

LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND THE QUEST FOR A POSITIVE POLITICAL CULTURE

Vincent Stephen Kabuk

Department of Religion and Philosophy
University of Jos, Nigeria
kabukv@unijos.edu.ng

&

Luka Tank Fun

Department of Political Science Education
Kaduna State College of Education,
Gidan Waya
lukeefun@gmail.com

Abstract

It is an indubitable fact that Nigeria operates a constitutional democracy, although the pattern of its political engagement fails to satisfy the democratic ideals of modern civilisation. Over the years, Nigeria has drifted far from the principles of true democracy. This situation is attributed to several factors, including the legacy of prolonged military rule, widespread corruption, lack of political will, poor policymaking, and the low quality of the ruling class. Perhaps the most critical issue is the challenge of leadership recruitment, which has stunted the nation's developmental trajectory. Nigeria's post-independence political narrative has positioned it in a retrogressive state where mediocrity, charlatanism, manipulative opportunism, and a blatant disregard for political, educational, and economic excellence have become the norm. This work aims to establish that the culture of exclusive politicking by a privileged clique of recycled mediocrities and ethnic loyalists has stifled national development. This stagnation is driven by entrenched political stereotypes and non-functional ideas. Consequently, meaningful development cannot be achieved with such political mindsets. Nigeria cannot make meaningful progress until there is the political will to dismantle these detrimental practices. The paper further suggests that a new political culture must be fostered – a positive political culture that promotes inclusivity, progressiveness, innovation, and the participation of technocrats, regardless of creed or ethnic affiliation – where citizens trust institutions, engage constructively, and uphold democratic norms, thereby contributing meaningfully to national development.

Keywords: Nigeria, leadership recruitment, nepotism and cronyism, mediocrity, democratic ideals, positive political culture.

Introduction

The developmental pace of any society largely depends on the quality of leaders entrusted with its

affairs. Leadership, therefore, serves as the national compass that directs a nation's progress.¹ In essence, the calibre of individuals recruited into public office significantly shapes the destiny of a country.

In Nigeria, however, the general conversation within the political space often questions the integrity of political actors and public officeholders. The most critical drawback confronting Nigeria's development – and indeed that of much of Africa – is the persistent challenge of leadership recruitment. Over the years, Nigeria has faltered in this process, resulting in sociopolitical and economic instability, ethnoreligious crises, infrastructural decay, systemic corruption, and poor governance. These realities point to a chronic failure of leadership in addressing national challenges.

Since independence, Nigeria has witnessed a catalogue of irregularities in the recruitment of public functionaries, where individuals of questionable character and mediocrity are enthroned in public positions or elevated to the forefront of policymaking. Consequently, the nation has drifted along a retrogressive trajectory, where mediocrity, opportunism, and the erosion of excellence have become normalised. Successive nepotistic regimes have displayed glaring signs of neglect toward political, educational, and economic advancement. This pattern has been reinforced by weak institutions and the dominance of political patronage over merit.²

This work argues that the culture of exclusive politicking by a privileged clique of recycled mediocrities and ethnic loyalists has stifled Nigeria's developmental process, as their stereotyped and unproductive ideas continue to suffocate progress. This damaging practice has become the new political order, from which political actors show little intention of breaking away.

Accordingly, this article examines the challenges undermining effective leadership recruitment in Nigeria – challenges that perpetuate poor governance, stunted development, and citizen disillusionment – and explores how building a positive political culture could chart a new course toward democratic consolidation.

Leadership Recruitment in Nigeria: An Overview

The ideal principles of political leadership recruitment generally focus on building strong and enduring institutions with clear, merit-based criteria. This involves well-defined strategies that ensure competence and representation, thereby promoting a political culture rooted in integrity and service. Such an approach prioritises stronger institutions over dependence on “strong men.”

¹. E. E. Isife, “African Traditional Values and the Quest for Good Governance in Contemporary Africa: A Critical Investigation” in *Nigerian Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol.3, No.2, October 2024, 86-87.

². See V.S. Kabuk, “Politics of Ethnic Exclusion: A Pitfall of the Nigerian State Towards Nationhood” in *Nigerian*

The recruitment process should therefore emphasise candidates with a vision for public service, a solid ethical foundation, and a firm commitment to democratic ideals, while rejecting corrupting influences such as ethnic or religious bias.

Conversely, there are three major public leadership recruitment processes in Nigeria: the electoral process, political appointments, and bureaucratic progression.³ A cursory examination of each, however, shows that they have failed to meet democratic ideals, causing Nigerian society to drift away from the principles of genuine democracy and modern civilisation. As Popoola and Arije observe,

The leadership recruitment process in Nigeria is often fraught with sectional bias and other undemocratic principles which almost always lead to the emergence of deficient leadership and bad managers of government resources, resulting in the consigning of the masses into the position of unending socio-economic squalor.⁴

This makes it clear that leadership recruitment in Nigeria has historically been shaped by a complex interplay of political, social, and economic factors, which has produced various ethnic hegemonic interests across the nation. In practice, Nigerian society currently operates under a dual system of nepotism and cronyism; one that trades competence, integrity, and commitment to public service for ethnic ties and personal networks. There is no doubt that the practice is often driven by ethno-religious and regional considerations. In this context, merit-based leadership has given way to patronage networks and political godfatherism.⁵

In all fairness, the Nigerian state has, throughout its history, struggled to institutionalise a merit-based and transparent recruitment mechanism. This is reflected in constitutional provisions and other extra-constitutional guidelines that delineate frameworks for a genuine process.⁶ However, in practice, the process has faltered under successive regimes. Preference for patronage over merit has become the norm. The focus is no longer on qualifications, integrity or competence but on individual loyalty, personal connections, and ethno-religious considerations in the selection of candidates for public office.

Journal of Philosophical Studies (NJPS). Vol. 3, no. 2; (2024), 43.

3. As in the case of the public executives in the ministries and departments

4. M. A. Popoola and O. E. Arije, "Leadership Recruitment Process and Governance Challenge in Nigeria" in *Advance Journal of Art, Humanity, & Social Sciences*,

5. V.S. Kabuk, "The Politics of Ethnic Exclusion: A Pitfall of the Nigerian State Towards Nationhood" in *Nigerian Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2: (2024).

6. V.S. Kabuk, *Transformative Justice and Oppression in Africa: Responses, Mediation and the Experiences of Some Victim Communities*, presented at a workshop at the Department of Philosophy and Economics, University

The principles of separation of powers and the apparent autonomy of the various organs of government, which should permit checks and balances, exist in principle but have lost practical effect in Nigeria's political landscape. The country now operates under an overly powerful executive presidency, whereby the President effectively determines who becomes the Senate President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives,⁷ and even the Chief Justice of Nigeria.⁸ These positions remain at the discretion of the President, who may remove and replace them through extra-constitutional means whenever their loyalty is in doubt. Similar practices are observed at the state level, where governors wield comparable influence. In such cases, failure to comply with the wishes of a sitting governor, president, or any other powerful individual renders due process irrelevant in the replacement of public officers. The recent declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State by the Nigerian President – resulting in the suspension of the elected governor, the deputy governor, and members of the State Assembly, and the appointment of a sole administrator with a military background – constitutes a clear undermining of constitutional provisions and a classic abuse of democratic principles.

Since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria's leadership recruitment has remained a complex and contested process. The country has consistently grappled with the recurrent challenge of recruiting credible political and public functionaries. Various historical, social, and political factors have shaped this difficulty.

The emergence of General Olusegun Obasanjo as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1999 was widely described as an elite bargain rather than a broad-based democratic choice. It was considered a means of appeasing the Western region following the annulment of the June 12 election, and partly because he handed over power to a non-Yoruba in 1979. In essence, it was more of an elite-managed transition from military to civilian rule.⁹ Political patronage and godfatherism defined the regime, with the elites who formed and controlled the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) allegedly hijacking the process of political appointments, thereby

of Bayreuth, Germany, between 21st to 25th October 2023.

7. Too much influence of the president on the emergence of the parliamentary leadership and on their activities led the 9th and 10th National Assembly to be labelled as “rubber stamp” national assemblies. The leader of the Senate and Senator representing cautioned Nigerians; Taiwo Amodu, “Stop calling us rubber-stamp parliament, Senate leader tells Nigerians”, *Tribune*, May 25th, 2025.

8. Chapter 7, Part 1, Section 231 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) empowers the President to appoint the Chief Justice of Nigeria on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council, subject to confirmation by the Senate. However, in recent regimes, the process has been criticised for producing appointments that appear to favour individuals from the same religion, ethnic group, or region as the appointing authority.

9. A. Zakariyau, “Why we backed Obasanjo Over Ige, Falae in 1999 – Lamido”, in *Punch*, Saturday, August, 30th 2025; and, [Chukwudi Ukonne](#), “The Civil Soldier: The Political Legacy of Olusegun Obasanjo” in *The Republic*,

undermining merit.¹⁰

The regime operated amid informal agreements, such as the PDP's zoning principle of key positions. While this appeared to entrench zoning and ethno-regional balancing in political recruitment, it largely served as a tool for political patronage based on loyalty and the self-serving interests of the elite. These excesses eventually culminated in the controversial "third term agenda" of 2006, which sought to extend Obasanjo's tenure beyond constitutional limits.

Following the failure of the original political arrangement, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, then Governor of Katsina State, emerged within the national leadership framework through elite-driven mechanisms that subordinated democratic choice to negotiated power interests, thereby raising fundamental questions about political legitimacy and popular consent. Yar'Adua later admitted that the electoral process, which brought him to power, was deeply flawed. Acknowledging these irregularities, Yar'Adua promised electoral reforms, leading to the inauguration of the Justice Uwais Electoral Committee. However, his protracted illness revealed his inability to fully meet the demands of office.¹¹ Despite this, political cronies and vested interests preferred that he retain power in absentia, creating a constitutional and political vacuum. Their reluctance to formally transfer power to then Vice President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan eventually compelled the National Assembly to invoke the "Doctrine of Necessity," which made Jonathan Acting President and, after Yar'Adua's death, substantive President. This move was crucial in averting political instability and a national crisis at the time.¹²

Yar'Adua's open admission of the flawed process that brought him to power earned him a reputation for honesty. Nevertheless, this reputation had little bearing on his overall performance as president. Critics have also argued that his appointment strategy during his brief tenure was heavily influenced by ethno-religious considerations.

President Goodluck Jonathan's era was widely criticised for favouring allies and political loyalists; political patronage, godfatherism, and elite dominance further weakened meritocracy. Massive corruption plagued cabinet members, and there was little determination to build strong institutional frameworks.¹³ However, Jonathan's peaceful handover to an opposition candidate,

[August/September 2021](#)

¹⁰. C. E. Ugwu, E. Izueke, & C. J. Obasi, "Godfatherism in Nigeria's Politics: A Study of Obasanjo's Civilian Administration (1999-2007)", in *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 5, 2013, 136-140.

¹¹. [O. Madueke](#), & [C. Enyiazu](#), "Electoral Integrity and Election Management in Nigeria: The Case of the 2023 General Election", in *Wiley Periodicals*, 22 January 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1002/waf2.12055>

¹². Stanley Alieke, "[The Doctrine of Necessity in the Nigerian Politics and in Law](#)" in *Tekedia* November 11, 2023.

¹³. T. Ojoye, "Corruption: 25 Jonathan's ex-ministers, aides under probe", 5th November 2016, in *Punch*, August

General Muhammadu Buhari, in 2015, earned him both local and international recognition.

The takeover of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 ushered in an era of a new coalition of political parties that formed the All Progressives Congress (APC). Nevertheless, this regime deepened many of the challenges that had characterised the PDP era. Inclusivity was largely disregarded, and public opinion had little influence on decision-making. The period witnessed various clashes and protests—between young protesters and the government, Shiite Islamic groups and security forces, civil societies and the state—alongside recurrent strikes in universities and escalating insecurity nationwide. Security agencies appeared overwhelmed, prompting calls for divine intervention through Churches and Mosques.

Corruption scandals of unprecedented scale emerged, particularly in the Ministries of Humanitarian Affairs, Aviation, Office of the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, as well as the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation. The Ministry of Education failed to demonstrate competence in addressing lingering sectoral challenges, while the Ministry of Labour was accused of disregard for workers' welfare and intimidation.¹⁴ Political appointees faced no accountability, and many appeared to hold “guaranteed” eight-year tenures regardless of incompetence. To say the least, indolence among public office holders was often rewarded rather than punished. Nepotism and ethno-religious bias dominated appointments,¹⁵ undermining the federal character principle intended to promote inclusivity.

As Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah aptly described President Buhari's administration:

The last 8 years of the Buhari administration marked the worst phase in the history of interfaith relations in Nigeria, especially relating to violence against Christians and their exclusion from power. That administration gave oxygen to jihadists by virtue of its policies, which overtly favoured Islam and northern Nigeria. The President himself was a Muslim, and ensured that the Senate President, the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the entire leadership of security were entrusted to the hands of only Muslims, almost all from the north. This was a departure from the sensibilities that had characterised power sharing in Nigeria. I argued then that in reality, the difference between President Buhari and the Jihadists was that he was using a pen while the jihadists were using weapons of violence against Christians. I also stated that under Buhari, to gain

30th, 2025.

¹⁴. Intimidations and proscriptions of unions, invocation of the principles of pro rata when not necessary, creating and registering rival unions by the Hon Minister, Chris Ngege, using court injunctions to suppress workers' unions, manipulations and sabotage of efforts of other ministers during collective bargains with unions, etc. The era was considered an anti-labour regime that Nigeria had ever witnessed.

¹⁵. I.I. Yahaya, “A Post-Mortem of President Muhammadu Buhari Administration's Fight Against Corruption in

power, it was more important to be a northern Muslim than to be a citizen of Nigeria.¹⁶

Appointments to key political positions during the administration appeared to follow an informal hierarchy of preference: the candidate had to be, first, a Muslim; second, a northerner; third, a Fulani; and fourth, someone with personal or familial ties to the President, his wife, or individuals within his inner circle. These seemed to constitute the major criteria for leadership recruitment at the time. The controversial removal of Walter Onnoghen, the then Chief Justice of Nigeria, and the near-total exclusion of the South-East from strategic governance positions serve as strong evidence of the administration's perceived bias against other ethnic groups and faiths.

The regime's complete disregard for competence, vision, and honesty in leadership selection constituted one of its greatest failures, both politically and economically. The team responsible for coordinating the economy appeared largely clueless, relying almost entirely on internal and external borrowings to sustain government operations. There was little evidence of creative or strategic efforts to explore alternative approaches for effective economic management. Furthermore, President Buhari was widely perceived as being detached from the daily affairs of governance, reinforcing public speculation that a powerful cabal operated the government on his behalf.

On his part, President Bola Tinubu, who assumed office in 2023, has largely followed the same trajectory as his predecessor. The major distinction, however, is that his regime appears to operate more as a plutocracy, rooted in elite patronage sustained across successive administrations. While Buhari was accused of ethno-religious bias, Tinubu's government appears more nepotistic in ethnic terms but less overtly defined by religious considerations in political appointments.¹⁷

There are varying opinions regarding the role of the immediate family of President Bola Tinubu in his administration. Some observers describe their involvement as supportive, while others view it as meddlesome and amounting to an abuse of office. Carter Sullivan, for instance, observes that "Tinubu's children have played a supportive role in his political campaigns and have held key positions in his administration. Their involvement reflects the importance of family and political alliances in Nigerian politics."¹⁸ However, general opinion on social media suggests that the President's wife and children are excessively influential and more visible than

Nigeria (2015-2023)" in *Journal of Political Discourse*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2025).

¹⁶ M.H. Kukah, "Why Nigeria Should not be Designated Country of Concern: A Plea & Testimony from Nigeria", Comments at the Launch of the ACIN 2025 World Report on Religious Freedom in the World, Delivered at the Augustinianum Hall, on October 21st, 2025, Vatican City.

¹⁷ C. Obina, "HURIWA condemns Tinubu's 'nepotism' in key appointments," *Punch*, April 1st, 2025

¹⁸ [Carter Sullivan](#), "Unveiling the Success and Impact Of Bola Tinubu's Children," in *Nextclub*, August 4th, 2025.

the Vice President, an influence many interpret as a violation of constitutional principles.

Critical sectors such as security, the economy, and financial institutions are predominantly headed by individuals from the president's ethnic group. Other key institutions – including the judiciary, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and anti-corruption agencies – also reflect similar patterns. Indeed, it has become increasingly rare for any major political appointment to be announced without strong indications that the appointee will likely be of Yoruba origin.

Conversely, the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances among the three branches of government, which characterise modern democracy, are not functional in Nigeria due to the apparent encroachment of the executive branch on the legislative and judicial branches in recent times. The Nigerian version of democracy features executives (governors and presidents) with virtually unquestionable powers, to the extent that appointments of the heads of the legislative and judicial arms are no longer based on merit and constitutional procedures but on loyalty and a willingness to compromise with the will of the executive. The All Progressives Congress-led administration has shown disregard for democratic principles, as the National Assembly appears ineffective, approving virtually every proposal from the President. This earned the ninth and tenth National Assemblies, under the leadership of Senators Ahmed Lawan and Godswill Akpabio, the label of a 'rubber-stamp National Assembly.' Their legislative recklessness escalated to the point where songs were chanted in praise of the president whenever they appeared in the chamber to present executive demands, which signalled their readiness to carry out the wishes of the president.¹⁹

At the state level, too, the situation is no different. A viral video has circulated showing former Governor Yahaya Bello instructing newly elected members of the Kogi State Assembly to sit on the floor while he addressed them – an act that vividly exemplifies the problem of subservience at the state level. In the video, Yahaya Bello can be heard saying:

“...if you're going there now, go and cooperate with the Speaker and other members of the Kogi State House of Assembly, and be part of those who support Ahmed Usman Ododo in everything that comes before the Assembly, in everything, every...”²⁰

This incident is a stark testimony to how the executive has weakened the legislative arm of

<https://staff.mtu.edu.ng/14625376/unveiling-the-success-and-impact-of.html>

^{19.} S. Ihechukwu, “Budget Presentation: NASS Rendition of Tinubu Allegiance Song Irks Nigerians,” in *Daily Post Nigeria*, 2nd December 2023. <https://dailypost.ng>

^{20.} A copy of the same video is available on <https://www.facebook.com/share/r/19uKdih8MU/>, and also on Dino Malaye's Facebook page, posted on 22nd August 2025. This clearly indicates that the elected legislators will be

government, rendering it incapable of exercising its constitutional mandate. It shows how elected legislators have traded their constitutional rights and have shown a readiness to be used as willing tools in the hands of the executive. This also explains why Nigeria's leadership challenges have persisted across successive regimes. There is no doubt that the recruitment processes are marred by a lack of decency and patriotism within the Nigerian polity.

Challenges and Implications of Poor Leadership Recruitment

Leadership recruitment is often described as the process through which individuals ascend to positions of political authority. As earlier explained, there are three major processes of political or public leadership recruitment in Nigeria: the electoral process, political appointments, and bureaucratic progression (career civil/public servants). These constitute critical determinants of governance quality and national development. However, political recruitment in the Nigerian context has largely hindered meaningful progress and impeded social, economic, and technological development.²¹ The pervasive problems of cronyism, nepotism, and, most notably, godfatherism have obstructed the engagement of competent and visionary individuals in the political space. Consequently, the recruitment processes often undermine meritocracy and accountability due to the glaring structural, institutional, and cultural deficiencies that characterise the system. This situation poses deep-seated leadership challenges and produces far-reaching implications for the nation's development.

There is no gainsaying that the problem of a weak institutional framework in Nigeria makes leadership recruitment more challenging and deeply contestable. The process erodes merit-based selection and discourages visionary leadership due to deep-seated practices that permit godfatherism and political elites to dictate candidacies – a phenomenon that has now evolved into a defining feature of Nigeria's political culture.²² Hence, ideological engagement has long given way to personal ambition and patronage. Perhaps, this is the reason why even the political parties, which should have served as platforms for promoting decent political ideologies, have shown a lack of internal democracy, where personal and group interests are prioritised over collective ideals.

The electoral process, on the other hand, is plagued by grave electoral malpractices such as vote-buying, rigging, and violence, often in favour of the perceived preferred candidates. This explains why corruption and money politics continue to thrive in the Nigerian system. Political recruitment has been monetised by wealthy politicians who reduce political offices to avenues for substantial financial gain, often at the expense of integrity and competence.

unable to fulfil their constitutional duties.

^{21.} A.R. Ifeoma, "Leadership Challenges and Nigeria Development: The Issues and Imperatives", in *International Journal of Academic Accounting, Finance, and Management Research*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, January 2020, 1-5

^{22.} O.E. Ademola, "Rethinking Leadership in Nigeria: A Call for National Renewal", August 3, 2025,

This phenomenon has created a cycle of political office seekers who perceive politics primarily as an investment that must yield personal profit rather than as an avenue for service. Consequently, leaders are more inclined to serve narrow interests than the collective good. This, perhaps, explains the ethno-religious configurations of Nigeria's political landscape, which exacerbate leadership problems by appealing to ethnic and religious sentiments rather than promoting good governance or competence. Such parochial considerations hinder national integration and perpetuate sectionalism.

As a result, there is little evidence of a positive political culture among the wider citizenry. This is why electioneering periods are often violent in many parts of the country. They are characteristically marked by opportunism, where immediate gratification, personal enrichment, and social prestige are prioritised over a sound assessment of candidates' capabilities or track records. The entire exercise frequently undermines the legitimacy of electoral outcomes that should define a decent liberal democracy, thereby portraying the process as a manifestation of moral decay.

There are far-reaching consequences for compromising leadership recruitment in any society. This is why Nigeria and many other developing countries lag behind in the global pace of development. Although the implications may be multidimensional, the most glaring include governance failure, mismanagement of resources, policy misdirection, erosion of public trust, political and moral decay, systemic corruption, a culture of impunity, widening inequality, the stifling of democratic progress, and the collapse of institutions.

Improvement Strategies for Leadership Recruitment

It is a truism that Nigeria's leadership problems cannot be resolved without deliberate and sustained efforts across all sectors of society. Such efforts must reflect democratic ideals and the people's aspirations, requiring a multidimensional approach that fosters national renewal and a collective spirit capable of integrating all segments of society. This approach should encompass genuine platforms that promote institutional reforms, ethical reorientation, civic education, and participatory governance. It must be holistic—one that upholds merit and public interest rather than being driven by tendencies rooted in patronage and corruption. These goals cannot be achieved through mere lip service, as is often the case; a framework that supports a genuine political culture and enduring social values must first be established before other measures can follow. Nonetheless, the following strategies are crucial for improving leadership recruitment in Nigeria:

1. *Strengthening Institutional Frameworks*, where the electoral bodies (such as INEC) must be strengthened and become effectively independent (both operational and financially). The appointment of the chairman should not be done by the executive (such as the president or the

governor at the federal and state levels, respectively). When the executive has the power to hire or fire the electoral umpire, there is always the tendency to carry out their bidding for the fear of losing their positions, as is the case in Nigeria. This and many other irregularities experienced in the electoral process through the years are the reasons behind the widespread agitations for electoral reforms.²³

2. *Solidification of the Judiciary/Legal System:* The legal framework, in general, serves as the vanguard of constitutional order, while a solid and independent judiciary guarantees justice and sustains a robust institutional system. A genuine legal framework, coupled with a strong judicial system,²⁴ ensures that leadership recruitment adheres to the principles of justice, fairness, and accountability.²⁵ This framework plays a multifaceted role in enhancing credibility by upholding constitutionalism and the rule of law, guaranteeing the independence and integrity of the electoral process, enforcing electoral laws and regulations, adjudicating electoral disputes, curtailing the culture of impunity, protecting citizens' rights and political participation, promoting internal democracy within political parties, and building public confidence in governance. Indeed, strengthening the judiciary is indispensable to reforming Nigeria's leadership recruitment process.

3. *Institutionalising Merit-based Leadership Recruitment:* Rather than being driven by parochial considerations such as ethnic and religious patronage, leadership engagement should be anchored in institutional merit, competence, and integrity. Beyond the electoral process, leadership recruitment through political appointments and bureaucratic progression must also be guided by merit, professionalism, and ethical standards. The persistent patronage of cronies and the entrenchment of nepotism inevitably breed mediocrity and institutional inefficiency.²⁶ In contrast, merit-based leadership selection not only enhances administrative effectiveness but also restores public trust and confidence in governance.

<https://business.ng>

²³. V.S. Kabuk, "Menace of Vote Trading: Youths as Vanguard of Impactful Change", a text presented on the occasion of Youth Sensitisation on the menace of Vote Trading, organised by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for the North Central Zone on the theme: *Zonal Engagement with Identified Youth Groups Ahead of the 2023 General Election*, at the Crest Hotel, Rayfield Road, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, on December 16th, 2022.

²⁴. A.R. Ifeoma, "Leadership Challenges and Nigeria Development: The Issues and Imperatives",

²⁵. A.A. Yusuf, B. Audu, & A. Audu, "The Impact of Leadership Failure and Economic Mismanagement on Unemployment and Inequality in Nigeria (1999-2023)," in *Journey of Political Discourse*, Vol.3, Issue 1, March 2025, 94.

²⁶. J.E. Bassey & E.E. Edemidiong, "Patronage Versus Merit: A Systematic Review of Recruitment Dynamics in the Nigerian Public Service", in *AKSU Journal of Administration and Corporate Governance*, Vol. 1 No. 2, August,

4. *Combating Corruption and Money Politics*: Corruption remains the root cause of most of Nigeria's socio-political and economic problems. Over the years, unpatriotic individuals have infiltrated public institutions, using positions of authority to advance personal rather than collective interests. In many cases, the notion of leadership has been reduced from a call to service to a pursuit of personal enrichment. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a stronger and truly independent body to ensure transparency and accountability in the acquisition and management of wealth by public officials. Money politics should be recognised and treated as a serious crime against the state, with clearly defined punitive measures applied without regard to social status or political affiliation. Existing anti-corruption agencies, though active, are often perceived as politically compromised, with prosecutions that appear selective. A more transparent, empowered, and genuinely independent anti-corruption framework is indispensable if Nigeria is to wage an effective and sustained war against this national malaise.

5. *Accountability Mechanisms*: In addition, effective leadership recruitment is contingent not merely on formal political structures but on the normative ecosystem that sustains democratic legitimacy. This entails the cultivation of ethical and civic values, the consolidation of civil society and media as sites of critical deliberation, robust electoral reforms, enhanced accountability mechanisms, compulsory asset declaration, and regular performance evaluation as instruments of political responsibility.

For the leadership recruitment system in Nigeria to reflect the ideals of democracy and the aspirations of the people, both policymakers and citizens must be deliberate in building a capacity-driven framework and robust institutions that ensure equality before the law, irrespective of individuals' social or political status. Implementing the foregoing policy recommendations will promote a transparent, accountable, and merit-based leadership recruitment process.

Conclusion

In sum, the leadership recruitment process in Nigeria arguably violates the democratic principles that characterise modern democratic societies. Her version of leadership selection permits the recruitment of inefficient, docile, and inept individuals, thereby entrenching mediocrity in governance. Consequently, the nation is gradually drifting toward a monolithic gerontocratic system that resists all meaningful and innovative ideas. To correct the anomaly, deliberate and sustained efforts are required to promote effective governance and democratic consolidation. These efforts must not be merely procedural; rather, they should be implemented substantively, as the quality of leadership recruitment remains a decisive factor in shaping the nation's democratic health and developmental trajectory. Indeed, this represents the positive political culture to which Nigerian society should genuinely aspire.

Jordan B. Peterson's observation is profoundly insightful. He asserts that “the more corrupt the culture is, and the less trust is possible between individuals, the less productive the culture is going to be. Corrupt societies collapse.”²⁷ Perhaps, the prevailing realities of corruption, weak institutions, money politics, ethno-religious bias, and the erosion of civic values have collectively hindered the emergence of visionary and competent leaders. Hence, the cultivation of a genuine political culture rooted in integrity, patriotism, and meritocracy remains the only viable path to national renewal. Strengthening institutions, reforming the electoral system, developing a clear framework for leadership engagement, promoting civic values that emphasise collective interest and public trust, solidifying the judiciary, and establishing transparent accountability mechanisms that guarantee equality before the law must all be prioritised to address the systemic deficiencies impeding Nigeria's progress.

Ultimately, Nigeria's transformation depends on the collective will of both the political class and the citizenry to reorient the moral and institutional foundations of leadership recruitment. Only through a transparent, merit-based, and value-driven process can the nation overcome its leadership deficit, restore public confidence, and align governance with the true ideals of democracy and the aspirations of its people. A reformed political culture, therefore, is not merely desirable; it is indispensable for Nigeria's sustainable development and democratic consolidation.

Bibliography

- Ademola, O.E., “Rethinking Leadership in Nigeria: A Call for National Renewal”, August 3, 2025, <https://business.ng>
- Alieke, Stanley, "The Doctrine of Necessity in Nigerian Politics and in Law" in *Tekedia* November 11, 2023.
- Amodu, Taiwo, “Stop calling us rubber-stamp parliament, Senate leader tells Nigerians”, *Tribune*, May 25th, 2025.
- Bassey J.E., & Edemidiong, E.E., “Patronage Versus Merit: A Systematic Review of Recruitment Dynamics in the Nigerian Public Service”, in *AKSU Journal of Administration and Corporate Governance*, Vol. 1 No. 2, August 2021, 74
- Ifeoma, A.R., “Leadership Challenges and Nigeria Development: The Issues and Imperatives”, in *International Journal of Academic Accounting, Finance, and Management Research*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, January 2020, 1-5
- Ihechukwu, S., “Budget Presentation: NASS Rendition of Tinubu Allegiance Song Irks Nigerians,” in *Daily Post Nigeria*, 2nd December 2023. <https://dailypost.ng>
- Isife, E. E., “African Traditional Values and the Quest for Good Governance in Contemporary Africa: A Critical Investigation” in the *Nigerian Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol 3,

No.2, October 2024.

- Kabuk, V.S., “Menace of Vote Trading: Youths as Vanguard of Impactful Change”, a text presented on the occasion of Youth Sensitisation on the menace of Vote Trading, organised by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for the North Central Zone on the theme: *Zonal Engagement with Identified Youth Groups Ahead of the 2023 General Election*, at the Crest Hotel, Rayfield Road, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, on December 16th, 2022.
- Kabuk, V.S., *Transformative Justice and Oppression in Africa: Responses, Mediation and the Experiences of Some Victim Communities*, presented at a workshop at the Department of Philosophy and Economics, University of Bayreuth, Germany, between 21st to 25th October 2023.
- Kabuk, V.S., “Politics of Ethnic Exclusion: A Pitfall of the Nigerian State Towards Nationhood” in *Nigerian Journal of Philosophical Studies* (NJPS). Vol. 3, no. 2; (2024).
- Kukah, M.H., “Why Nigeria Should not be Designated Country of Concern: A Plea & Testimony from Nigeria”, Comments at the Launch of the ACIN 2025 World Report on Religious Freedom in the World, Delivered at the Augustinianum Hall, Vatican City, on October 21st, 2025.
- Madueke, O., & Enyiazu, C., “Electoral Integrity and Election Management in Nigeria: The Case of the 2023 General Election”, in *Wiley Periodicals*, 22 January 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1002/waf2.12055>
- Obina, C., “HURIWA condemns Tinubu's 'nepotism' in key appointments,” *Punch*, April 1st, 2025
- Ojoye, T., “Corruption: 25 Jonathan's ex-ministers, aides under probe”, 5th November 2016, in *Punch*, August 30th, 2025.
- Popoola, M. A., and Arije, O. E., “Leadership Recruitment Process and Governance Challenge in Nigeria” in the *Advance Journal of Art, Humanity, & Social Sciences*, Vol. 8 No. 4 (2025): July-August.
- Sullivan, C., “Unveiling the Success and Impact Of Bola Tinubu's Children,” in *Nextclub*, August 4th, 2025. <https://staff.mtu.edu.ng/14625376/unveiling-the-success-and-impact-of.html>
- Ugwu, C. E., Izueke, E., & Obasi, C. J., “Godfatherism in Nigeria's Politics: A Study of Obasanjo's Civilian Administration (1999-2007)”, in *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 5, 2013, 136-140.
- Ukonne, Chukwudi, “The Civil Soldier: The Political Legacy of Olusegun Obasanjo” in *The Republic*, August/September 2021
- Yahaya, I.I., “A Post-Mortem of President Muhammadu Buhari Administration's Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria (2015-2023)” in *Journal of Political Discourse*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2025).
- Yusuf, A.A., Audu, B., & Audu, A., “The Impact of Leadership Failure and Economic Mismanagement on Unemployment and Inequality in Nigeria (1999-2023),” in *Journey of Political Discourse*, Vol 3, Issue 1, March 2025, 94.

Zakariyau, A., “Why we backed Obasanjo Over Ige, Falae in 1999 – Lamido”, in *Punch*, Saturday, August 30th, 2025.

1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)