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**Political leadership and brain drain among Nigerian youths: Causes and effects**

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**Abstract**

*The paper examines political leadership and how it has impacted on youth development in Nigeria. Leadership had played germane roles to enhance youth development in most states across the world, but the reverse is the case in Nigeria. This study made use of qualitative approach and adopted greed-based theory as its theoretical framework. Political Leadership since the return to democratic government in 1999 has perpetually made most of the youths in the country to be less productive as a result of policies and dispositions of government to their plights. This is majorly perceived to be a result of monumental diversion of public funds meant for the economic development of Nigeria at different levels into individual pockets, thus, affecting the energetic population of the country in virtually all sectors, including education, health, agriculture, politics, science and technology, among others negatively. Aside other social vices discovered to have emanated from the nonchalant attitudes of the political leaders in Nigeria, the paper singled out “Japa-syndrome” (brain drain) as the major consequence of youth underdevelopment in Nigeria today. The paper therefore recommended among other, the need to make political leadership positions at all levels less attractive in terms of financial and other benefits, as this, will reduce the unhealthy scrambling for political power in the country and pave way for serious minded individuals to aspire for political leadership positions for the benefits of the entire populace.*

**Keywords:** Development, Political leadership, Nigeria, Youths.

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**1. Introduction**

Leadership remains pivotal in the quest for development across the globe. In a democratic society, political leadership enhances the development of different spheres for the holistic growth of all. In the recent World bank's development report, about 184 million people, 2.3 percent of the world's population, live outside of their country of nationality. Almost half of them are in low- and middle-income countries (World bank, 2023). This, over the years have been a bane to many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where political leaders in most cases had abrogated their welfare, and security of lives and property among others onus expected of good leaders.

Several forms of social vices have been witnessed in Nigeria since the return to democratic rule in 1999 as the political leadership who had hitherto raised the hopes of the people at the disengagement of the military failed to live up to expectation (Muhammad, 2023). The failure to truly ensure development of the youths across the three levels of government has led to a high rate of insecurity including youthful unrest, armed robbery, thuggery, banditry, abductions, kidnapping, ritual killings, cyber-crime and other criminal activities in the country. As observed by Nwagbosa (2012), one of the main causes of insecurity in Nigeria is the failure of successive governments to solve the problems of



poverty, unemployment, and unequal wealth distribution among ethnic groups. The visionless, egotistical, mediocre, tribalistic, and opportunistic "small money-minded" leaders who have been reshaping Nigeria's political landscape since 1960 are to blame for the foundation of this issue. (Okolie & Igbini, 2020).

Nigerians appear to have experienced the worst conditions they could have possibly imagined since 2009 when Boko Haram insurgency started; in fact, Nigerians are seeing criminals and terrorists attacking the country's sovereignty despite protestations from the political elite (Muhammad, 2023). They are misgoverned by a draconian gerontocracy of self-serving political elite that is growing in power; they are reduced to pauperism by rising inflation and a nearly zero-production economy; and they are stifled by a decadent system of dysfunctional education that has a high jobless rate (Adepoju, 2015) and no succession plans.

Nigeria is quickly turning into one of the least likely places to consider a rewarding future given the concomitant dissatisfaction and despondency among young people. Therefore, it is undeniable that a large number of disillusioned Nigerians are moving abroad on a daily basis. Indeed, migration is a fact of human existence and has been instrumental in the overall development of host countries. In some cases, it may be beneficial to the home country of the emigrant. However, it becomes a source of worry when it occurs suddenly and increasingly to a point where it begins to drastically affect a country's economy and human resources, as is the case with Nigeria.

It must be made clear that no sustainable development can be accomplished without involving the young people, particularly in the new normal where engagement and other governance activities are digitalized. This is because the new world order favours pro-activeness and adaptation to global changes. Youth participation at all levels of

government is therefore essential for a successful democratic society and leadership in order to increase governance's stability, effectiveness, and efficiency. It is on this premise that the paper examines how political leadership in Nigeria have negatively affected the youthful population causing incessant exodus of energetic Nigerians. X-raying the causes and effects on the development of the country.

## **2. Methodology**

Desk-top method was adopted in this paper with use of secondary data sources such as official publications, textbooks, newspaper, journals, internet and documentary where relevant information to explain the effects of political leadership on brain drain of the Nigerian youths.

## **3. Review of Literature**

Leadership is a buzzword used by several scholars and writers in different climes around the world. It is a process of influencing the behaviors of an organized group toward the creation and realization of goals (Okolie & Igbini, 2020). In the words of Achebe (1981), leadership is a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. The idea that "everything rises and falls on leadership and every endeavor you can undertake that involves other people will live or die depending on leadership" was supported by Achebe's description. A leader should be able to carry the burden of overall development of the society. Shoff (2020), explained in his article on servant-leader, that, a leader must think outside of the box in order to conceptualise an issue or organization from a perspective that is different from their everyday experience. Thus, a leader must be a critical thinker who goes steps ahead of the followers on issues facing the society or in an organisation. There are different types of leadership styles, visionary, transactional, charismatic, transformational, autocratic, bureaucratic,



democratic and laissez-faire Leadership style (Eneanya, 2010). We consider the democratic leadership style in this paper, since, it goes with involvement of different people in the decision-making process.

In a concise definition, political leadership refers to the influence that a political office holder's actions have on political outcomes and decision-making. As a result, it is related to leadership style and may have roots in particular personality features of the leader. Political leadership is closely link to the basic tenets of democracy, chief among which is equality protected by the constitutional separation of powers and paired with the notion of popular sovereignty. In the end, democracy is based on the idea that the rule of law is embedded in the rule of many.

Political leadership in Nigeria can be historically linked to the years following the country's acquisition of republican status in 1963, which gave its political leaders the official and legal authority to continue the nation's political activities. Since then, Nigeria has been led by 16 different presidents, with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu currently in charge after President Muhammadu Buhari stepped down on May 29, 2023.

### **Youth Development**

The meaning of the term 'youth' varies in different societies around the world. The Secretary-General of United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Kraus, 2019). Youth is considered as 'a social group made up of people aged about 15 to 25, who no longer fulfil the role of children, but are not yet conceded the role of adults by society (Arches & Fleming, 2017; Jegede, Irewole, & Dada, 2019). In the United National Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) documents the upper age limit for a youth is twenty-six years, in United Nation (UN) materials youths are between 15 and 24 years old (Kraus, 2019). In this paper, we perceive youth as younger

generation above the childhood stage and below the old stage of human growth. To us, the youths are able bodied men and women who consist of the workforce in a society and are able to contribute through their energy and skills to the development of a state. Thus, we pegged the age bracket of youth to be between 16 and 55 years.

In their own view, Adhikari et al. (2021) pointed out that the number of Nigerian migrants abroad has jumped from about 450,000 in 1990 to 1.4 million in 2019. The issue is that the population of youths in Nigeria is greatly increasing. However, in spite of the high educational levels and job skills, a lot of these youths are unemployed in Nigeria. At the same moment, the working-age population of Europeans is decreasing. This has resulted in shortage of labor forces in mid-skill professions in some European countries. The Nigerian situation of unemployed youths and European's case of insufficient mid-skilled labor make international migration of former's youths to latter inevitable (Adhikari et al., 2021). This is why Clemens (2020) had earlier pointed out the existence of what he called "migration hump" in which people in poor countries will increasingly migrate in large number to rich countries.

The leadership of the developing countries such as Nigeria needs to brace-up in the area of youth development as seen in most developed nations. Chang et al (2022) avers that youth empowerment is the process of making young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and the lives of others. This is a pointer to the fact that, youthful stage is the stage of constructing the self-concept; a time in a person's life when he makes crucial choices and takes decisions on things which will affect his future (Afolaya, 2018).

Youth development in this context is an approach to stop all forms of marginalization and negligence of youths and to give them equal opportunity and



access to education, financial control, entrepreneur capacity, political participation, leadership etc. regardless of gender (Idris, 2014). Avail to say that good governance matter for empowering young people; especially in third world countries like Nigeria where transitioning to adulthood is increasingly becoming more difficult due to challenges in accessing quality education, decent jobs, healthcare and affordable housing. Abayomi (2021) asserts that socioeconomic insecurities have led to lower trust in national governments, potentially undermining the legitimacy of public institutions. And going by the Nigerian context of gerontocracy in an ageing society, the growing demand for sustainable development are likely to increase and generate long-term social and economic costs. Consequently, many young people express concern about inequalities, marginalization as well as their repercussions on well-being and inclusive growth.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on the Social Contract Theory (SCT). The theory is used to explain the linkage between poor political leadership and the incessant exodus of youths from Nigeria. SCT, is associated with the neo-classical political theorists who largely drew their assumptions from the classical theorists. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679); John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1478), were universally known as the leading exponents in the SCT discourse. Though, their arguments about the state of nature were not directly related, their solutions were related. Specifically, this paper draws insight from the social contract assumptions of Thomas Hobbes. The hub of the theory holds that the true foundation of any governed society is a creation of an agreement. All citizens in a society agree to partake in a social union in the form of a deal under equal condition (Friend, 2016). This was after the state of nature as postulated by Hobbes which was according

to him brutish, nasty, solitary, poor and short. The deal necessitated that everybody relinquished all-natural rights and liberties; giving up their individual freedom for the empowerment of the collective will of the people (Duignan, 2020) through an individual known as the Leviathan. The Leviathan makes rule and regulations which the people obey and also provides for their well-being. The people, by entering into the social contract assented to a generally beneficial framework (that is good governance) by which society could be organized for the common good. Therefore, individuals who by nature are free and equal, agreed to renounce part of their natural liberty for a social pact which they subject themselves for the sake of the advantages provided by civil society (Falaye and Okeregbe, 2016). Therefore, those at the helm of affairs (the Nigerian leviathans) are under obligation to work tirelessly to promote the welfare of the people, and concomitantly gain their support, particularly the youth who make up around 70% of the population (Olatunji, 2023; Ndukwe, 2016). This is due to the fact that the hallmark of good governance is the ability of democratic leadership to effectively administer platforms for indiscriminate political participation, high-quality education, youth empowerment through meaningful employment opportunities, the creation of a favorable economic environment for development, and the preservation of the rights to social justice and political choice of the masses without imposing any gerontocratic leadership on them (Akhakpe, 2019).

Instead of the good governance for which the Nigerian youths gave up their individual rights/liberties in a social contract, according to Okpe (2021), young people in Nigeria are growing accustomed to bad governance, adopting attitudes of fatalism, resignation, and acceptance of the status quo, and they are beginning to accept the ongoing condition of depravity as the new normal. As a result, rather than functioning



as a part of the machinery for the planning and execution of the nation's developmental goals, absence of good governance and growing social problems have produced an environment where young people in Nigeria are easily manipulated by politicians who only care about themselves (Chinnah, 2019; Kasali, 2020).

According to scholars, the inability of governance to fulfil the social contract that empowers youth and creates an environment that fosters entrepreneurship has led to a number of young people engaging in activities that they view as the simplest way to make ends meet and satisfy their desires. This may be seen in the way that young people turn to illegal acts, such as armed robbery, pickpocketing, vote box snatching, political thuggery, drug misuse, online fraud, ritual killings, and other vices, in order to meet their fundamental necessities (Otieno *et al.*, 2022). While those who detest such social vices, gather funds and decides to leave the country and in most cases, the funds gathered are even questionable among some of the youths who want to travel out of Nigeria by all means. These happened as a result of failure on the part of the political leaders to create enabling terrains for the youth to develop as part of the contract signed every four (4) year at the polls in Nigeria.

#### **4. Factors Necessitating the incessant Exodus of Youth from Nigeria**

Going by the social contract theorists' proposition on the state, failure on the part of the political leadership in Nigeria to adhere to their own side of the contract which is also stated in Chapter 2, Section 14(2b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria constitutes the bulk of the movement seen by the youth to seek better living conditions outside the country. Other germane causes of the continuous exodus of youths from Nigeria includes:

##### **Economic Hardship**

The level of economic hardship faced by Nigerians as a result of government policies

remain alarming. With prices of goods increasing on a daily basis, an average Nigerian is faced with at least any of the three economic hardships: income poverty, material deprivation and subjective financial stress (Anika & Painco, 2019). Most Nigerians especially those of youthful age get meagre salaries for the work they render, and some are even underemployed resulting to them battling with income poverty. The money they receive from work can only sustain them on feeding and the need to have other germane material things to support their living condition becomes difficult thus, resulting to material deprivation which often leads to frustration and aggression. The impact of income poverty and material deprivation is often felt by those who are said to rich in the family as the less privilege looks up to them for assistance from time to time, hence, subjective financial stress set-in for them. Nigerian political leaders rely more on crude oil exportation for revenue as seen in budgetary estimates since 1999. Any fall in the price of oil at the international markets definitely affects the country too thus, impending needed infrastructures that will great enabling environment for the youths to thrive. The economic hardship and restricted prospects for personal growth and development within the country. The high rates of unemployment and the difficulty in finding steady, well-paying employment that can support a comfortable quality of living demoralize a lot of young Nigerians. They so turn to other nations with stronger economies and greater opportunities for career advancement

##### **Insecurity**

Nigeria as a nation has had a long, checked history of insecurity. Lives and property of an average Nigerian are not safe and even hope of living tomorrow becomes blink on a daily basis. Insurgency, armed conflicts, banditry, attacks by secessionists, ritual killings, herder-farmers conflicts and the increasing rate of kidnapping for ransom are the common security to a peaceful co-



existence in Ngeria today. Since, the swearing-in of President Bola Tinubu on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2023, over 2, 423 people have been killed in different ways, some through auto crash, boat accidents and the recent Christmas eve killings of residents of Bokkos and Barkin Ladi areas of Plateau

state by armed attackers (Odeniyi & Angbulu, 2023; Isa, 2023). Kidnappers have killed some of their abductors in different parts of the country. Some were killed even after paying ransom. The table below shows some of the killings by kidnappers in Nigeria.

**Table 1: Selected cases of Kidnapped Victims killed (2022-2024)**

S/n	State	Names of Killed Victims	Number	Remarks
1.	Ugbe-Akoko, Ondo State	Augustine Okoye and his wife	2	They were gruesomely killed after payment of ransom was made.
2.	River State	Justice Azunda	1	River State officer’s corpse recovered from kidnappers’ den in the forest.
3.	FCT, Abuja	Ariyo Folorunsho	1	13-years old child killed by kidnapper in Abuja.
4.	Dusten-Alhaji Area, FCT, Abuja		3	Killed by kidnappers for not paying ransom in time.
5.	Ikole, Ekiti State	David Ogunsakin and Olatunde Olushola	2	Royal fathers killed by kidnappers on their way back from Irele-Ekiti, Ekiti State.

Source: Johnson (2022), Oporum (2022), Shaibu (2024), Ogbonnaiye (2024).

As a result, young Nigerians often seek safer havens abroad, where they can pursue their ambitions without the constant threat of violence as the case with Nigeria.

**Infrastructural Deficits**

One crucial determinant for growth and development in any given society is the availability of functioning infrastructures such as quality education, electricity, water, good road network and healthcare services. Nigeria’s political leaders in most cases have played lip-services in the creation and maintenance of these germane infrastructures which makes living conditions unbearable in the country. The infrastructure deficits of Nigeria according to experts is over \$2.3 billion (Orjime, 2023). The issue of inadequate reliable infrastructure makes daily life challenging for many Nigerians, leading them to seek better living conditions outside the country.

**Quality of Educational System**

Another germane reason for the exodus of youth from Nigeria is the quality of educational system in the country. Most political leaders show lesser concern to education since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999. As against the 15-20 per cent national budget advised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the highest education allocation in the last ten years was 10.7 per cent in 2015 while the lowest was 5.6 per cent in the 2021 national budget (Omijidi, 2023). In the 2024 budget, education got #1.54 trillion indicated 6.39 per cent which is lower than 8.8 per cent gotten in 2023 and still far below the recommendation of UNESCO. The ripple effects are felt on the kind of education given in the country with outdated curricula, obsolete infrastructure, teaching and learning aids. This in the past has made many teachers from primary to tertiary level



to seek better milieu to pursue their professions outside Nigeria and equally made many youths to seek better educational opportunities elsewhere across the globe to acquire the cutting-edge knowledge and skills that they feel are lacking in the Nigerian educational system.

#### **Erroneous Belief on Oversea Traveling**

Before now, the common erroneous belief in Nigeria is that people need to be connected before they can be gainfully employed (Olatunji, 2023). The situation in Nigeria has gone so bad that with these connections, only a few Nigerians are able to get employed. The Japa Syndrome is also influenced by social media and mainstream media. The idea that life is substantially better outside of Nigeria can be fostered by the representation of opportunities and success stories from other countries in media such as television, movies, and internet content. As a result, a large number of intelligent young people choose to travel abroad in order to obtain a foreign diploma, which they need in order to obtain employment in Nigeria. Some of them travel at all costs since they think everything is fine abroad.

#### **Corruption and Inefficiency**

Incessant cases of corrupt practices and inefficiency in government institutions are major deterrents for young people who seek a fair and transparent society. The perception that success is largely dependent on political connections rather than merit and hard work discourages many talented individuals from pursuing their dreams in Nigeria. This further brought about a growing erosion of trust in government institutions and policies due to corruption, maladministration, and downright incompetence. This has severely eroded citizens' faith in the nation's ability to provide a conducive environment for personal, family, even organizational and economic growth. This lack of trust has pushed Nigerians, young and old alike, to seek greener pastures abroad.

#### **Effects of Youth exodus from Nigeria on the Country's Development**

Since young people are seen as a country's future, their migration away from a particular country might have negative effects on that country. The negative impacts of young people leaving Nigeria exceeds the beneficial ones, despite the fact that some positive effects did arise and were evident in the extraordinary successes of these individuals in various areas outside of Nigeria. Some of the significant drawbacks of young people constantly leaving (Japa) Nigeria are discussed below.

First, with the colossal human and capital flight outside Nigeria, the economic development of the country will be negatively affected. A country's economic production will always decline when a sizable chunk of its productive population departs, as fewer people work in manufacturing and other productive industries and there is a shortage of experienced and talented labor. Any country's ability to prosper is largely dependent on its economic production. Industries including healthcare, technology, engineering, and education suffer from a shortage of competence when talented people depart the nation. This has a knock-on effect on the whole economy in addition to impeding advancement within the sector. Another effect of the incessant youth migration from Nigeria is the issue of brain drain. Resident doctors, nurses, engineers, and educators are among the competent and skilled people who are emigrating from the country in quest of better possibilities elsewhere. The nation's human capital is diminished by this migration, which impedes its progress and advancement. Although the idea of brain drain is not new, its significance is greater when considering Nigeria in the modern day. The country has made significant investments in the education and training of these experts, only to watch as they leave for nations with greater prospects for professional growth, better pay, and better working



circumstances. Consequently, the lack of qualified and experienced workers negatively impacts our healthcare system, the education sector, and other vital industries.

Again, foreign and local investors tend to lose confidence in the nation. Potential investors receive a negative signal from the large-scale migration of the productive population of Nigeria. Investing in a country that is thought to be losing its skilled labour force and experiencing a shortage of qualified professionals would deter them (Orjiude, 2021). Any country's economic development and progress depends on the faith of its investors. Foreign investors are hesitant to make investments in Nigeria when they believe the country is losing its human capital and seeing a talent exodus. Less foreign direct investments have already been present for a number of years, which has hampered economic growth and lowered the number of job creation chances in the Nigerian economy.

Mass migration is a phenomenon capable of engendering unfavorable perception about Nigeria. It can support misconceptions that hold that Nigerians are hopeless in their own country and must emigrate in order to live better lives. In the global community, perception is very important. Diplomatic relations may suffer and foreign investment may decline if Nigeria is seen by the world community as a nation unable to keep its highly trained labour force. The increase in the rate of youth migrations from the country has portrayed Nigeria as a country that is not doing so well. In specific, the health sector where about 1,417 resident doctors have left the country for United Kingdom, United States of America, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and other African countries (Onwuzoo, 2023) leading to medical errors and preventable deaths among Nigerians.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has examined political leadership in its relationship to youth development in Nigeria with focus on the incessant migration of youth from the country, popularly referred to as “*Japa Syndrome*”. Political leadership weakness has been discovered as the major bane causing brain drain of Nigerian’s youthful population. This overtime has made them seek safety, greener pasture and better living conditions elsewhere around the globe. The effect of these migration has been discussed as it negatively affects the country. As a way to reduce the *Japa Syndrome* of the youth from Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

First, the political leaders need to give priority to policies that encourage entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment in important industries in order to increase economic productivity through more employment generations for the youth.

Second, needed infrastructural facilities such as electricity, good road network, better educational system and well-equipped health care, that will aid production and better contributions of the youth to the country should be given priority by the political leaders

Also, Nigerian political leaders should be serious in the fight against corruption. Cases of corruption should be tried and punitive judgement given with ample time. This will further give the youth confidence in the system and the leaders in protecting their future in Nigeria.

Again, political leaders must demonstrate the commitment to retaining and developing the skilled workforce. This involves not only addressing the *Japa Syndrome* issue but also improving governance, transparency, and the overall business environment.





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