FACILITATING VALUE-REORIENTATION THROUGH COUNSELLING: FOCUS ON POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The article highlighted the pressing need for a transformative shift in Nigerian political leadership by emphasizing value reorientation, focusing on ethical conduct, transparency, and accountability. Acknowledging challenges like corruption and ethnic tensions, the study advocated for a comprehensive approach to reshape political values. Counselling is proposed as a pivotal tool to address psychological and behavioral factors influencing decision-making among political leaders. By fostering self-awareness and emotional intelligence, counselling contributes to systemic change, creating a political culture marked by integrity and public service. The article recommended integrating counselling into political leadership training, offering concrete steps to navigate challenges and promote ethical and transformative leadership in Nigerian politics.

Keywords: Value Re-orientation, Counselling and Politics

Introduction

The current state of leadership in Nigerian politics reflects a complex landscape marked by both commendable efforts and persistent challenges. Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa, has experienced history of political transitions, with periods characterized by military rule and civilian governance. The democratic era since early 2000s has seen a shift towards multi-party politics. However, the country continues to grapple with issues such as corruption, governance inefficiencies and struggles for power among political elites (Adejumobi, 2004).

Corruption remains a pervasive concern in Nigerian politics, impacting the effectiveness of governance and eroding public trust. The mismanagement of public resources and instances of bribery and embezzlement have been persistent challenges (Eboh, 2005). Additionally, the political landscape is marked by ethnic and regional complexities, with power often concentrated among a few dominant groups, contributing to tensions and perceptions of marginalizations. The quest for ethical leadership becomes paramount in such a context, as the lack thereof contributes to a cycle of challenges that hinder the country's socio-political development.

Despite these challenges, there are instances of positive strides in Nigerian political

leadership. Some leaders have demonstrated commitment to governance reforms, economic development, and anti-corruption initiatives (Salisu, 2012). Efforts towards institutional strengthening, constitutional reforms and the engagement of civil society organizations signify a recognition of the need for transformative leadership (Anyangwe, 2015). However, the overall trajectory underscores the urgency for a comprehensive approach to value re-orientation, emphasizing ethical conduct, accountability and inclusive governance.

Value-reorientation in the political landscape of Nigeria involves a purposeful and strategic transformation of the prevailing values, ethical standards, and behaviors of political leaders and institutions. It is a conscious effort to shift the political culture towards principles of integrity, transparency and accountability. Adejumobi (2004) noted that Nigeria's political history has witnessed challenges rooted in corruption and governance inefficiencies, necessitating a reevaluation of values for sustainable political development. In this context, value reorientation becomes a dynamic process, focusing on instilling a renewed commitment to ethical conduct and responsible leadership. The significance of value re-orientation in Nigerian politics is underscored by its potential to address deeply entrenched issues and foster a positive political environment. Eboh (2005) emphasizes the pervasive nature of corruption in Nigerian politics, indicating that value re-orientation serves as a corrective mechanism to counteract these challenges. By promoting ethical leadership, value reorientation contributes to building public trust and confidence in governance, crucial for the effective functioning of democratic institutions. This is particularly pertinent in a country where historical complexities, ethnic diversity and power struggles have influenced political dynamics.

The role of counselling in facilitating value re-orientation among political leaders is pivotal in fostering a transformative shift towards ethical conduct and responsible governance. Counselling, within the political context, serves as a strategic intervention aimed at addressing the underlying psychological and behavioral factors that influence decision-making and leadership practices. By engaging political leaders in counselling sessions, this process aims to promote self-awareness, introspection and the development of a value system that prioritizes the common good over personal interests. Counselling provides a confidential and supportive space for political leaders to explore their values, beliefs and motivations. Through reflective dialogue with trained counselors, leaders can examine the ethical implications of their actions and decisions. This introspective process helps identify areas where personal values may be misaligned with the principles of ethical leadership. It is particularly crucial in addressing issues such as corruption, lack of transparency and abuse of power, which have historically plagued political landscapes.

Moreover, counselling contributes to the development of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills and essential components of effective leadership. Political leaders who undergo counselling gain insights into their own emotions and the impact of their behavior on others. This heightened emotional awareness fosters empathy, communication and collaboration qualities crucial for building trust and positive relationships with constituents, fellow politicians and

international stakeholders (Salisu, 2012). The role of counselling in value reorientation extends beyond individual leaders to encompass systemic change. By addressing the psychological barriers to ethical conduct, counselling contributes to the creation of a political culture that values transparency, integrity and public service. Through this process, political leaders are better equipped to navigate the complexities of governance while aligning their actions with the ethical principles essential for the socio-political development of a nation.

Historical Context of Nigerian Politics

The trajectory of Nigerian politics is marked by a complex interplay of historical events and leadership trends that have significantly shaped the nation's political landscape. One pivotal moment was Nigeria's attainment of independence from British colonial rule in 1960, heralding a period of political transition and the emergence of a nascent democratic system. The First Republic (1963-1966) witnessed the establishment of political parties, with the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG) playing prominent roles. However, this era was cut short by series of coups in 1966, setting the stage for a tumultuous period of military rule.

The subsequent military regimes, characterized by series of coups and countercoups, saw a fluctuating political landscape with changing leadership dynamics. The civil war (1967-1970), also known as the Biafran War, further intensified political complexities, leaving a lasting impact on the nation's social fabric. The 1979 transition to the Second Republic marked a return to civilian rule, but political instability persisted, leading to another military intervention in 1983. The return to democratic governance in 1999 ushered in the Fourth Republic, with a renewed emphasis on political pluralism and multiparty democracy. This period has been marked by alternating ruling parties, reflecting the evolving nature of Nigerian politics (Diamond, 2008; Ojo, 2012).

Leadership trends in Nigerian politics have been characterized by a mixture of visionary leadership, challenges of corruption and struggles for regional representation. The early post-independence period saw leaders like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello (the Saudauna of Sokoto), who played instrumental roles in shaping the political landscape. However, the challenges of ethno-regional politics and corruption became increasingly evident, contributing to a cycle of military interventions. Military leaders such as Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed and Ibrahim Babangida left indelible marks on the nation's political trajectory. The structural adjustments of the 1980s under Babangida brought economic reforms but were marred by political controversies leading to a prolonged period of military rule.

The return to democratic governance in 1999 saw a new wave of leadership, with Olusegun Obasanjo becoming the first civilian president of the Fourth Republic. Subsequent administrations, including those of Umaru Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, have grappled with challenges ranging from economic disparities to security concerns. The persistence of corruption in Nigerian politics has remained a critical issue, even in the present administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, impacting the effectiveness of governance and impeding national development.

The historical development of Nigerian politics reveals a pattern of political transitions, leadership changes and persistent challenges. Ethical considerations have often taken a backseat amidst the complex dynamics of power struggles and regional interests. The challenge of corruption, in particular, has permeated various facets of governance, hindering the realization of the nation's full potential (Diamond, 2008 & Agbiboa, 2017). As Nigeria seeks to facilitate value re-orientation through counselling, it must address historical legacies and ongoing challenges. A comprehensive approach that considers the socio-political context, historical nuances and leadership intricacies will be essential in shaping a new era of ethical and visionary leadership in Nigerian politics.

Historical factors play a crucial role in shaping the values and practices of political leaders, providing a foundation that influences decision-making, governance approaches and the overall political culture. Understanding this historical context is essential for comprehending the motivations and behaviors of contemporary political leaders. Several key dimensions illustrate the impact of historical factors on political leadership values and practices as follows:

1. **Colonial Legacy and Independence:** The colonial legacy significantly influences political leadership in post-colonial nations. In the case of Nigeria, a history of British colonial rule has left lasting imprints on political institutions and governance structures. The centralized administrative model imposed by colonial powers has implications for the concentration of power in modern political leadership (Osaghae, 1998). Also, the struggle for independence and the subsequent formation of a nation contribute to the values of nationalism and patriotism among political leaders. Historical narratives of resistance and liberation become integral components of the national identity, influencing leaders' commitment to the welfare and sovereignty of the nation (Nnoli, 1980).

2. **Post-Independence Political Transitions:** Periods of military rule and frequent political transitions have a profound impact on leadership values. Military regimes, characterized by centralized authority and often marked by coup d'états, shape a political culture that may prioritize stability over democratic principles (Ihonvbere, 1994). Also, the post-independence era witnessed the emergence of ethno-regional politics, driven by historical regional disparities and identity politics. Political leaders' values are often influenced by the need to balance these regional interests to maintain political stability (Osaghae, 1998).

3. **Civil War and Conflict:** The experience of civil war as seen in the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), has profoundly influenced the values of political leaders. The scars of conflict, the need for reconciliation and the imperative of nation-building become central considerations in the leadership ethos (Achebe, 2012). Also, historical conflict resolution strategies or the lack thereof, shape the approach political leaders take towards managing internal strife and fostering national cohesion (Braithwaite, 2010).

4.　**Economic Transformations and Challenges:** Economic transformations, especially the post-independence adoption of structural adjustment policies, influence the economic values of political leaders. Decisions related to economic liberalization, privatization and public welfare are often rooted in historical experiences and global economic dynamics (Adebajo, 2000). Historical patterns of resource management and economic exploitation can shape political leaders' approaches to resource allocation, corruption and sustainable development (Salami, 2015).

5.　**Democratic Transitions and Governance:** The transition to democratic governance in 1999 marked a significant shift in political leadership values. Leaders in the Fourth Republic grapple with the historical challenges of military rule and work towards building democratic institutions (Agbiboa, 2017). The struggle for democratic consolidation involves navigating historical challenges, such as the legacy of flawed elections and the need for transparent and accountable governance (Suberu, 2001). The values and practices of political leaders are intricately tied to historical factors that have shaped the trajectory of a nation. Recognizing and understanding this historical context is essential for analyzing and predicting the actions and decisions of contemporary political leaders in Nigeria and other post-colonial societies.

Current Challenges in Nigerian Politics

　Nigeria's political landscape faces multifaceted challenges that impede effective governance and hinder the nation's socio-economic progress. Some prevalent challenges include the following:

1.　**Corruption:** Widespread corruption remains a critical challenge, infiltrating various levels of government and public institutions (Transparency International, 2021). Corruption hampers the effective allocation of resources, undermines public trust and fosters a culture of impunity.

2.　**Ethnic and Regional Tensions:** Ethnic and regional tensions persist, influencing political dynamics. Politicians often exploit these divisions for electoral gains, contributing to a fragmented national identity and hindering cohesive governance.

3.　**Insecurity and Insurgency:** Nigeria grapples with persistent insecurity, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast. Insecurity not only threatens lives but also hampers economic activities, exacerbating socio-economic challenges (Obasi, 2020).

4.　**Economic Instability:** The economy's heavy reliance on oil revenue makes Nigeria susceptible to global oil price fluctuations. Economic instability coupled with issues of unemployment and poverty, poses a significant challenge to sustainable development (Oyebola, 2019).

5.　**Electoral Irregularities:** Elections often face allegations of irregularities, including voter intimidation, manipulation and irregular vote counting. These challenges undermine the democratic process and erode public confidence in political institutions.

6. **Infrastructure Deficit:** Inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable power supply and deficient transportation networks, hamper economic activities and impedes the overall development of the nation (World Bank, 2021).

The challenges in Nigeria's political landscape can be closely linked to lack of ethical values among political leaders thus:

1. **Corruption and Lack of Accountability:** Corruption often stems from ethical lapses, where leaders prioritize personal gain over the public good. A lack of accountability mechanisms allows corruption to thrive, undermining the ethical foundation of governance (Agbiboa, 2017).

2. **Ethnic Manipulation for Political Gains:** Politicians, driven by a pursuit of power, exploit ethnic and regional divisions for political gains. This manipulation compromises ethical principles, contributing to a divisive political environment (Suberu, 2001).

3. **Insecurity and Governance Ethics:** In addressing insecurity, ethical leadership requires strategic governance. A failure to implement ethical principles in security strategies may lead to human rights abuses and exacerbate the challenges posed by insurgencies (Adebajo, 2002).

4. **Economic Mismanagement:** Economic instability is often exacerbated by unethical practices in resource allocation. Leaders engaging in corrupt practices may divert funds meant for development, perpetuating economic challenges.

5. **Electoral Malpractices and Democratic Ethos:** Electoral irregularities undermine the democratic ethos, reflecting lack of commitment to ethical principles. Leaders who prioritize winning at any cost erode the foundation of democratic governance.

6. **Infrastructure Challenges and Ethical Governance:** The infrastructure deficit can be linked to unethical resource management. Leaders who prioritize personal gains over public welfare may neglect critical infrastructural projects, hindering national development.

Nigeria's political challenges are deeply intertwined with ethical considerations. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to ethical leadership, accountability and a reorientation of values among political leaders. Only through fostering a culture of integrity and ethical governance can Nigeria overcome its current political hurdles and pave the way for sustainable development.

The Concept of Value-Reorientation

Value-reorientation refers to the intentional process of reshaping and realigning the core values, beliefs and ethical principles that guide the behavior and decision-making of individuals or a group, particularly within the realm of political leadership. In the context of political leadership, value-reorientation involves a deliberate effort to instill ethical values, integrity and a sense of

responsibility among political leaders. Oni and Osisanwo (2013) highlighted the importance of value-reorientation in Nigerian leadership, emphasizing the need for leaders to embrace ethical values to build a sustainable and prosperous society. Additionally, Okolie and Nwankwo (2016) emphasized the role of self-awareness and personal development in enhancing leaders' ethical decision-making.

Elaborating on the above concept within political leadership involves:
1. **Ethical Framework:** Value-reorientation necessitates the establishment of an ethical framework that outlines the principles and standards governing political conduct. This framework serves as a guide for leaders in making decisions that prioritize the public good and adhere to moral and legal standards.
2. **Cultural and Social Context:** Political leaders operate within a cultural and social context that shapes their values. Value-reorientation acknowledges the influence of cultural norms and seeks to align political practices with ethical values that contribute to societal well-being.
3. **Accountability and Transparency:** A key aspect of value-reorientation is the promotion of accountability and transparency in governance. Political leaders are encouraged to be open, honest and accountable for their actions, fostering a culture of trust between the leaders and the public.
4. **Public Service Orientation:** Value-reorientation emphasizes a shift from self-serving motives to a focus on public service. Political leaders are encouraged to prioritize the welfare of the citizens, address societal needs and work towards inclusive and sustainable development.
5. **Integrity and Moral Courage:** The concept emphasizes the cultivation of integrity and moral courage among political leaders. Leaders are expected to demonstrate consistency between their words and actions, uphold moral principles and have the courage to stand against unethical practices.

The potential impact of value-reorientation on fostering ethical leadership is substantial and far-reaching. Ethical leadership, grounded in a set of well-defined values and principles, contributes to the establishment of a political culture characterized by integrity, accountability and responsible decision-making. The transformative effects of value reorientation in this context include the following:
1. **Trust and Confidence:** Value-reorientation builds public trust and confidence in political leaders and institutions. When leaders consistently demonstrate ethical behavior, citizens are more likely to believe in the integrity of governance processes, leading to increased trust between the government and the governed.
2. **Accountability:** Ethical leadership, as a result of value-reorientation, promotes a culture of accountability. Leaders who prioritize ethical values are more likely to be transparent in their actions, accountable for their decisions, and responsive to the needs and concerns of the public.

3. **Social Justice:** Value-reorientation emphasizes principles of fairness and social justice. Ethical leaders are more inclined to address issues of inequality, discrimination and social injustice, working towards policies and initiatives that benefit the entire population.

4. **Stability and Sustainability:** Ethical leadership contributes to political stability and sustainability. Leaders guided by strong ethical values are less likely to engage in actions that can destabilize the political environment, fostering a more stable and enduring political landscape.

5. **International Standing:** A political landscape characterized by ethical leadership enhances a nation's standing on the global stage. Ethical leaders are more likely to foster positive international relations, attracting cooperation, partnerships and investments from the international community.

In essence, value-reorientation in political leadership is a catalyst for creating a more ethical, accountable and service-oriented political culture. The potential impact extends from rebuilding public trust to fostering sustainable and responsible governance, contributing to the overall development and well-being of the nation.

The Role of Counselling in Value-Reorientation

Counselling plays a crucial role in addressing the psychological and behavioral aspects that impact decision-making and governance. Political leaders, like any individuals, are subject to psychological factors that can impact their decision-making, interpersonal skills, and overall effectiveness. Counselling, within this context, delves into the psychological dimensions of leadership, addressing issues such as stress, emotional intelligence, communication styles and the influence of personal experiences on political behavior. These are discussed below as follows:

1. **Stress Management:** Political leadership often comes with immense stress due to the weight of decision-making, public scrutiny and the complexity of governance. Counselling provides leaders with tools to manage stress effectively, promoting mental well-being and preventing burnout. By addressing stressors and enhancing coping mechanisms, leaders can make more informed and rational decisions.

2. **Emotional Intelligence:** Counselling helps political leaders to develop emotional intelligence which is a crucial aspect of effective leadership. This involves recognizing and understanding one's own emotions and those of others. Leaders with high emotional intelligence can navigate complex political landscapes, build positive relationships and respond empathetically to the needs of the public.

3. **Communication Skills:** Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful political leadership. Counselling assists leaders in refining their communication skills, fostering clear and transparent dialogues with constituents, fellow politicians and international stakeholders. Improved communication contributes to public trust and enhances diplomatic relations.

4. **Decision-Making Processes:** The psychological aspect of decision-making is explored in counselling to enhance the rationality and ethical considerations in political leaders' choices. By understanding cognitive biases, ethical dilemmas and the impact of personal values on decisions, leaders can make more informed and principled choices.

Counselling can also, contribute to reshaping the values and attitudes of political leaders in Nigeria. This can be achieved through the following:

1. **Self-Reflection:** Counselling provides a space for political leaders to engage in self-reflection. Through introspection, leaders can evaluate their values, beliefs, and attitudes, identifying areas for improvement and alignment with ethical standards.

2. **Identification of Core Values:** By exploring personal values, counselling helps leaders identify their core principles and beliefs. This process allows for the reinforcement of values that align with ethical leadership and the reconsideration of those that may hinder responsible governance.

3. **Behavioral Change:** Counselling supports leaders in developing strategies for behavioral change. Whether it is addressing problematic behavior, fostering a culture of inclusivity or improving interpersonal relationships, counselling facilitates concrete steps towards reshaping values and attitudes.

4. **Accountability and Responsibility:** Through counselling, leaders can cultivate a sense of accountability and responsibility towards their constituents. This involves recognizing the impact of their decisions on the broader population and understanding the ethical imperative of serving the public interest.

5. **Conflict Transformation:** Counselling supports leaders in transforming their approach to conflicts. Instead of viewing conflicts as obstacles, leaders can learn to see them as opportunities for growth and collaboration, leading to more constructive resolutions.

6. **Cultivating a Growth Mindset:** Counselling encourages leaders to adopt a growth mindset recognizing that personal and professional development are ongoing journey. This mindset fosters openness to feedback, learning from experiences and adapting to new challenges.

In essence, counselling in political leadership addresses the psychological and behavioral aspects that influence decision-making and interpersonal dynamics. By fostering self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and ethical values, counselling contributes to the overall development of leaders who are not only competent but also ethically grounded and attuned to the needs of their constituencies.

Challenges in Implementing Counselling Programmes for the Benefit of Political Leaders

Implementing counselling programmes for political leaders in the context of value-reorientation in Nigerian politics may encounter several challenges. The challenges are explored as follows:

1. **Resistance to Change:** Political leaders may resist counselling programmes due to fear of change or concerns about potential vulnerabilities being exposed (Okolie & Nwankwo, 2016).

2. **Political Interference:** The political landscape in Nigeria may be characterized by interference, making it challenging to maintain the confidentiality and neutrality required for effective counselling (Oni & Osisanwo, 2013).

3. **Limited Accessibility:** Access to counselling services may be limited, especially in remote areas, potentially excluding a significant portion of political leaders from benefiting (Oni & Osisanwo, 2013).

4. **Stigma and Perceived Weakness:** Political leaders may perceive seeking counselling as a sign of weakness or vulnerability, fearing potential negative public perceptions. Overcoming the stigma associated with mental health is a significant challenge.

5. **Time Constraints:** Political leaders often have demanding schedules, leaving limited time for counselling sessions. Finding time for counselling without disrupting their official duties poses a practical challenge.

6. **Confidentiality Concerns:** Leaders may worry about the confidentiality of counselling sessions. Concerns about sensitive information becoming public can hinder open communication during counselling

7. **Limited Access to Qualified Counsellors:** Availability of qualified counsellors with expertise in political leadership and governance may be limited. Ensuring the availability of skilled professionals is crucial for the effectiveness of counselling initiatives.

By addressing these challenges through a combination of trust-building, political support, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity and continuous evaluation, counselling programmes can navigate the complexities of Nigerian politics and contribute to meaningful value-reorientation among political leaders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the article underscores the urgent need for a transformative shift in Nigerian political leadership through value reorientation, emphasizing ethical conduct, transparency, and accountability. The multifaceted challenges ingrained in the country's political landscape, such as corruption, ethnic tensions and economic instability, necessitate a comprehensive approach to reshape the values and behaviors of political leaders. While acknowledging positive strides made by some leaders, the article emphasizes the overarching importance of instilling a renewed commitment to ethical leadership to address deeply rooted issues and foster positive political environment.

The concept of value-reorientation is positioned as a dynamic process that involves intentional and strategic transformation of political values and ethical standards. Moreover, the role of counselling emerges as a pivotal tool in facilitating this value reorientation, addressing the psychological and behavioral factors influencing decision-making among political leaders. By providing a confidential space for self-reflection, emotional intelligence development and addressing historical influences, counselling is proposed as a catalyst for systemic change, not only at the individual leader level but also in shaping a political culture marked by integrity, accountability and public service orientation. This article is concluded by advocating for the integration of counselling programmes into the training and development of political leaders, offering concrete recommendations to navigate the challenges and promote a culture of ethical and transformative leadership in Nigerian politics.

Suggestions

The following recommendations are made as follows:

1. There should be advocacy to incorporate counselling sessions as a core component of leadership training programmes for aspiring and current political leaders. This ensures that leaders receive psychological and behavioral support from the early stages of their political careers.

2. The Government should create dedicated Counselling units within government agencies or institutions associated with political leadership. These units can offer confidential counselling services to leaders thereby, addressing psychological aspects and promoting self-awareness.

3. Counselling sessions should be integrated as integral parts of leadership retreats and workshops. These settings provide an opportunity for leaders to engage in reflective discussions and self-discovery in a conducive environment.

4. Political leaders and key stakeholders should be encouraged to demonstrate commitment to value-reorientation through public endorsements of counselling programmes. Political will is crucial for overcoming resistance and fostering a culture of self-improvement.

5. There should be investment in training counselors with expertise in political leadership and governance by ensuring a pool of qualified professionals who can understand the unique challenges faced by political leaders and provide effective guidance.

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