigerians.

While past leaders may have played a significant role during the nation's formative years, their legacy is marred by critical errors that should serve as cautionary tales for future generations. They often prioritized ethnic and regional interests over the collective welfare of the nation, perpetuating a cycle of divisive politics that hindered Nigeria's progress. Continuing to uphold these leaders as sources of inspiration risks perpetuating the mistakes that have impeded the nation's development.

As outlined in the theoretical discourse, at the core of Nigeria's leadership challenge are the crises of identity, legitimacy, penetration, participation, integration, and distribution, which manifest in the declining capacity of the state to cope with a range of internal political and social upheavals. Identity crisis in Nigerians arises from state of origin and deep divisions among major ethnic groups, such as Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. A lack of shared value makes individuals identify with their ethnic inclination before identifying as Nigerian, leading to ethnic solidarity, rivalry, and competition. Participation and legitimacy crises manifest in how electoral competition is played at a zero-sum level, leading to controversies and allegations of political corruption. These include rigging, distortion, lack of discipline, and excessive monetization of politics. More so, penetration, integration, and distribution crises are visible in terms of political violence and instability, resulting in various issues such as ethnic and religious crises, domestic terrorism (Boko Haram, kidnappings, and banditry), civil disobedience, and political disturbances.

Moreover, Nigeria's challenge has evolved beyond mere political independence to encompass economic self-reliance in a globalized world. The nation urgently requires new leaders equipped with the spiritual, mental, and intellectual fortitude to tackle these contemporary challenges. Unlike their predecessors, these leaders must prioritize economic independence and strive to achieve tangible results rather than merely assuming positions of authority for symbolic purposes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper undertook a comparative exploration between United States of America and Nigeria with a view to ascertaining the significance and contributions of patriotic leadership to national development. It also sought to underscore the extent of commitment to leadership and the behavioral patterns of the American and Nigerian leader's vis-a-vis the overall development of their nations. Pursuing leadership has undoubtedly always been a part of human history, and this is especially true as it pertains to the issue of national development. Consequently, it should be stressed that a nation's ability to succeed or fail depends on the degree of patriotism its leaders display. This, therefore, emphasizes the necessity for capable and patriotic leadership in any society. Such leadership must be in the hands of individuals

Plato described as ‘philosopher rulers’ - capable, knowledgeable, moral, and enlightened for the society’s overall development.

From the comparative analysis, it is obvious that patriotism and commitment to leadership are ingrained in American culture, with its leaders’ exhibiting selflessness, dedication to service, and effective management of both human and material resources conducive to national development. In contrast, Nigeria has not yet reached such heights in its political history, with leaders often prioritizing ethnic and regional interests over national interest - antagonistic to national development. Again, Nigerian leaders often fall short of exhibiting a willingness or capacity to set a personal example that other leaders would be proud to follow - the quality that distinguishes great leadership. It is hardly surprising that Nigeria cannot attain national development with leaders of this kind.

To attain significant national progress, the political leadership class in Nigeria has to shift its mindset completely. In contrast to local and regional interests, leadership duties and responsibilities must be people-centered and national in scope. The country must resist giving in to those who steal money to satisfy their own desires. At all times, national interest and patriotism ought to come first. It goes without saying that patriotic and capable leadership is essential to realizing these potentials for national growth.

As contended by Dode & Ita (2019), the country requires competent and dedicated leadership for Nigeria to attain and maintain national unity, nation-building, and progress. We require heroic leadership rather than just ordinary leadership because the nation’s problems now more than ever call for the skills and inspirational rhetoric of an extraordinary person or people to design and carry out long-term solutions for issues like national integration and other related issues.

In summation, this paper espouses the view that Nigeria may be liberated from the irritating problem of development with the aid of patriotic leadership. Thus, for Nigeria to measure up with the United States and successfully navigate its challenges of leadership and development, individuals who will bear the brunt of leadership in the future must have a complete understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and duties. Additionally, they need to be aware of and equipped to handle the pressures of leadership in Nigeria as a growing country. This would undoubtedly significantly enhance the quality of leadership and promote national development in the country.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATIONS**

Drawing on the analysis and findings of this paper, the following suggestions are made to assist Nigeria in overcoming the challenges of patriotic leadership and national development and possibly measure up with her America’s counterpart. Nigerian leaders should uphold the rule of law, patriotism and national consciousness to effectively identify and put national interests above their personal and ethnic interests. Regardless of their racial or religious orientations, Nigerian leaders must regard themselves as the people’s servants, not their masters, and steer them along national development objectives. To be seen as good role models for future leaders, Nigerian leaders must demonstrate a willingness to take on responsibility, meet challenges head-on, and lead by example. More than ever, the country needs dynamic, pragmatic, courageous, and purposeful leadership with integrity and genuine patriotism to move the country forward. As a necessary condition for promoting national development, the tasks and responsibilities of the government must be carried out justly and fairly for the benefit of the citizenry. Appointing people into leadership or governance positions should be based on fundamental criteria such

as proven leadership qualities, competence, experience, performance, accountability, and integrity. There is a need for the country to diversify its economy and explore other economic activities to generate employment and foster economic growth and development.

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