The Continuous Existence of Leaders and the Cyclical Nature of Leadership Change: A View from Present-Day Nigerian Society

Atianashie Miracle Atianashie

School of Graduate Studies, Catholic University of Ghana, Sunyani, Ghana

E-mail address:
miracle.atianashie@cug.edu.gh

Abstract: The notion of a persistent leading within societies, where revolutions merely result in shifts of leadership rather than substantial societal transformations, is a subject of profound relevance in the complicated socio-political landscape of contemporary Nigeria. This study ventures into the heart of this concept, using Nigeria's complex terrain as a compelling lens through which to examine its applicability. Nigeria is a nation marked by enduring challenges, including pervasive corruption, stark economic disparities, and relentless power struggles. These issues persist despite repeated changes in leadership, raising pertinent questions about the underlying structures that perpetuate elite influence. By carefully analyzing instances from Nigerian society that exemplify the resilience of elites, even in the face of revolutionary shifts in power, this study underscores the enduring relevance of this debate. It also investigates the multifaceted contributors to this phenomenon, delving into the role of institutional frameworks, deeply ingrained cultural nuances, and the formidable obstacles that hinder meaningful societal transformation. Through this comprehensive exploration, the research not only enhances our understanding of the intricate interplay between leadership upheavals and the entrenched structures upholding elite power but also illuminates the complex dynamics that continue to shape the evolution of contemporary Nigerian society. Ultimately, it prompts a critical examination of the prospects for genuine societal change in a nation where revolutions have often yielded superficial rather than substantive transformations.

Keywords: Corruption, Economic Disparity, Power Struggles, Nigeria Society

1. Introduction

The idea that there is always an elite in society and that revolutions only result in a change of leaders rather than a fundamental transformation has been a subject of debate and analysis in various contexts [1] In the case of contemporary Nigerian society, this contention holds particular relevance due to the country's complex socio-political landscape, characterized by longstanding issues of corruption, economic inequality, and power dynamics. [2] To explore this contention, we will examine examples from Nigerian society that illustrate the persistence of elites despite changes in leadership resulting from revolutions or political transitions. [3] We will also consider factors contributing to this phenomenon, including systemic structures, cultural dynamics, and the challenges of achieving substantial change.

2. The Persistence of Elites in Nigerian Society

Example 1: Political Dynasties

One significant illustration of the persistent elite in Nigeria is the prevalence of political dynasties. While the country has undergone multiple political transitions and elections, certain families maintain their grip on political power across generations. A prime example is the case of the Saraki family in Kwara State. [4]. Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, members of the Saraki family have held key political positions, including governorships and senatorial seats. Despite changes in leadership at the national level and the emergence of new political parties, the Saraki family's influence remains largely intact, revealing the continuity of a

political elite within the state [5].

Political dynasties, characterized by the perpetuation of political power within certain families across generations, are not unique to national politics in Nigeria; they also manifest at the local level. One notable example of a political dynasty can be found in Boki Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria [6]. The existence of political dynasties in Boki Local Government, as exemplified by the Enoh family's multi-generational involvement in politics, underscores the contention that elites persist despite changes in leadership resulting from political transitions. [7, 8] The Enoh family's ability to maintain their political influence over the years can be attributed to factors such as networks, patronage, and name recognition. [9] While political dynasties can have both positive and negative consequences, they raise important questions about the nature of representation, accountability, and democratic governance at the local level in Nigeria. [10, 11]

Cross River State in General in Nigeria also provides an insightful example of political dynasties, showcasing the persistence of elites within the region's political landscape. The case of political dynasties in Cross River State, Nigeria, serves as a microcosm of the broader contention that elites persist even in the face of changing leadership or political transitions. Families like the Dukes and Agabis exemplify how connections, resources, and political acumen can enable a dynasty to endure, maintaining its influence over time. While these dynasties might contribute to development and stability, they also raise concerns about democratic representation, accountability, and inclusivity within the political process. To address these challenges, it becomes crucial for both citizens and policymakers to engage in discussions about the nature of political power, the role of families in politics, and the overall health of democratic institutions. [12]

Example 2: Economic Oligarchy

Nigeria's economic landscape also exemplifies the contention that elites persist despite revolutions. The nation's wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, often connected to powerful political figures. The case of the "cabal" – a term used to refer to a group of influential individuals who are said to exert significant control over decision-making processes – demonstrates the longevity of economic elites. Regardless of the political transitions or changes in government, these economic elites continue to wield considerable influence over resource allocation and economic policies.

3. Revolution and Change of Leaders

Example 1: 2015 Presidential Election

The 2015 Nigerian presidential election is often seen as a significant political transition that exemplifies the idea of changing leaders through revolution. [14] The election marked the first time an opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, defeated an incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan. This transition was heralded as a victory for democracy and a

hopeful sign of change. However, while the leadership changed hands, many of the underlying issues that plagued Nigerian society persisted. Corruption, economic inequality, and security challenges remained entrenched, indicating that merely changing leaders did not address the root causes of these problems. [15]

Example 2: EndSARS Movement

The #EndSARS movement in 2020 highlighted the desire for revolutionary change in Nigerian society, particularly concerning police brutality and governance. The protests led to significant international attention and prompted discussions about the need for systemic change. While the movement succeeded in pressuring the government to disband the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), it also revealed the challenges of achieving comprehensive transformation. The existing power structures and elites remained largely untouched, raising questions about the long-term impact of the movement on broader societal issues. [16]

The #EndSARS movement was a significant social movement that emerged in Nigeria in October 2020 [17]. It focused on calling for an end to police brutality, particularly the misconduct and abuses perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police Force [13].

The movement gained international attention and highlighted broader issues of governance, corruption, and systemic challenges in Nigerian society. The #EndSARS movement in Nigeria serves as a contemporary example of how social movements can bring attention to pressing issues and lead to changes in leadership, but the road to comprehensive structural change is challenging. [12] While the movement achieved some immediate successes, it also highlighted the complexities of addressing deeply rooted problems within a society. The movement's dynamics underscore the need for sustained efforts to transform institutions, change cultural norms, and hold leaders accountable to achieve meaningful and lasting change in Nigeria. [18]

4. Factors Contributing to Elite Persistence

4.1. Systemic Structures in Nigeria

One reason for the persistence of elites in Nigeria is the deep-rooted systemic structures that enable their continuity. Political patronage networks, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak rule of law often allow elites to maintain their positions of power despite leadership changes. These structures create a cycle where new leaders may come into office, but they find it challenging to break free from existing networks and implement substantial reforms. [19]

Systemic structures in Nigeria refer to the established patterns, institutions, and processes that shape the country's political, economic, social, and cultural landscape [20]. These structures often have a deep-rooted influence on various aspects of Nigerian society and can either enable or

hinder progress, development, and equitable distribution of resources. Examining some of these systemic structures can shed light on the challenges the country faces and the reasons why certain issues, such as the persistence of elites and difficulty achieving comprehensive change, persist. The systemic structures in Nigeria are complex and interconnected, contributing to the persistence of elites, challenges in achieving comprehensive change, and various other issues faced by the country. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that tackles corruption, strengthens institutions, promotes equitable economic growth, and fosters social inclusion. Recognizing and understanding these systemic structures is crucial for policymakers, civil society, and citizens to work together toward building a more just, inclusive, and prosperous Nigeria. [12]

4.2. Cultural Dynamics in Nigeria

Cultural factors also play a role in elite persistence. Respect for authority and hierarchical structures can make it difficult for grassroots movements to challenge deeply ingrained power dynamics. Additionally, certain cultural norms might prioritize stability and continuity over radical change, making it harder for revolutionary movements to gain sustained momentum.

Cultural dynamics in Nigeria play a significant role in shaping the country's social norms, behaviors, and interactions. Nigeria's diverse population consists of over 250 ethnic groups, each with its languages, traditions, and practices [20]. This diversity contributes to a complex cultural landscape that influences various aspects of life, including politics, religion, social interactions, and even governance. Ethnic identity is a central aspect of cultural dynamics in Nigeria. The country's diverse ethnic groups often have distinct languages, traditions, and histories. While this diversity can be a source of strength, it has also been associated with tensions and conflicts. [9] The concept of federalism was adopted in part to accommodate these diverse groups and ensure representation at the national level. However, it has also led to power struggles among ethnic groups and calls for greater autonomy. Gender roles and norms are deeply rooted in Nigerian culture. While progress has been made in terms of women's participation in education and the workforce, traditional gender norms still influence many aspects of society. Women often face challenges in accessing leadership positions and economic opportunities, despite their significant contributions to the economy and society. [12]

Cultural dynamics in Nigeria are rich and complex, reflecting the diversity of the nation's population. These dynamics influence political, social, and economic interactions, shaping the challenges and opportunities that Nigeria faces [6]. Navigating these dynamics requires a delicate balance between honoring cultural heritage and adapting to the changing needs of modern society. Recognizing and leveraging the strengths of Nigeria's cultural diversity while addressing its challenges is essential for building a more inclusive, harmonious, and prosperous nation.

5. Challenges of Achieving Substantial Change

Achieving substantial change in present-day Nigerian society presents a myriad of challenges. One of the most significant obstacles is the deeply entrenched culture of corruption that has permeated various levels of government and institutions. Corruption not only hampers economic progress but also erodes public trust in the government, making it difficult to implement and sustain meaningful reforms. Another major challenge is the country's ethnic and religious diversity, which, while vibrant, can also be a source of tension and division. Building a unified and inclusive national identity in such a diverse society requires delicate political maneuvering and social cohesion efforts.

Furthermore, Nigeria faces serious security threats, including terrorism, insurgency, and communal violence. These security challenges not only disrupt daily life but also divert resources and attention away from crucial development initiatives. The lack of access to quality education and healthcare is another obstacle to change. A large portion of the population lacks access to basic services, hindering human capital development and perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Moreover, infrastructure deficits, including unreliable power supply and inadequate transportation networks, pose significant challenges to economic growth and development.

Political instability and a history of military coups have also hindered the establishment of consistent and effective governance structures. Achieving substantial change in present-day Nigerian society necessitates addressing a complex web of challenges, including corruption, ethnic and religious divisions, security threats, inadequate social services, infrastructure deficits, and political instability. Overcoming these obstacles will require a concerted effort from government, civil society, and international partners to create a more equitable and prosperous future for Nigeria. [6]

6. Conclusion

In contemporary Nigerian society, the contention that there is always an elite and that revolutions merely change leaders is supported by examples from both the political and economic spheres. The persistence of political dynasties and economic oligarchies underscores the resilience of elites despite shifts in leadership. The examples of the 2015 presidential election and the #EndSARS movement demonstrate that while leadership transitions can occur through revolutionary moments, achieving meaningful change requires tackling systemic issues that often outlast individual leaders. Factors contributing to elite persistence include deeply entrenched systemic structures, cultural dynamics that uphold existing

power hierarchies, and the inherent challenges of achieving substantial transformation. To truly address the issues of corruption, economic inequality, and governance in Nigeria, efforts must go beyond the surface level of leadership changes and engage with the complex interplay of political, economic, and cultural forces that sustain the elite status quo.

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