Political Leadership and Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

1Godwyns Ade’ Agbude PhD & 2Temitope Afolabi (PG)

Abstract

This study critically examined the role and importance of political leadership in sustaining democratic practice in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. It investigated the nexus between political leadership and democratic sustainability with focus on how the leaders, through their practices, have either strengthened or relegated democratic principles in Nigeria. With secondary data which were analyzed using textual analysis alongside elite theory as framework of analysis, this study averred that despite the unbroken democratic experience in Nigeria since May 29, 1999, the state of democratic practice still remains fragile and this can be alluded to the activities of her political elites and military retirees which consistently tramples on democratic tenets via numerous unconstitutional actions. The paper established that the nature and substance of leadership determine the quality of democratic experience in Nigeria. The paper equally identified other factors that help strengthens democratic practice in Nigeria. This study thereby recommends the need for selfless leaders who are void of parochial interest, ideologically-based political parties, an independent mass media, judiciary, advocacy groups and civil societies should be very proactive as these help strengthens democratic practices.

Keywords: Democracy, Democratic Sustainability, Leadership, Nigeria and Political Leadership

Introduction

One of the anxieties exuded by scholars is the possibility of nurturing and sustaining Nigeria’s democratic practice since its advent in May 29, 1999 (Abubakar, 2004; Ajayi & Ojo, 2014). The validity of these anxieties seem to be incontestable considering several unpalatable evidences that have characterized Nigeria’s fourth republic as well as the spike in anti-democratic actions such as electoral malpractices, corruption, human right violation, abuse of power/office, etc., that is been perpetrated by political elites who ordinarily should uphold and strengthen democratic principles in Nigeria (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014; Okafor & Okafor, 2018). It is pertinent to state that every system of government has it tenets and mode of operations however, for the sustainability and continuity of such system, effort must be channeled at upholding the virtues and tenets such system thrives on. It is therefore imperative for the leadership in any setting to uphold, sustain and consolidate these ideologies and values so far they are in alignment with the interest of the generality.

In every democratic setting, it is the onus of the leadership to take steps targeted at ensuring the sustenance of democracy considering the close nexus between leadership, democratic sustainability and development of a nation. However, democratic sustainability is evidently one of the snags of the Nigerian State with respect to the Fourth Republic (Okafor & Okafor, 2018). It is however pertinent to note that man naturally is different which culminates into having different views and perception

1 Department of Political Science
Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State.
Lead Author: godwyns10@gmail.com

2 Post Graduate Student
Department of Political Science,
University of Ibadan, Oyo State
about issues. To this end, different men have their different demands from democracy as well as diverse views about what democracy should entail. Thus, looking at the laid down tenets of democracy, it is evident that the idea of democracy goes in line with some general features which includes the rule of law, credible electoral process, freedom of information, liberty, voting and also being voted for, transparency, accountability, active political processes, regular free, fair and peaceful elections etc.

The work of Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) reveals that political leaders in Nigeria have apparently digressed from the actual reasons they were elected or appointed to the path of selfishness, high-handedness, corruption, godfatherism, party politics, ethnicity and the likes. It is commonly averred that no significant achievement has been recorded by the political leaders since the advent of democracy down to this present dispensation and this has affected the pace of development in Nigeria. There is also an argument that Nigeria is not practicing democracy but a civilian rule. Promoting democracy and ensuring it thrives is however analogous to the promotion of social good, therefore making the role of leadership and other factors important in the sustenance of democracy and development.

Upon the advent of democracy in Nigeria, the hopes of most Nigerians were high considering the favourable tenets that accompany democratic practices, which include good governance, rule of law, development, and accountability, to mention a few. It is against this background that this study investigated the role and importance of political leadership in sustaining and consolidating democracy in Nigeria. It unraveled the nature and substance of political leadership in Nigeria and its effort towards sustaining or relegating democratic practice in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The Concept of Leadership

In a recent review of leadership theory, Northouse (2004) identified four common themes in the way leadership now tends to be conceived: “(1) leadership is a process; (2) leadership involves influence; (3) leadership occurs in a group context; and (4) leadership involves goal attainment.” He thus defined leadership as “a process where an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse 2004, in Bolden, 2004:5). Leadership, according to Chemers (2002), is a process by which a person affects the actions and activities of the other by virtue of influence towards the accomplishment of desired objectives.

From the above definition, it is clear that leadership is a people-oriented process. Leaders must also possess influence and also be goal oriented. It is pertinent for leaders to exude qualities that reflects integrity, discipline, vision, character, and the ability to lead and direct by example (Ogbeidi, 2012).

The Concept of Political Leadership

It is pertinent to note that political leadership as opined in this paper is not limited to the government or individual holding political positions, but also encompasses the totality of political class or elites capable of influencing the machineries of the state in one way or the other, either overtly or covertly.

Political leadership, as seen by Ogbeidi (2012), refers to the activities of ruling class either visible or invisible responsible for managing the activities of the nation. It captures the entirety of activities of governance from policy making to implementation etc. Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014) averred that in the leadership discourse, a crucial area that is well emphasized is the political aspect, which is the class encumbered with the mandate of piloting the affairs, machineries and apparatus of a nation, via making decisions channeled at improving
the lives welfare of its people. It also captures individuals involved in managing the affairs of a particular political entity. These include individual occupying critical positions in government, and those who desperately aspire to attain such feat by all available means. This includes the elites who, overtly or covertly, influence public affairs in one way or the other.

According to Alfred de Grazia (1950), a political leader can be seen as an occupant of a political position who by virtue of the occupied position, is capable of influencing the behavior of the group. Going in line with the above definition of a political leader, it is necessary to accentuate that a Political leader is someone who occupies a political position or an individual who has once occupied a political position, therefore by virtue of the position held, such individual is confined to making decisions for the people. Political leadership is all about leadership within the political sphere.

Taking a cue from Alfred de Grazia (1950), political leaders supply much of the dynamism that operates and give room for changes in political institutions. But leaders do not act in isolation; they are mirrors of the people in many ways, and their actions are adjusted at every step of the political process in line with the energy, reactions and demands of the less active and less authoritative citizenry.

**Concept of Democracy**

Democracy is construed as a prominent concept in this dispensation as a result of its people-centered tenets as well as its ability to pave way for development (Agbude, 2011; Augustine & Solomon, 2017; Ugbelem, 2019). Owolabi (2003) is of the opinion that in all societies of the world, the challenge is not about the appropriateness of a political system, but the extent, level and quality of its democracy. Ogundiya (2010) averred that the process of democratization is seen as an imperative that every society should endeavor to adopt instead of being seen as a political alternative amidst others. Democracy has been affirmed to be the only legitimate way a society can be govern (Ogundiya, 2010).

There are a lot of ambiguities associated with the concept or system of rule of democracy in modern political analysis. Indeed, there is hardly a concept that has been so exposed to several definitional perspectives, interpretations and contradictions like the concept of democracy. This is not surprising given the fact that democracy has become more and more widely praised and applauded thus making it increasingly difficult to pin down (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014).

However, going in line with the above scholarly views on the concept of democracy, it is crystal clear that there is no specific conceptualization of democracy as different scholars have their own definitional perspective on democracy. It’s pertinent to explicate that these various definitions provided by scholars bind on their own understanding, experience and expectations from democracy.

According to Oni (2014), democracy, like several social science concept has been caught is several terminologies mix-up. The crux of the issue is not conceptualizing democracy but proffering a universal definition. Scholars have expressed different perspectives and standpoints on the elements and constituents of the meaning of democracy. Contemporary literatures have contrasting views on a universal position on the definition of democracy. However, scholars, political analysts, and statesmen have emphasized the different aspect of the process. They seem to dwell on the characteristic aspect of democracy rather than coming up with a definition (Oni, 2014).

Taking a cue from Oni (2014) on the meaning of democracy, it is however on ground that giving a universally acceptable definitions of concepts, not only social science concepts is
usually problematic and this is owing to the fact that various scholars have their own way in which they view things, and their views are shaped by their perception which often reflect on their definitions of concepts.

Appadorai (1975) construed democracy as a system of government where the people exercise prerogative of governance directly or through representatives selected by them via elections. Ununu (2005) averred that democracy a system of government that gives power to the people. He identified that every truly democratic nation must possess and respect rule of law, dignity of human life, equality, sovereignty, and individual freedom.

Giddens (1996) democracy is a system of government that gives the citizens the opportunity to be key players in the process of governance by electing representatives to political positions through periodic elections. Democracy creates an avenue to partake in decisions in the political process. Succinctly, arbitrariness and authoritarianism are against democratic principles. It upholds the will of the governed and pledges its allegiance to the protection of human virtues and values (Ake, 1991 in Oke, 2010). Democracy provides avenue for the people to get involved and participate in decision making process in the state. Hence, democracy goes beyond periodic elections. It can as well be said that the importance of periodic elections is central to the democratic process as it serves as tool for political choice irrespective, there are other things democracy centers on, not only elections. It is pertinent to note that liberal and participatory democracy is crucial for good governance. Sequel to this, liberal democracy emphasizes a fair platform for political competition which should be done in a just and open manner with an equal playing field for all (Arowolo & Aluko, 2012).

Arowolo and Aluko (2012) opined that true democracy emphasizes the need for freedom, participatory government, transparency and accountability, responsiveness, protection of citizen’s right, press freedom needed to professionally report findings on the strength of logic and not emotions. Diamond (2005) averred that political and civil freedom which is a derivative of democracy is an important prerequisite for development and good governance (Cited in Arowolo & Aluko, 2012).

However, going in line with these various scholarly definitions, it is evident that democracy is an umbrella concept that covers rule of law, political participation, good governance, free and fair periodic election, transparency and accountability and also respect for fundamental human right of the individuals.

**Concept of Democratic Sustainability**

The word “sustainability” is defined as having the ability to last or continue for a long time. It also means the ability to be used without the possibility of being terminated in the process of usage.

Sequel to the above, democratic sustainability is centered on the ability of democratic practices and democratic tenets to last long and thrives overtime. It is therefore imperative to note that before we can make democracy thrive, there must be the existence and practice of democracy which subsequently thrives with time. On the strength of the aforementioned, Egbeofo (2014) averred that democratic sustenance can be said to be in place when democracy becomes evidently legitimate among the citizens and is unlikely to breakdown. This is usually made possible as a result of the maintenance and preservation of key democratic tenets. Leadership is however a critical component that can help regularize democratic activities which would then culminate into a sustainable democracy. This regularization demands the development of robust democratic culture and also the expansion of leadership recruitment as well as
an optimum performance by civil societies. A
democracy is said to be sustainable when it is
capable of withstanding pressures while still
upholding the electoral process that is
dependent on it. (Egbeofo, 2014). Sustainable
democracy is a democratic government with
inbuilt mechanism for continuity. Having
continuity means that the foundation is laid,
the younger generations can come and build on
it (Chukuezi 2007, in Olorunwa & Orimoloye,
2012).

Taking a cue from the aforementioned, it can
be deduced that democratic sustainability
emphasizes the need for continuity and
transcendence of democratic practice beyond
the present dispensation to other generations.

Sustainable democracy literally means enduring
democracy, which is a democracy that can
stand the test of time. A democratic
government that meets the needs of the
present political period, and does not poise
danger or compromise to the corporate
existence of the generation to come. In a way,
sustainable democracy will metamorphose into
consolidated democracy (Olorunwa &
Orimoloye, 2012).

In line with Olorunwa and Orimoloye (2012)
view on democratic sustainability, it is worthy
to note that democratic practice and system
should not be aimed at the present political
period alone but should be positioned to
address futuristic governmental and political
needs. That is, democracy must not dwell on
the immediate but must also possess a
futuristic ability of thriving.

In Dewey (1916), the centrality of democracy is
that it respects the choices of the people in
piloting the affairs of the state. He opined that
a democratic system allows for consensus and
also lays emphasis on equality, freedom, service
delivery, effective political leadership and
political participation which are central to the
process of policy selection and a base for
democratic sustainability (Cited in Olorunwa &
Orimoloye, 2012).

On this note, it is advisable that democracy
should not be geared towards short time
electoral cycles or based on the present
dispensation but strongly prepared for the
great intergenerational challenge that will
dominate the next generation. As a matter of
fact, change is always surfacing and democracy
is thus central in accommodating such.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study hinges on the elite theory as its
theoretical outlet of analysis. The need to
understand the nature and role of political
elites in sustaining democracy has necessitated
the study of elites. According to Higley (2008),
elites may be defined as individuals who as a
result of their strategic location or important
positions in organizations and environment are
capable of influencing political decisions
regularly.

The general idea of the elite theory centers on
the dichotomy in class structure in every
society. It opines that every society has two
classes, the few who are regarded as the haves
(elite) and the many who are the haves-not
(non-elites). Those at the upper class are
usually selected few who makes laws and
formulate policies for the lower class. The elite
theory is against the theory of pluralism which
advocates for a mechanism for ensuring equity
in power sharing in the society.

According to Duru (2012), the elite theory was
developed by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca,
Robert Michaels and Wright Mills. The central
idea of the elite theory is that every society has
some few privileged who take decisions and
determines the fate of the majority in the
society. Basically, elite theory avers that every
society consist of two strata of people (a) the
minority who are seen as elites who exercise
totality of power and influence in the society.
Policies made are a reflection of the elitist
interest rather than the interest of the majority (b) the majority are seen as the masses who are controlled by the elites. For some, elites are conceived as custodian of influence and authority who is used to wield decisions and policies in their favour. For others, elites are the only source of values in the society, they also help in ensuring the preservation of the system (Duru, 2012).

Elite theory is premised on the following assumptions:

1. Every society has two strata, the powerful few who wield power and the majority without access to power.
2. The minority with power at their disposal is not representing the interest of the many who do not possess power.
3. Ascension from non-elite position to the position of elites is usually slow and difficult in order to ensure stability and prevent a revolution.
4. The elites are committed to preserving the system hence, active elites cannot be influenced by the masses.
5. Policies made are reflection of elite values and not the masses’ interest.

The main aim of elite theory is to elucidate the power structure and power dynamics inherent in every society. It analyzes the minority who constitute the elites and the majority who are usually the masses. The masses are submissive to the elites since the elites hold leadership positions and policies and decisions usually emanate from them.

Duru (2012) opined that elites have been dubbed the greatest danger to the sustenance of democracy as their practices often negate democratic tenets. Considering the fact that elites occupy important societal positions, they are often engaged in contradictory activities that repudiates the notion of people’s government (Duru, 2012). Flowing from the above analysis, it can be debated that the elite’s poises threat to the functionality of democracy, their action, activities also depict totalitarianism as they cannot really be subjected to check by the majority in which they are meant to serve.

Application of Elite Theory to the Research

In Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, the presence of the elites is profound at the Federal, State and Local levels of government and other spheres concerned with the activities of governance.

In Nigeria, leadership is vested within the circle of the elites hence, they are charged with the activities of running the affairs of the state, and these few make laws and policies for the majority who are the masses. It is also noteworthy that policies made are reflections of the interests and aspirations of the elites. It is noteworthy that each of the assumptions of elite theory are not far-fetched in the Nigerian State. Nigerian political leaders who are also the elites will do all they can to preserve the system so as to maintain the status quo which centers on continuous domination of the state and the abuse of democratic tenets.

The various nefarious activities of leaders in Nigeria has tampered with the development of the Nigerian state and also made it impossible for the visibility of democratic tenets and also the sustainability and the consolidation of the Nigerian democracy.

Political Leadership and Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria: The Nexus

Leadership and democratic sustainability are complementary in nature. It is a vital prerequisite in preserving and promoting the integrity and cohesion of the political community. Oladipo (2007) pointed out that although Nigeria has not thrived as a corporate entity since independence, the public affairs of the country have predominantly not been managed in a manner that inspires confidence in the people. The state, instead of being an instrument for the maintenance of security and a means of providing public benefits has been used as a tool for reprisal and oppression.
Consequently, there seem to be a disconnection between the state and the society. This disconnection has therefore made the achievement of national cohesion and also the sustenance and consolidation of democracy impossible, thus impeding the realization of democratic-enduring promises of freedom and prosperity. Taking a cue from the aforementioned, it is vital to take note that for the realization of the purpose of governance, it is expedient that a vibrant political leadership be put in place in the country. Nigeria will be continually tagged a failed state until adequate attention is paid to the problem of governance and leadership, hence, the attainment of a thriving and sustainable democracy will be a mirage.

It is unarguable that there is a great level of complementarity between leadership and the sustenance of democracy, just as leadership is also important in governance, it can also help in facilitating speedy and sustainable development (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019). Leadership is also a vital prerequisite in preserving and promoting the integrity and cohesion of the political community.

According to Akande-Adeola (2013), the stability and serenity in any society is unobtainable without an effective leadership that helps in shaping the policy direction of that society. It is expedient to note that leadership is highly instrumental in achieving stability and cohesiveness in the society.

Political leadership is a necessity for democratic sustainability. As a matter of fact, political leadership is usually a product of democracy, to this end leadership invariably affects the outcome of democracy. Political leadership is integral to the sustenance of democracy as it can in various ways undermine or strengthen the elements of democracy via its activities.

Gowon (2007) made it known that political, social and economic problems plaguing the nation is not attributed to the lack of leadership, but definitely the absence of good leadership. It also noteworthy that different leaders assume positions with diverse styles of leadership. Leadership styles that is channeled towards the achievement of the general interest should be in place and leader must be able to act in line with the transformational leadership mode as we possess few transformational leaders but several transactional leaders. Transformational leaders according to Gowon are the true leaders while transactional leaders are mere managers. It can be said that the Nigeria’s leadership challenge does not center on the lack of leadership but on the absence of good leadership which is an impetus for productivity and performance. Irrespective of the leadership style adopted, focus must be on the achievement of the interest of the generality.

Political leaders must be tied to the pact that brought them in. All leaders must understand that upon their election to provide leadership, they enter into a social contract with the people. A social contract stands as an offer of leadership, an acceptance to serve and a consideration in the form of service to advance the growth and development of the society (Gowon, 2007).

The above assertion further articulates the relationship between political leadership in Nigeria and democratic sustainability. Hence, whether democracy will thrive in the Nigerian State is heavily dependent on political leadership alongside some other factors. This is owing to the fact that the actions and inactions of our leaders as a matter of fact have a role to play in the advancement or stagnation of our democracy. It is typical to aver that since political leaders are products of democratic practices, it is just necessary they uphold the virtues of the system that brought them in. In addition, since the level of growth and progress in a state is proportionate to the strength and quality of its leadership, it is however safe to affirm that the level and quality of democratic
practice inherent in a nation is equally tied to the quality and attitude of its leadership capacity.

**Leadership Challenge and the Sustenance of Democracy in Nigeria**

The challenge of leadership is a critical issue affecting democratic practice in Nigeria. It is imperative to clarify that the leadership discourse is not limited to macro level politics; it captures the activities of leaders across board down to the local level of governance. It has become so terrible that some do not even see the essence of democratic practice in Nigeria as a result of the ineptitudes that have been perpetrated by leaders serving under this democratic setting. Leadership is evidently a critical component in the activities of governance, the management of societal affairs, and the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019).

According to Ihonvbere (2009), some Nigerians averred that colonialism offered a better life than democratic practice. Such is therefore pitiable as life cannot be better under a system that thrived on dehumanization, slavery, domination, discrimination and colonization. However, such assertion simply reflects the dysfunctional nature and style of leadership in Nigeria and leadership failure.

It is imperative to understand that bad leadership cannot promote democracy and since the promotion and sustenance of democracy is farfetched, good governance would be an illusion.

The promotion of accountability, discipline, social justices and good governance will be impossible as all these cannot be encouraged by bad leadership and bad governance is however a function of bad leadership (Ihonvbere, 2009).

Ihonvbere (2009) went further to opine that good leadership rekindles hope and brings succor to the people they are mandated to serve. It helps pave way for the best minds who attract local and international support into the system. The derivatives of good leadership include quality governance, and policies that help in the consolidation of democratic practices. Good leadership can be helpful in eliciting the obedience and commitment of the citizens to the course of governance. It also helps establish quality platforms, synergies and collaborations among various stakeholders in the polity. Irrespective of the level, purposeful, quality and patriotic leadership remains a sine qua non for development. Taking a cue from the aforementioned, it can be said that one of the challenges of the Nigerian State is leadership crisis. Nigeria has no doubt had several leaders in succession who mostly come to the helm of affairs with no ideology but that of impunity as these leaders are disconnected from their followers and constantly acting contrary to the compact they signed.

Abati (2007) identified Nigeria as a nation whose political elites and leaders frustrate the effective functionality of institutions as this reduces the extent and level of their influence. The average Nigerian leader never goes into a political office with the mindset of stirring a change or making meaningful reforms, rather focus is on how the office would be desecrated and used as a rent-seeking platform to advance individual and primordial interest instead of acting in conformity to the mandate of the people (in Idada & Uhuruengho, 2012).

Speaking to the current leadership gap in Nigeria, the late renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe (1984) averred that the main challenge of the nation centers on the absence of quality leadership. The problem with Nigeria is simply a case of poor leadership. The Nigerian character, climate, land, water and air is not problematic rather, the major issue is lack of responsive leadership and the unwilling nature of the Nigerian leaders to be committed to their responsibility, which is a necessity for

Drawing from the above, it can however be said that the character and qualities of the Nigerian leader is one of the things bedeviling the sustainability of Nigerian democracy, as it can be drawn from the contributions above that the character and qualities of Nigerian leaders do not align with the sustainability of democracy, development and good governance. Hence, until there is a think shift or a change in ideology of the Nigerian leaders, the dividends of democracy will continually be a mirage.

Olaniyi & Umar (2014) posited that the predominant problem with democratization in Nigeria is the absence of free and fair election. Practically, all elections conducted in a supposedly democratic nation have been marred with several form of electoral malpractices. These electoral irregularities are usually perpetrated by majorly political leaders who would do anything within their reach to ensure the maintenance of status quo, hence, not allowing democracy take its course.

Leadership succession is one of the numerous challenges confronting Nigeria since her independence in 1960. The means of political recruitment is usually associated with enormous instability and characterized by undemocratic acts like godfatherism, ethnicity and ballot fraud. Hence, the resultant effect of this is leadership by imposition. This unpalatable experience is attributed to the long reign of military rule however, with the advent of democracy in 1999, hopes were high considering the goodwill, stability and progress democracy avails, but these democratic dividends are still far-fetched in Nigeria (Olaniyi & Umar, 2014). In addition, electoral process is never a reflection of the will of the people but the will of godfathers and other political elites, hence, once these leaders assume office they channel states’ resources into gratifying the desires of their sponsor (elites).

We can, however, posit from the aforementioned that the output of leadership in the Fourth Republic is far from been people-centered as leaders are elected or imposed so as to promote their personal and primordial interest while they advance the interest of the godfathers who helped them ascend power. These actions do not help in the sustenance of democracy as actions and inactions of the leaders will not be people-oriented but directed to the attainment of the interest of the selected few hence, robbing the people of the dividends of democracy.

**Problems of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria**

Nigeria’s democratic experience has not met the expectations of the common man. Thus, it is safe to aver that several problems inhibit democratic process in Nigeria.

According to Egwu (2000, p.1) a cursory look at the past clearly shows that the missing link in the search for enduring democratic governance is constitutionalism. The author further observes that while it is true that the country has had “legal” constitutions, these have hardly been ‘legitimate’. The process of evolving constitutions in Nigeria has all along been a state-led, elite-driven process that result in producing elegant constitution documents that can hardly provide the basis of democratic governance (Cited in Yusuf, 2007, p. 64).

It can be drawn from the aforementioned that strict adherence to constitutional provisions is a prerequisite for sustaining democracy; and that is not evident in Nigeria. Even the process that led to the 1999 constitution is said to be questionable, considering its elite-driven and non-consultative process.

Yusuf (2007) stated that it is imperative to note that irrespective of the establishment of a multi-party system in Nigeria and the return to
civil politics in May 1999 when power changed from the military to the civilian government based on competitive and open election, Nigeria cannot still be tagged a democratic nation. The above is an attestation to the fact that election is an important prerequisite for democracy but democracy encapsulates much more than is conveyed in election. Other areas that should be focused on is the credibility of the elections, the quality of the candidates, the extent to which the election was free and fair, the availability of a level playing field for all contestant etc.

However, that elections take place periodically does not automatically mean democracy is in view even though elections are impetus for democracy. Building a thriving democracy encapsulates much more than is usually captured in elections.

Another critical issue to democratic sustainability in Nigeria is the issue of military in civilian carb politics as advanced by Nweke (2015) who opined that political leadership positions have been dominated by military retirees since the introduction of democracy in Nigeria. Thus, it might be said that Nigeria practices democracy but the militarized version dominated by ex-military men who have abandoned their khaki for the new trendy “agbada” (flowing garment) but still operating via the tenets of military rule i.e. emphasis on centrality, violation of fundamental human rights, absence of the rule of law, etc. It is evident that critical leadership positions have been dominated by military retirees, e.g. the likes of Olusegun Obasanjo, Muhammadu Buhari, T.Y. Danjuma, David Mark etc. hence, the severe ignoble actions that characterizes Nigeria’s democratic practice. The military-styled democratic rule in Nigeria is usually saddled with despotism and dictatorship accompanied with a ridiculous level of “kleptocracy” (Nweke, 2015).

From the aforementioned, it can be deduced that the practice of democracy in Nigeria have largely been influenced by the activities of military men in civilian “agbada” who have infused the military norm into civilian rule thus negating the important and enduring tenets of democracy. Furthermore, “the issue of morality in politics is considered archaic and absent in our democratic political culture” (Yusuf, 2007, p.74). In the words of Osaghae (1994, p. 70), “this unfortunate tendency, coupled with the palpable lack of interest of African political scientists in philosophy, accounts for the relative neglect of morality which is thus important in sustaining democracy.”

Osaghae (1994) furthered held that as a result of the missing link of morality, the process of democratic politics in Nigeria is characterized by devious mass rigging of elections, assassinations of opponents, deceitfulness, massive financial corruption and misappropriation by administrators who do not consider such atrocities as politically unethical. If it exists to pursue the interests of only few, then it has no right to expect obedience from the people no matter who its operators may be. As long as this perception persists, obedience will be problematic” There is need for state credibility and operators of the machinery of the state should also be seen as credible by the people and perhaps such credibility becomes impossible, as the case may be in Nigeria today, the polity is likely to be unstable and polarized. To illustrate further, credibility and transparency is nothing but a moral imperative for the survival of democracy in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular (Osaghae, 1994, pp. 70-71 cited in Yusuf, 2007).

From the aforementioned, morality even though in recent times it’s seen as archaic goes a long way in helping to sustain our long cherished democracy. Morality basically dwells on the idea of ethics, good or bad, decency, principles and the likes that are virtues that shape individuals and instill in them the right
ideology needed to successfully manage democracy.

According to Onu (1994), democracy also acknowledges the right of all citizens to dissent. A sustainable democracy is also characterized by social integration which makes possible a wide spread habit of tolerance or accommodation of differences over issues and policies (Cited in Yusuf, 2007). By extension, the rule by the majority as regards official policy formulation and acceptance of that policy by the minorities upon persuasion is not enough without social integration. As a culturally-plural nation, Nigeria needs social integration now more than any other period in the historical evolution of the country for the present democratization process to be sustained and consolidated. It can be drawn from the above that social integration is not evident in Nigeria, as we have different diversities, however, this inhibits peaceful coexistence and unanimous agreement on policies and issues for the betterment of the country, thus constantly impeding a thriving democracy.

According to Yusuf (2007), one can assert that the failure of democratic politics in Nigeria over the years could be attributed to the absence of legitimacy from the citizens. The seven years of “democracy” or rather civilian government from 1999 to 2006 has been characterized by distrust of the government by the public. Basic trust from the people has become gradually eroded following deceitful statement and empty promises by administrative stakeholders. People no longer believe in the government and consequently the expected legitimate support became apparently weak. As a result of the malpractices that characterizes the democratic process as well as several failed promises, the citizenry no longer see the leadership as legitimate which is definitely against democratic practices.

Diamond (1987) held that Nigeria’s political environment is characterized by suspicion, jealousy, pride and insecurity, which have culminated into widespread tension and conflict by political leaders as a well thought-out strategy in the struggle for power and wealth. Furthermore, Nigeria’s first attempt at practicing democracy failed as a result of the absence of unity and trust among its ethnic compositions. Ironsi’s regime suffered backlash and was eventually overthrown as a result of suspicions. Gowon and Murtala’s regime were not successful too. The second attempt at democratization was the Shagari’s regime was overthrown on the basis of trust. In the same vein, the military regime of Buhari, who succeeded Shagari, was also overthrown by General Babangida alongside his cohort because of trust issues among the military leaders (Cited in Yusuf, 2007). The issue of mutual suspicion is still evident even among political parties. Opposition parties usually see activities of the ruling party i.e. fight against corruption, investigation of policies, contracts etc. as vendetta against them or targeted at decimating their influence. Notwithstanding, the fact that this might sometimes be true, it is not always the case. All these from analysis pose as challenges to the survival of democracy in Nigeria, however, making it impossible for the actualization of sustainable democracy.

**Factors Promoting Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria**

It is imperative to point out that aside political leadership, there are other salient factors that contribute to the preservation and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. An excellent, quality, and purposeful leadership is imperative but not enough in the sustenance and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. In order to achieve the desired democratic output, good leadership is just a part of the entire system hence, other parts such as an active and interested electorate, an independent press, independent judiciary, periodic elections, and vibrant civil
societies etc., need to be properly positioned to achieve this.

Okowa (2015) posited that there is a strong connection between political parties and the sustenance of democracy. Sustainable democracy however requires the existence of viable political parties fostering a people-centered democracy as they are important platforms that support political recruitment. It is imperative to note that political parties are major players in a political system and to this end, have a part to play in the sustenance of democracy. Political parties should not just focus on hijacking and controlling political power but must plan for immediate demands and subsequent needs of the people. Political parties must also be in tune with making futuristic plans that help in the sustenance and consolidation of the Nigerian democracy. Hence, political parties need to have an ideology to run with and not just fixated on hijacking political power, they should also give opportunity to visionary individuals with fresh insight instead of recycling the same old set of retirees. In addition, parties should also enshrine internal democracy by ensuring whoever emerges via their platform is a product of consensus rather than imposition and godfatherism (Ahmed & Ali, 2019).

An independent mass media is another salient factor that helps in the promotion of sustainable democracy. According to Pate (2009), it is evident that there is a strong nexus between media performance and political conducts or activities in democratic systems. Curran and Seaton (1994) argued that the media is a realm that is reconstituted by the citizens with the power to supervise the affairs of the state, which is a necessity for our democracy (Cited in Pate, 2009). Taking a cue from the aforementioned, it should be known that the imperativeness of the mass media cannot be underestimated as it acts as check on the government and also gives the people an idea of happenings in government. The media is thus the fourth realm of the estate and must not be involved in partisan politics, hence should report objectively and logically considering its sensitive role as a watchdog.

The importance of an independent judiciary cannot be overemphasized as a necessary impetus for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Iwuchukwu (2013) is of the opinion that several individual have unanimously dubbed an independent judiciary a bedrock of true democracy. This is however so because it avails judges the opportunity to preside and make impartial decisions without fear of dire consequences. Its importance in strengthening democracy is key considering its role as the hope of the common man. One of the elements of democracy is the rule of law, this cannot be achieved if there is no independent judiciary. An independent judiciary helps to prevent anarchical rule and makes sure people act in conformity with the law. Independent judiciary is evidently a basis for sustainable democracy as it helps to pave way for the prevalence of justices. The judiciary also rises up to their responsibility of adjudication by prosecuting corrupt cases religiously, and as such discouraging political corruption via their verdicts and pronouncement. The bulk of electoral tribunal dispute also ends on their desk hence; they are the hope of not only the common man but also the democratic process.

In addition to the aforementioned, it is important to note that there is a need to respect the civil and political right of the people. The fundamental human rights of the people must be upheld. There must not be any form of violation on the civic and political rights of the common man. The right to voting and being voted for and also to participate in political activities in line with their constitutional rights must be upheld.

The importance of vibrant civil societies in promoting democratic sustainability is also crucial. It is necessary to state that civil
societies occupy the same public realm alongside the state. Civil societies are not as powerful as the state and lack the power to overthrow the state but they wield considerable amount of influence over the state and as such can act as check on the activities of the state and also call the state to order.

Conclusion
This paper examined the role of political leadership within the context of democratic sustainability considering the imperativeness of sustenance and consolidation to the success of democracy. Political leadership in Nigeria have been characterized by ambitious individuals controlling the machinery of the state and also ensuring the rotation of power between the same set of visionless people. These elites lack the requisite leadership ideology and have indulged in inimical acts that consistently undermine the substance and practice of democracy, hence, making democratic sustainability a herculean task. Nigeria’s political leadership has failed to avail the needed course and support that can catalyze into the survival of democracy as their activities are often antithetical to democratic principles. This lacuna in leadership constitutes a major setback in establishing a thriving democratic practices in Nigeria. Irrespective of the long reign of military rule, Nigeria’s democratic system is evidently fragile and requires a strong amount of commitment to democratic tenets for it to thrive. Therefore, aside the virulent and tensed political sphere that tends to weaken democratic process in the nation, activities of its political leaders are also in contrast with the demands of democracy. Other salient factors that contribute to democratic sustainability include; an independent mass media, efficient and incorruptible judiciary, civil and advocacy groups, respect for human and minority rights, liberalized democratic system, rule of law etc. Without quality political leadership alongside other fundamental factors that supports democratic practices, democratic sustainability in Nigeria will remain a mirage.

Recommendations
Having examined the twin issue of political leadership and democratic practice in Nigeria, the imperativeness of the following recommendations cannot be overemphasized.

There is the need for selfless leaders who are void of parochial interest. Leaders should therefore be appointed based on merit and this should be done dispassionately. Ethnicity, religion and the likes should not be a prerequisite for electing and appointing leaders. There is also the need for viable successor, that is, leaders should source for possible successor who possesses the same people-centered vision like the incumbent. The individuals, who are the followers should also avoid been instigated by godfathers against the system. Voting and decisions by the followers should not be premised on the decisions and interest of political godfathers. Also, the importance of civil societies and advocacy groups that are void of parochial interest cannot be overemphasized. Civil societies act as check on the government, thus constructively criticizing the government and also protecting the rights of the people. They also sensitize the people and keep them abreast of happenings in the political system thus, helping in giving the people a vibrant political culture, which automatically fosters political participation that is crucial for the sustenance of democracy. An independent mass media is important. The place of the media as the fourth realm of the estate cannot be underestimated in a democracy as it helps in checking the activities of government and also create awareness about happenings in government. The media should also report objectively and logically considering its vital position.

The judiciary must help to ensure strict adherence to the law thus, making sure defaulters get punished irrespective of their
status quo in the society. The judiciary should as well be sanitized and free from corruption and manipulations. There is also the need for a more liberalized democratic system so as to help break the rigidity of political parties, thus making it easy for independent candidature to surface without the need of being subjected to manipulation by political parties. Political parties must ensure they rise up to their responsibility of proffering viable alternatives for political recruitment. The process of political recruitment needs to be transparent and in line with laid down criteria. Internal democracy should be upheld in the selection of candidates who will represent the party rather than the usual manipulation orchestrated by party leaders and godfathers who are known for subjugating due process to pave way for their preferred candidates. A framework that respects human and minority rights must be in place in order to ensure that the rights and privileges of the people are respected and not violated. This goes a long way in helping to promote and sustain democratic practice. The need for a transparent and accountable government cannot be overemphasized as this would help keep the leaders in check.

References


Chemers, M. M. (2002). Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Intelligence of Transformational


A Study of the Impact of Social Media on Nigerian Politics


