

# Leadership crisis and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: A discourse using Awolowo's political philosophy

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**Abstract** In Nigeria, poor leadership has been a major barrier to the country's progress and survival. The political class's reckless pursuit of power has made democracy's journey more difficult over the past twenty years. This study uses Awolowo's political philosophy to explore the relationship between Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation and Leadership Crisis. In this context, the modernization theory was used as a foundation. Nigeria has been shown to have shortcomings in three main areas: security of property and life, descriptive analysis, and data generated from secondary sources. These areas include advancing the rule of law and offering inspirational guidance. The study concludes that a nation's ability to survive and develop depends on a number of key factors, including the rule of law, the management of plurality, accountability, peace and security, tolerance of opposition, and equality. The study's recommendations for improving good governance are based on its findings, which suggest that fundamental governance should support self-participation, communal services, motivation, and responsiveness to public needs.

## Introduction

Philosophers are the society's mirror, using their glass to examine and evaluate many human issues objectively and then provide a possible solution. Awolowo's political theory on the practice of good governance provides guidance to all legitimate democratic leaders who are in positions of power with the intention of serving mankind and improving the lives of their people. Nigeria has had multiple cycles of democratic and authoritarian government since gaining independence in 1960. During the post-colonial era, the military ruled for a total of 29 years. When General Ibrahim Babangida canceled transitional elections for a civilian president in 1993, an unsuccessful Third Republic came to an end. President Olusegun Obasanjo led the Fourth Republic that was proclaimed after new elections in 1999. The Nigerian people welcomed this most recent regime shift with a fervor that frequently bordered on joy. Many people expressed expectations

for a “democracy dividend” that would reduce government wrongdoing, restore political liberties, include marginalized groups, and stimulate the economy (Lawal et al., 2012).

But great hopes were short-lived, and widespread disappointment emerged. There has been a great deal of disagreement in politics regarding the division of authorities, the scope of rights, and, most importantly, distributive tensions. Thousands of people were killed nationwide by acts of communal violence, whether related to disagreements over land ownership in the Middle Belt or oil profits in the Niger Delta. Many Nigerians were also uneasy due to the pervasive insecurity, which also raised criticism of the government’s inability to control the conflict (Lawal et al., 2012). It is reasonable to say that the core causes of Nigeria’s underdevelopment issues are poor governance practices. In Nigeria, underdevelopment is mostly caused by bad administration (Ibrahim and Cheri, 2013; Abdulyakeen, 2021).

Sadly, despite years of protests and grousing, poor leadership performance has persisted, according to Odekunle (2007). We have allowed political misfits to lead us, thereby consenting to our own progressive ruin. It’s unsurprising that the majority of people failed to reap the much-anticipated benefits of democracy while the ruling class continued to avoid taking responsibility for their actions.

Furthermore, according to Odekunle (2007) and Nwekeaku (2014), the majority of Nigeria’s current challenges, particularly those related to development, are the result of our past and present leaders’ harsh actions. Our leaders have not been at their best when it comes to accountability, transparency, and service delivery; after all, Nigerians’ hopes and dreams of a better future have long since been dashed, and the country still lacks the governance elements that will make it the envy of many. Nigeria has struggled with leadership ever since gaining independence, which is worsening the country’s political situation. Very few, if any, of the leaders contribute to the nation’s progress; instead, their policies are frequently poorly thought out and implemented. The underdevelopment and widespread misery of Nigerians, who have previously experienced colonial exploitation at the hands of their colonial masters and neocolonial degradation at the hands of their post-independence leadership, have been greatly exacerbated by bad administration.

The quotes from Nwekeaku (2014), if anything, simply serve to highlight how applicable the Awolowo’s political and governance ideology is to Nigeria today. Therefore, it must be carefully researched.

Awolowo is one person who was worried about the state of good governance and leadership in Nigeria. Indeed, a 1999 report by awake correspondent on the collapsing values in our society embodies a long-standing belief of his. As a statesman, he emphasized that education and strong leadership are the keys to achieving a high standard of living for all state citizens. Awolowo also shares the same views as to what is necessary for human society to run well: stable families, robust labor forces, a reliable government, honorable law enforcement, and law going citizenry. Nonetheless, leaders who are able to develop both spiritual profundity and mental acuity are the only ones who can establish a reliable government. These are leaders who have overcome the “tyranny of the flesh,” as Awolowo (1968) referred to it, by rising above corruption and selfishness as well as base desires. Therefore, Awolowo believed that it is the duty of the government to provide

the circumstances necessary for residents of the state to have access to jobs, adequate health care, and education. In other words, the claim is that the state has a duty to offer social security to its people. People turn to illegal activity when the government fails to fulfill its obligations to the people. Awolowo created and carried out initiatives that demonstrated his love, generosity, and selflessness to the people he ruled over. No one could quickly forget Awolowo's love for the people who benefited from his free education policy, which began in 1955; his scholarship program; his reformed health program; his industrialization program; his promotion of agriculture (particularly the establishment of plantations for farmers); and his increased salary and emoluments for workers (earning 5 shillings, when their counterparts, in the other two regions, were earning 2 shillings and 6 pence). His catchphrase, "LIFE MORE ABUNDANT; FREEDOM FOR ALL" (Awolowo, 1981a:196), along with the actions that follow, may be seen as a subtly revolutionary approach to enact democratic socialism, but his insistence on eschewing the sanctimoniousness that is frequently connected to this ideology raises serious concerns about his readiness for democratic socialism. This study aims to investigate how Awolowo political philosophy may be applied to address Nigeria's leadership dilemma in a more practical manner.

Nigeria would have made progress toward genuine nationhood and integration had it not been bound by the shackles of underdevelopment after gaining independence nearly sixty years ago. But not quite so much in Nigeria, where independence has, more than anything else, meant the opening of the country's Pandora's Box, resulting in political unrest, economic stagnation, and – more pitifully a growing sense of apathy and distrust among the people. Why, sixty years after gaining independence, has Nigeria not been able to govern itself successfully, or at least not appeared to do so, with three disastrous republics interspersed with several military takeovers and counter take overs? Novelist Chinua Achebe summed up Nigeria's problems in one word: leadership. He pointed out that our founding fathers' lack of intellectual rigor in politics was a major problem (Awolowo). History does, in fact, show that whether a leader comes during the military or the civilian age and transforms lives for the better or worse, it truly does not matter. Nigerians' strong ethnic and religious fanaticism is one of the main causes of the country's leadership dilemma, according to Yeruna (1988), who also notes that conditions in society create leaders rather than them emerging out of thin air. The lack of a clear leadership structure among such minorities, whether in the north or the south, does not imply that the larger tribal blocs voluntarily support their dominance. Awolowo would have been spot on, in my opinion, if he had predicted that injustice and its attendant bad tendencies would persist as long as capitalism endures, rather than capitalism per se. This is especially true given the numerous instances of lawlessness that exist in Nigeria today. The paper specifically aims to:

1. Analyze Awolowo's political ideology in light of Nigeria's Democratic consolidation.
2. Investigate the reasons behind Nigeria's lack of progress despite all efforts to reform the nation.
3. Argue that Nigeria's state's much-discussed "post-colonial" character is a barrier to the consolidation of democracy.
4. Suggest legislative actions that ought to be taken in order to give our democracy a stronger development-oriented focus.

## Defining political philosophy

Any intellectual endeavor needs to define its concepts in order to place the discourse in context, “delineate its scope, and perhaps teleguide the reader” (Corma and Rehner, 1968). There are very few academic subjects that elicit as much anxiety as philosophy. The term philosophy derives its name from the desire of wisdom. Philosophy is both revolutionary and essential to a fulfilling life. It all began with a proposition made public by Socrates, the father of moral philosophy, which holds that while thoughtful consideration of significant matters disturbs, it also comforts. As Aristotle stated more than 2,000 years ago, philosophy starts with awe at the wonders and mysteries of the universe. It culminates in a life lived with ardent moral and intellectual integrity. Philosophy starts in amazement in the search of wisdom and truth.

Pojman (1993) defined philosophy as the contemplation or study of the most significant issues facing humanity with the goal of advancing enlightenment, comprehension, and a holistic perspective. Its operations of concept clarification, analysis, and argument construction as potential responses to these age-old issues draw on reason, sense perception, imagination, and intuition. Argumentation is the cornerstone of the philosophical approach. The main responsibility of philosophers is to analyze and develop arguments, however they also clarify concepts and examine, evaluate, and test claims and beliefs (Projman, 1993). In support of this viewpoint, Azenabor (2002) states that argument is a method common to philosophy and that philosophy involves reflections, arguments, rationalities, and critical assessments. According to Wiredu (1989), without initiative, justifications, and explanations, philosophy does not exist in a strict sense.

Argument analysis and construction are not done by philosophers for their own sake. The goal of a philosopher is to present a comprehensive understanding of the problem under study. Philosophy’s critical, all-encompassing, and revolutionary qualities enable it to accomplish this. This means that philosophy typically challenges the majority as the latter is frequently the result of prior biases or philosophical conflicts. A deeper truth or better piece of evidence frequently challenges the status quo and compels us to reevaluate or reject certain parts of our ideas.

## Democracy

In order to have a deeper comprehension of the research, we shall define terms like democracy, governance, and social contract. Democracy has gained popularity in today’s world and is discussed in many modern discourses. These days, as people fight for freedom and a better life, it is a word that strikes a chord with them and speaks naturally.

Scholars cannot agree upon a precise definition of democracy. Democracy was described as the governance of the people, for the people by the Athenians of antiquity. This merely indicates that individuals in government are willingly appointed to work the populace without facing prejudice due to their social standing. The aforementioned perspective was held by Euripides, a Greek philosopher who lived long before Plato. He defined a democratic society as one that is run by the representatives of the people and for the many who are born without property or status. (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). Another Greek philosopher, Plato, shared a similar perspective on democracy.

In his book *The Republic*, he described a democratic state as one headed by philosopher kings who live together in barracks, which are modern parlours, and formulate policies for the welfare of the populace as a whole. The philosopher kings neither marry nor own private property. But when Plato defined democracy as the rule of the people, where the law is supreme and both the ruler and the subjects are subject to it, in his second and third volumes, the *Statesman* and the *Laws*, he changed his original definition.

In the Nigerian context of democracy and sustainable national development, this is illuminating. This is due to an apparent Nigerian ideology that holds that majority rule translates to democracy. Nonetheless, a fundamental tenet of democracy is that the well-being of its constituents must be ensured. However, studies conducted in Nigeria (Jega et al., 2002) have shown that democracy in that country disregards the well-being of its people. Therefore, it will be challenging to sell any form of governance as democracy if it cannot ensure the well-being of its constituents. A more appropriate term for such a regime would be ceremonial democracy. Nonetheless, it seems as though the foundations of African democracy clearly demonstrate the characteristics of democratic capitalism, also referred to as capitalist democracy. In the context of this research, democracy is defined as a form of government established by the people that respects the principles of the social contract between the state and the people, guarantees equal opportunity and resource distribution to all of its citizens, and operates under the rule of law.

## Consolidation process

Democratic consolidation cannot be conceptualized in a way that is widely agreed upon. Scholars differ in how they conceptualize it. Adam Przeworski contends that rather than any widespread agreement on democratic institutions, democratic thinking is predicated more on economic progress. He contends that there is no such thing as consolidation based on this premise (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cimonji, 1996).

Andreas Schedler maintains that consolidation is a real phenomenon, which sets him apart from Przeworski. According to Schedler (1998), democratic consolidation is the process of creating the institutions required to advance a government beyond simple elections and toward a contemporary liberal democracy. Thus, consolidation is more commonly understood according to Linz and Stepan's definition. According to Linz and Stepan (1978), democratic consolidation is the result of a process in which a sizable majority of the public agrees that democracy is the ideal form of government and in which governmental and non-governmental actors cooperate to resolve disputes in accordance with democratic norms.

When examining African democracies, this idea of a consolidated democracy is helpful. Elections and democratic institutions exist in Africa, but democracy itself often does not. In Africa, elections lack legitimacy as fair processes; instead, they are merely a means of reusing public resources to support corrupt political figures who threaten opponents, amass fortunes, and cling to power against popular will. The issue lies in the fact that African democratic elections and advancements, such as those in Cote d'Voir, Tunisia, Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe,

and Nigeria, have never produced democratic stability but have instead been beset by political instability, violence following elections, the rise of dangerous militant groups, and political protests or revolutions.

The practice of democracy has resulted in the rise of a small class of political elites who are more concerned with actualizing their own self-interests than with advancing democracy. Government representatives impose unjustifiable, wasteful initiatives, suppress dissenting opinions, and undermine individual interests through harsh economic measures. As a result, there is widespread poverty and corruption. This weakens democracy and causes citizens to lose faith in it as the best form of social governance, which in turn stalls the development of democracy in Africa.

### Leadership crisis in Nigeria

Concerns today about good governance are mostly a result of the general realization that many governments, particularly those in Africa, have manifestly failed to provide their constituents with the better life they so desperately desire. The discontent among Nigerians with the current state of affairs can be directly attributed to the loud calls for the polity and public policy to be redirected toward goals that could help improve the standard of living for the populace in all its aspects. This situation, demonstrated by the stresses and strains the Nigerian political system has experienced over the years, merely serves to highlight a few of the clearly noticeable issues with the way the country's political system and its procedures are run, including the state of the institutions, structures, and procedures in place to support and oversee efficient governance.

According to Lawan (2010), Oshiomole (2010), and Nwekeaki (2014), the return to democracy was met with a great deal of hope and expectations from the populace, which is understandable. But what the people have after 20 years of democracy is a ruling class that is domineering, stealing mandates, and crushing hopes. In reality, the only distinction between the military administration that the democratic government overthrew and the one that came before it was that the former was installed through a military coup, while the latter was installed through an electoral fraud. With confidence, one can argue against the Nigerian state, which theoretically serves all people but in practice only serves a few group of wealthy people. This supports the Marxian theory of the state, which holds that it did not develop as a result of social compact or consent. Accordingly, it is perceived as a tool of exploitation and class or ethnic dominance (Okaneme, 2010; Ademola, 2011; Saliu, 2012). Thus, the interests of those (class, ethnic, or religious group) in control of the state are prioritized over those who do not hold political authority.

According to a different analytical viewpoint (Saliu, 2012; Achmuga et al., 2013; Ibrahim and Cheri, 2013), Nigerian governance has, regrettably, performed poorly since the country's independence in 1960. The majority of our officials support things like military control, corruption, nepotism, regionalism, and a lack of commitment to democratic ideals. Bad governance is the result. As a result, citizens frequently turn to violence to either draw the attention of the government or to handle problems in their communities in their own unique way because they believe

that the government will not solve their problems for them. To better comprehend and evaluate Nigeria's democratic path to date, discussions must continue in order to foster informed discourses. A thoughtful contribution to the current discussions on good governance is the study "Awolowo Political Ideas as a Panacea to Governance Crisis in Nigeria."

## **Obafemi Awolowo (1909–1987)**

Awolowo was raised in Ikenne as the son of a farmer and received legal training. His political career began in the 1940s, and in 1951 he founded the Action Group (AG). From 1954 until 1959, when he was elected as the Federal House of Representatives opposition leader, he served as Western Nigeria's premier. He was a staunch supporter of federalism who was detained in 1962 on suspicion of trying to overturn the government. General Yakubu Gowon later set him free and appointed him as the Federal Commissioner for Finance (1976–71). He resigned in protest as a result of the delay in the implementation of civilian government. In 1979, he entered the presidential race but was unsuccessful. He passed away in 1987.

## **Awolowo's contribution to African political thought**

He actively participated in the pan-Africanist movement, which advocated for African unity and freedom. In 1945, he had the honor of attending the Pan-African Congress in Manchester, United Kingdom. He supported the federalism movement in Nigeria and became a vocal nationalist who demanded both African and Nigerian independence. He saw the British Empire as a representation of brutal mass exploitation by a wealthy and powerful minority, as well as oppressive dictatorship. He was, in fact, a strong advocate for of African liberation and independence from colonial rule.

## **One indivisible Nigeria with a constitution**

The majority of Nigerians currently hold to Awolowo's concept, which has persisted over time and is summarized as follows: "Let there be one Nigeria, an indivisible entity." He had such a strong belief in Nigeria that he dedicated his memoirs to "A new and free Nigeria where individual freedom and more abundant life are guaranteed to all her citizens," rather than to his beloved wife. Even though he believed that Nigeria was an artificial territory created by the British, he did not advocate for the country to fall apart. He thought that political leaders should be dedicated to preserving the nation's unity.

Another school of thought holds that a republican constitution is necessary for Awolowo. States ought to be federating, semi-autonomous entities with their local governments. He wrote extensively about his thoughts on the concept of federalism and its application. He identified democracy as the foundation of federalism. Those who claimed he desired to impose his willful takeover of government should be reminded of his conviction that a tyrannical or dictatorial government can only be upheld by the use of force and various forms of repression and oppression directed at those who oppose or criticize the tyrant or dictator.



In the end, this demonstrated his conviction that the business of government is to serve people. He was adamant that funds be allocated toward ending poverty. He opposed costly military and defense spending because he believed it was inefficient to divert resources intended for economic development to the military. His support was for the creation of an army to defend the nation and its borders, not to uphold an oppressive system of government. He issued a dire warning: “Any government that does not enjoy the goodwill of the people should resign; it must not use the people’s money to enslave and starve the people” (Awolowo, 1968).

## Progress and development

He played a key role in the Western Region’s 1955 implementation of free universal primary education, which emphasized the importance of education for all inhabitants. The nation’s resources must be actively developed by its educated populace. He maintained that in order for Nigeria to advance, the government must make use of the country’s resources to provide for the needs of the populace through the creation of jobs, access to education, and the creation of conditions that allow people to have access to the necessities of life, which include food, clothing, housing, and health. He made a connection between a set of economic goals and the overarching principles of state aims, saying that a state is less vulnerable to the threat of internal instability and more capable of deterring external aggression if it is wealthier and its wealth is more equally and justly distributed.

The goals outlined in his work were based on welfare politics. His personal accounts of escaping poverty found their way into the initiative to enable others to follow suit. He firmly believed that no one should live in poverty, and he was happiest when he was creating and carrying out anti-poverty measures. According to him, poverty is man-made and the natural result of an unjust and cruel social structure where a powerful, self-centered, and brutal minority exploits and deprives the vast majority of people on both a political and economic level. According to Olufemi (2013), the state alone possesses the means and capacity to eradicate poverty and guarantee equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their parents’ income.

## Welfare politics

Awolowo’s recommendation for the application of welfare politics is the most crucial lesson to learn from his writings. This is a proposal for critical ideas that political leadership needs to adopt. He maintained that ethics – a morality of more prudent resource use, devoid of corruption, and compassion for others – must underpin leadership. Leadership cannot be founded on the use of force or the repression of different political ideologies; instead, it must respect human rights and the law. Politics, in his words, is about vision, the politics of articulating ideas and goals, the politics of putting those goals forward, and the politics of carrying them out. It is unrealistic to expect people to accept goals that are at odds with their personal ambitions. They won’t tolerate leaders who act in contradiction to their words or who approve project budgets merely to take funds from the public coffers and deposit them in their own personal accounts. Service is the core of leadership; neither more nor less. Wesley College’s motto, “Bi Eniti Nse Iranse,” which is derived from Luke 22:27, is spot on.



Public service now seems to be about personal growth and acquisition, where the servant becomes the leader. The state becomes more imperialist, turning people into subjects and turning resources into private property. The game of politics is about outwitting rivals to gain more access to the benefits of office. Politics is about controlling people and resources. Power, not public service, yields money, fame, and admiration in that setting.

The same words, spoken more than sixty years ago, would still hold true if he were still with us: “Our greatness and happiness as a people will be measured by the amount of patriotism, un-stinting effort, and wisdom which we apply to the exploitation of our vast resources, and of the just and equitable distribution of the results of such exploitation” (Awolowo, 1968).

## Education, leadership, and good governance

When it comes to politics, leadership refers to the capacity to persuade a group of individuals to pursue their objectives (Robbins and Judge 2007). It demonstrates a leader’s capacity to align his goals with the circumstances of his surroundings. The quote from Awolowo about self-control reads, “I will subject myself to severe self-discipline more than ever before.” He believed that men who are masters of themselves are the only ones who can easily master others. Consequently, I will constantly maintain rigorous control over my ideas, words, and behavior (Awolowo, 1985).

Awolowo makes it very evident that a leader needs to be able to exercise self-control. According to Aboluwodi (2012), he views the preservation of a just and peaceful social order that offers a variety of options, including liberty, justice, fairness, high-quality education, and legal equality, as the true measure of effective governance. The pursuit of good governance is becoming a worldwide concern, not only in Nigeria. He believes that a leader’s lack of mental development leads to corruption. In his study, he also paints a picture of a corrupt mind that lacks self-control and is driven by earthly cravings. People with this kind of thinking have a hard time controlling their hunger. As a result, their instinct and desires carry them away. In his attempts to explain how some people are occasionally enslaved by their instincts and emotions, Awolowo references to this subject. In his quotation, he said, “Any educational system that does not assist a man in having a sound and healthy body, an alert mind, and balanced and disciplined instinctive urges is both misconceived and dangerous” (Awolowo 1960).

Awolowo blames the leaders for the underdevelopment of the nation and does not hesitate to attribute the structural decay in Nigeria to the current economic system, namely capitalism. He thinks that those in power are leaders who don’t really understand what is best for Nigeria. Awolowo acknowledges that the lack of education is the root of the issue, but he continues to believe that Nigeria’s issues stem from the leaders’ inability to let reason – that is, critical thinking – be a part of their decisions. He connects reasonable behavior with sound governance.

Awolowo approaches Nigeria’s political development from the standpoint of social transformation, namely;

1. The removal of ignorance and illiteracy among the citizens.
2. The education of the leaders.

According to Awolowo, the main obstacle to achieving excellent government is ignorance and illiteracy, which frequently shows up in two main areas. These are in the domains of uneducated voters who support election tampering and inept leaders who support dishonest members of the public. He argues that education is necessary to produce an informed voter in society; as he succinctly states, “I have often emphasized that an informed populace is essential to the successful operation of democracy.” He argues that while it might not be enough for excellent governance, strong leadership is a prerequisite for administrative competence. He adds that one of the advantages of sound administration is that leadership entails the capacity to convert ideals (love, justice, and fairness) into reality. At this point, he makes the decision to draw the conclusion that a leader must be extremely disciplined and educated in order to befit leading his or her nation.

Adherence to accountability, openness, the rule of law, and human rights policy are characteristics of good governance. Love, social justice, equity, and fairness are also aspects of it.

He argues that a man is vulnerable to exploitation if his body develops but his mind and intellect do not. This group includes those who commit acts of terrorism (like Boko Haram) for religious reasons. Awolowo (1968) asserted that a corrupt, greedy, and wicked government will eventually succumb to the overwhelming demand and clamor from the public for a welfare system that ensures equal benefits for all. There will eventually be a conflict between the exploiters’ and the victims’ desires and wills. These conflicts of interest will then compel the universal consciousness to act, and an event will transpire that will result in the overthrow or drastic alteration of the avaricious and malevolent regime (Awolowo, 1968).

Awolowo sees Africa as a whole, not just Nigeria. After receiving the appropriate education, leaders need to have grown mentally, physically, and intellectually so they can think critically and rationally enough to know how their actions affect other people. Awolowo appears to be referring to General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd) of Nigeria, who lost an election in 2011 but permitted his supporters to incite his fellow countrymen against the same citizens he had promised to serve, as well as Professor Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast, who lost elections but insists on holding onto his position. People such as these are outside the purview of Awolowo’s leadership style. The Gambia’s Yahyah Jammeh made similar remarks during the most recent general elections. Therefore, Awolowo contends that in order for successful governance to exist in Africa, individuals who aspire to leadership positions must be guided by logic rather than by unfavorable emotions. Leaders can only comprehend that meeting the needs of all citizens is the primary focus of any government in this regard. He has “a highly analytical mind, a compelling vision, and terrific ideas,” according to Robbins and Judge (Robbins and Judge, 2007).

Awolowo introduces two forms of education:

1. Education for the masses.
2. Education for the leaders.

His main goal for the general public is to educate people so they can overcome the issues of superstition, ignorance, and illiteracy. Higher education is to be given to the leaders in order to liberate their minds from the shackles of instinct. According to Akinjide Aboluwodi (2012),

Awolowo introduced universal primary education in Western Nigeria based on this idea. According to Simpson (2006), “the provision of universal education does not necessarily imply that people will be educated,” which is a gap in Awolowo’s thinking that I agree with.

## Assessment of Obafemi Awolowo’s political philosophy vis-à-vis contemporary issues for democratic consolidation in Nigeria: A discourse

Nigeria has had multiple cycles of democratic and authoritarian government since gaining independence in 1960. During the post-colonial era, the military ruled for a total of 29 years. When General Ibrahim Babangida canceled transitional elections for a civilian president in 1993, an unsuccessful Third Republic came to an end. President Olusegun Obasanjo led the Fourth Republic that was proclaimed after new elections in 1999. The Nigerian people welcomed this most recent regime shift with a fervor that frequently bordered on joy. A lot of people expressed expectations for a “democracy dividend” that would reduce government wrongdoing, restore political liberties, include marginalized groups, and stimulate the economy (Lawal et al., 2012).

But great hopes were short-lived, and widespread disappointment emerged. There has been a great deal of disagreement in politics regarding division of authorities, the scope of rights, and, most importantly, distributive tensions. Thousands of people were killed nationwide by acts of communal violence, whether related to disagreements over land ownership in the Middle Belt or oil profits in the Niger Delta. Many Nigerians were also uneasy due to the pervasive insecurity, which also raised criticism of the government’s inability to control the conflict (Lawal et al., 2012). It is reasonable sense to say that the core causes of Nigeria’s underdevelopment issues are poor governance practices. In Nigeria, underdevelopment is mostly caused by bad administration (Ibrahim and Cheri, 2013; Abdulyakeen, 2021).

Odekunle (2007) states that “despite years of complaints and grouching, our sadly poor leadership performance has persisted, and we have allowed ourselves to be gradually destroyed by surrendering to the leadership of political misfits.” It is surprising that the majority of people failed to reap the much-anticipated benefits of democracy while the ruling class continued to avoid taking responsibility for their actions.

Furthermore, according to Odekunle (2007) and Nwekeaku (2014), the majority of Nigeria’s current challenges, particularly those related to development, are the result of our past and present leaders’ harsh actions. Our leaders have not been at their best when it comes to accountability, transparency, and service delivery; after all, Nigerians’ hopes and dreams of a better future have long since been dashed, and the country still lacks the governance elements that would make it the envy of many. Nigeria has struggled with leadership ever since gaining independence, which is worsening the country’s political situation. Very few, if any, of the leaders contribute to the nation’s progress; instead, their policies are frequently poorly thought out and implemented. The underdevelopment and widespread misery of Nigerians, who have previously experienced colonial exploitation at the hands of their colonial masters and neocolonial degradation at the hands of their post-independence leadership, have been greatly exacerbated by bad administration.

As the Premier of the Western region of Nigeria, Awolowo exemplifies the importance of leadership in governance. A leader who is “placed in a position of leadership must be prepared to grasp the nettle...set a worthy example and a marathon on pace in probity, unselfishness, and self-sacrifice,” according to his leadership philosophy. “Africa has produced more self-seeking leaders than public spirited ones,” he said. According to this, “only men who are masters of themselves become masters of others easily.” As the Premier of Western Nigeria, Awolowo exemplifies effective leadership. He is credited with the following achievements: a. ensuring that primary education is free and mandatory for everyone in the Western Region; b. founding the first television station in Africa, WNTV, in 1959; c. offering free health care to anybody under the age of eighteen; d. integrating rural development; e. achieving full employment; and f. constructing the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan, as reported in the *Journal of Education and Human Development*, Vol. 3 (2), June 2014 (Odusote, 2013).

## Corruption

Corruption is one of the numerous issues that Nigeria still has not addressed. For Nigeria, it continues to be a significant long-term political and economic concern (Osudare, 2012). In Nigeria, corruption has been so obvious and pervasive that it seems to have been made lawful (Premium Times, 2013). The disease of corruption has deeply ingrained itself into the structure of the Nigerian state, as noted by Ekumankama (2012). As a result, it has affected every government that has come after independence. In fact, since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has lost almost \$400 billion due to corruption and rent-seeking, according to Nuhu Ribadu, the former Chair of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), who made this revelation in 2004. Similarly, since 1999, nearly N8 trillion has been stolen, according to the Executive Director of the Centre for Ethics and Self Value Orientation (Weekly Trust, 2014, p. 3).

He thinks that a leader’s lack of mental development leads to corruption. In his study, he also paints a picture of a corrupt mind that lacks self-control and is driven by earthly cravings. People with this kind of thinking have a hard time controlling their desires. As a result, their instincts and desires carry them away. In his attempts to explain how some people are occasionally enslaved by their instincts and emotions, Awolowo references to this subject.

Awolowo made the following important proposition regarding public officers’ surveillance: In actuality, leadership is about providing service backed by a goal. Leadership is defined as the “ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or a set of goals” by Robbins and Judge (2007). In terms of politics, leadership refers to the capacity to persuade a group of individuals to pursue their objectives. It appears to demonstrate a leader’s capacity to align his goals with the circumstances of his surroundings. Fiedler’s contingency theory, which states that a leader’s effectiveness stems from a good fit between the leader’s aims and the extent to which the circumstances are favorable for the leader to carry out his tasks, is the best illustration of this.

Political considerations and nepotism prevade the Nigerian Civil Service, which is meant to be based on seniority and productivity. Promotional rules do not distinguish between workers who are productive and those who are not. Dismissal is rare, unless there are administrative bottlenecks

and a high level of corruption. In terms of qualifications for employment, those who join the Civil Service through familial or political connections might not possess the necessary technical abilities for their roles. Furthermore, programs for on-the-job training are inadequate and ineffectual (Nwaze, 2011). Although appointments to the Civil Service should be made solely on the basis of merit, in reality, political, familial, ethnic, and religious factors play a significant role. Awolowo (1963) asserted that the transformation of our institutions and societies must inevitably start with a thorough understanding and appreciation of the responsibilities of leadership, its foundation, and the essential qualities that make a successful leader. His talks on public affairs, good governance, leadership, the traits of a leader, the foundations of leadership, and the battle against corruption provide new insights into transformational leadership and its function in social change.

Pervasive corruption was a significant factor that shattered the 16-year control of the People's Democratic Party in Nigeria. Voting for All Progressive Congress (APC) presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari in the 2015 general election was one way Nigerians expressed their dissatisfaction. Buhari pledged to combat terrorism, eradicate corruption, and improve the economy. But as bandits abduct for ransom and herdsman conflict with rural towns, jeopardizing food security and national unity, Boko Haram terrorists continue to inflict havoc (Tade, 2021). After two years of Buhari's second term as president, corruption has not diminished. The three pillars of Buhari's anti-corruption campaign are the introduction of the "Whistle Blowing" policy, the Biometric Verification Number (BVN), and the Treasury Single Account. As seen by the higher savings, these have garnered praise (Tade, 2021). But problems like the politicization of the fight against corruption and the unwillingness to look into allegations have made the fight seem questionable. Among these are the accusations of double standards in Buhari's handling of his supporters and the suspension of Ibrahim Magu, the acting director of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, due to corruption charges. Party politics protects those who are obedient to the ruling class from prosecution. Adams Oshiomole, the previous head of Buhari's party, has urged opposition party defectors to join the ruling party in order to have their "sins" pardoned (pulse.ng, January 17, 2019).

In Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Nigeria fell to 146 by the end of 2019 when President Buhari was elected to a second term, and by 2020, it was placed 149. The Buhari administration has referred to the ranking as "senseless and baseless," yet data from the 2019 National Bureau of Statistics show that Nigerians have encountered corruption when dealing with governmental authorities. The information on instances of corruption in the public eye demonstrates that corruption is still a serious issue. One major problem is that there are no ethical norms in place in Nigerian government and commercial institutions. Ethics, in the words of Bowman (1991), is action, the way we live out our morals; it is a framework for decision-making. The topic of ethics in the public (and private) spheres is wide-ranging and includes, among other things, the importance of deference to authority, the use of logic in moral reasoning, and the application of moral judgment in real-world situations (Bowman, 1991). Sadly, a large number of elected and appointed officials in Nigeria lack a strong understanding of the moral obligations associated with their posts. This concept is receiving little, if any, attention while unethical behavior is skyrocketing.

The current Buhari administration is never slow to draw attention to the crimes carried out by the Goodluck Jonathan administration that was previously in office. The parallel is certainly appropriate; under Jonathan, the PDP essentially destroyed Nigeria. It is peculiar, though, that Buhari, who was elected with great anticipation that he would remove the remnants of the previous PDP administration, has demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that the faith bestowed upon him was misplaced. Given Buhari's appalling performance, one is forced to infer that Awolowo's prediction – that giving greed or naked self-interest priority in Nigeria's social structure would have the unintended consequence of cultivating a competing cycle of greed and naked self-interest – has come true. However, Awolowo's conclusion that the "process of time" will put an end to the mess is illogical and unjustified. Maybe Awolowo's unquenchable optimism – despite his knowledge that corruption has a way of striking back – is what has brought him to this untenable conclusion. It is naive to believe that the passage of time, in place of decisive action, can automatically end impunity inside the system. This is especially true for Awolowo, who associates the term "process of time" with "aeons of time," which implies eternity. The reductionism theory, which reduces governance to "efficiency and rationality in allocating resources, curbing corruption which inhibits development and investment, guarantee of civil and human rights, and accountability of the people," seems to be in line with Awolowo's definition of good governance (Ologbenla, 2007). The most valuable aspect of Awolowo's leadership paradigm is the attention he pays to the leader's existence; this approach views leadership from the perspective of the person in office rather than what they accomplish. "Leadership springs from within; it's about who I am as much as what I do," according to Awolowo. (Stiglitz, 2008). The idea behind the leadership notion is that a leader's decisions, actions, attitudes, and behaviors are informed, influenced, and guided by his or her beliefs, values, and principles (Stiglitz, 2008). As a result, Awolowo's leadership style, like Stiglitz's, is holistic and strives for the development of the full individual, the being.

## Democracy and election rigging

One of the most contentious aspects of "neo-representative democracy" that has been introduced into Africa is the adoption of competitive elections by various political factions. Commentators have pointed out that in most African societies, different ethnic or social groupings associate political "opposition" with warfare. Politicians have based electoral campaigns in most African nations on dividing voters along ethnic lines. Codes of conduct, which impose a duty to return gifts from others, are anticipated to keep politicians from winning elections. Among many ethnic groups in Nigeria, accepting a gift from someone else forges a connection that politicians use to bind rural communities to whom they have given consumer goods (which can range from motorcycles to edible salt, textiles, rice, and maize flour) and thereby remove them from appeals by other political parties.

The use of violence in political campaigns and during voting is a sign that a new tool is being used, one that hasn't developed from within communities' consensus-building mechanisms and local worldviews. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate was accused of engaging in a number of "malpractices" by the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), one of the main opposition parties in the April 2011 elections in Nigeria. The CPC listed these



“malpractices” to judges in an election tribunal, including: voter fraud, ballot paper tampering, multiple voting, giving money to presiding officers, arbitrary vote distribution throughout the nation, and failure to provide election materials (Daily Trust, Wednesday, November, 2011, p. 3).

These are signs of a conflict over cultures of political power struggles, such as rules that forbid ideas of “accepting to be defeated by another” or giving legitimacy to “winners” of electoral contests.

Similar to Plato, Awolowo emphasizes the importance of leadership and education in the growth of the individual and the country. Perhaps in response to the issue of illiteracy and ignorance that plague Nigerian society and pose a barrier to a sustained democratic culture in that nation, he pushes for free and compulsory education. This issue frequently appears in two main areas: uneducated voters who support electoral tampering and inept leaders who support governmental corruption. According to Awolowo (1981), education is necessary to produce an educated electorate in the state. Awolowo adopts Plato’s position, having previously contended that a leader’s involvement in dishonest and deceitful activities stems from their lack of formal education. Awolowo compares such a leader to a person who gets lost in a cave. He is able to break free from the chains of ignorance after his body, mind, and brain have fully matured through education. Nyerere (2006) shares Awolowo’s temperament when it comes to the goal of education, which is why he thinks that the main objective of education should be to free people from the constraints and restrictions of ignorance and dependency. According to Nyerere (2006), thinking is how man develops consciousness; hence education of this kind should also empower people to think for themselves. Fisher (2005, pp. 7–8) makes a similar case, urging us to understand that “the quality of life depends on the quality of our thinking.” According to Fisher (2005, pp. 7–8), a society that is successful will be one in which its citizens’ capacities for lifelong learning are most fully fulfilled. In this sense, developing critical thinking skills is something that people should strive for in their education.

The time has come for Nigerians to support Awolowo’s claim that he will serve as the focal point for this social reengineering and to urgently articulate the philosophical ideas that will keep the sinking Nigerian state afloat, because ideas truly do change the world and philosophical ideas serve as a catalyst for positive social change.

Second, Awolowo’s philosophical moral ideas have promoted moral behavior on the part of the individual as well as improved governmental systems that protect human rights, freedom, and peace and the advancement and well-being of the economy. Thus, the Awolowo ideology has made a significant contribution to the finest possible organization of human society, one that enables its individuals to reach their full potential. Awolowo’s idea of mental magnitude effectively encapsulates the concept of ethical leadership by drawing a distinction between leaders who prioritize wealth and materialism and those who choose to serve their community. While reason governs the latter, instincts and emotions govern the former. When Awolowo refers to emotions, he means unpleasant feelings like fear, wrath, worry, jealousy, selfishness, and the like. For Awolowo, leaders who choose to serve are those who are guided by reason rather than emotions. Preaching accountability and openness is challenging when the leaders – like those in Nigeria – don’t live up to these principles. The adoption of Awolowo ideas on leadership and administration, along with curriculum



modifications to include critical thinking instruction, are the keys to resolving Nigeria's present image crisis. According to Awolowo, administrative competency requires effective leadership. In his opinion, people who want to be in positions of leadership need to have a solid education in order to understand the need for good governance. According to him, the growth of the body, mind, and brain constitutes true education. Those who have created a mental magnitude routine are the ones whose mind, brain, and body are developed. People who adopt this mindset are able to regulate their cravings, emotions, and appetites because reason now governs their thoughts and behaviors.

Therefore, it makes sense that Awolowo's philosophical concepts should seize the bull by the horns and help Nigeria overcome its urgent ethical, sociopolitical, and economic concerns in the current times. His moral philosophy ought to be put into effect in order to offer direction out of the unsettling and intolerable predicament the nation finds itself in.

## Summary of major findings

To prevent a leadership crisis in Nigeria, the following conclusions seem crucial to our developing democracy's existence and well-being:

1. According to the study, the establishment of popular sovereignty that affects people's daily lives, imbues meaning to citizenship, and extends beyond the borders of the country's constitution is essential to the survival of democratic governance in Nigeria. Democracy can only endure in the nation if and when it transforms into a reality that is deserving of defense. Additionally, research indicates that social life and political affairs should be planned and carried out in a way that promotes equal distribution of the benefits of democracy among the many social classes and strata in society as well as effective access to decision-making for all.
2. The study found that the majority of Nigerians rely on the government for employment, favors, and a living. Nigeria's economy would benefit from a shift away from oil and toward other industries like agriculture, solid minerals, and etc., as this would help to lower poverty on the continent and create jobs for the vast majority of unemployed youth.
3. The study went on to argue that in order for popular democracy to succeed, it needs accountable leaders and informed followers who understand the link between democratic practices and socioeconomic advancement. This development should center on the social welfare of the populace, support political and cultural pluralism, place a strong emphasis on democratic accountability, ensure that people's human rights are protected, and guarantee that opposing viewpoints are represented in the political process.
4. The study found that in order to reverse some societal problems like electoral violence, which is detrimental to elections and democratic practice, there is an absolute necessity for real attitude change. African politicians would no longer view politics as a business focused on generating money or a "do or die" situation, but rather as an endeavor involving community service if they were to truly adopt a new mindset. This will undoubtedly contribute to reducing the nation's economic resource vandalism as well as the ruthless rivalry that political leaders and job seekers typically participate in. In the same spirit,

the ruling class will stray from the colonial legacy of intolerance toward alternative viewpoints that were inherited at independence, and the government will develop sincere programs of empowerment that are focused on the needs of the people and will actually reduce poverty. The ruling elites would be prevented from using security personnel, election body officials, the media, the judiciary, young people, and etc., as tools for electoral violence and fraud by a complete shift in value orientation.

5. The study makes the argument that effective governance is the best defense against corruption. Whatever the measures implemented, they ought to be ones that support accountability, control, and good governance. This framework is the only one that would enable policy frameworks and their execution to have a respectable level of symbolic coherence.

## Conclusion

The study makes the case that Nigeria's democratic government hasn't yet brought about the required and ideal growth. Nigeria's democratic experience has markedly diverged from the paradigm of people-centered governance. The people's personal gains from democracy are not increased overall development or welfare but rather hopelessness and annoyance. Nigeria has an abundance of natural and human resources. The problem seems to be in effectively and efficiently utilizing these resources through a system that guarantees equitable resource allocation, an improvement in the majority's standard of living, and the defense of the rights of the impoverished. It appears that the standard of governance is declining, which is causing unrest and the erosion of some public institutions to the point that the continent is being considered a failed state. Through the prism of Awolowo, his stance and philosophical concepts have established a course for societies to pursue in order to maximize happiness for the largest number of people. Because Awolowo had an impact that extended in many directions beyond his own era and nation. While Nigeria has made some progress in terms of human capital and infrastructure development, political squabbling, corruption, injustices, and the threat to people's lives and property have prevented most citizens from receiving the benefits of democracy and responsible governance that have been promised by democratic governments in the past. This article argues that the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria would only occur when the global community observes a discernible shift in the leadership style, mindset, values, and attitudes of individuals in positions of authority. There is no denying that Nigeria is in desperate need of devoted leaders capable of realizing the benefits of democracy. The ability to alter the governance process, structures, and leadership styles in order to promote sustainable growth in our country's economy, however, remains uncertain.

## Prospects for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

1. **Reducing the appeal of political office through salary regulations for politicians is the answer to this dilemma.** As long as political office holders earn four times as much as academics, Chief Justices, experienced engineers, and other professionals, political offices will continue to be a gold mine that everyone who finds will sell everything they own to get.

2. **Enough knowledge must exist for Nigerian voters to be dissuaded from selling their consciences to support existing leaders.** When voters are aware of the potential consequences of selling their votes, they will not engage in this behavior. However, if the nation's poverty rate remains high, this will not be effective. The government must make every effort to raise the typical Nigerian's standard of living by establishing job opportunities and social programs for the unemployed.
3. **The pressing necessity to alleviate the widespread poverty that is destroying the populace.** Africa has to implement a successful plan for reducing poverty in order to address the multifaceted character of this deadly illness known as poverty. Poverty's social, cultural, political, and economic aspects must all be taken into account in this strategy. People must have a means of subsistence, such as work that allows them to take care of themselves, in order to combat poverty on the continent and ensure that democracy functions.
4. **Offering Africans access to practical education.** In order for its citizens to become self-sufficient and politically aware enough to engage in politics with intelligence, the government must provide them with an education.
5. **African economies must be restructured in order to become economically independent of the world capitalist system.** This can be accomplished by diversifying our economy to lessen our exposure to the whims of the global marketplace. Our agriculture industry needs to be redesigned. In order to attain economic growth and development, an effort must be made to guarantee sectoral linkages within the agricultural economy.
6. **Good political instruction.** The National Orientation Agency (NOA) must immediately reorient its mission from that of a government propaganda machine to that of a genuinely national and people-oriented organization tasked with informing and enlightening the Nigerian populace about the value of good governance and democratic processes. This agency ought to participate in civic and moral education as well. Along with disseminating government initiatives in an effort to get public feedback.
7. **Dealing with the corruption issue.** The African anti-corruption institutions ought to be given the authority to carry out their mandate free from outside intervention. I think that if all of the previously mentioned points are carefully taken into account, it will significantly contribute to the establishment of a robust democracy in Africa.
8. **The study suggests that candidates for any political office be subject to a mid-term assessment.** After serving for two years in a four-year term or for two and a half years in a five-year term, politicians should be forced to return to their constituents and ask them to reaffirm their mandate. With this clause in place, voters will know that elected officials are accountable and responsive to their constituents and will be able to deliver on the benefits of democracy.

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