

# Leadership and Governance Crisis in Nigeria: The Case of the #Endsars Protest

Olukemi Ajibike Aluko PhD

Department of Local Government and Development Studies,

Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria.

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## Abstract

Leadership and governance are intertwined as they have also been recognised as imperatives for the attainment of development in any polity. Discourses on leadership and national development cannot be over-emphasised particularly as it relates with governance. Given its place, its impact is felt in the delivery of the objectives and citizens' expectations in any given society or organization. Be that as it may, given the several challenges bedevilling Nigeria, the quest for quality leadership and good governance are always burning issues. Thus, the need for further research on this topical issue. It is on the basis of this that this study further seeks to re-examine the place of leadership on governance in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on appraising the #EndSARS protest that took place late 2020 as an effect of absence of quality leadership and good governance over the years. In carrying out the research, we made use of literatures and secondary materials, particularly the mass media to unravel leadership lapses in the governance process over the years and how these occasioned several unrests and protests. The study discovered that the challenges faced by the citizens are products of lack of quality leadership and good governance and concluded that if this is consciously addressed, the Nigerian political and systems would be the better for it.

**Keyword:** governance, leadership, development, ENDSARS and socioeconomic crisis

## 1. Introduction

Sundry scholars have opined since independence, that there has been a fruitless, yet continuous search for leadership that can engender good governance in Nigeria and this has generated a lot of clamour from both the political elites and the academia (Achebe, 1988; Mustafa, 2004). They argue for the need to constantly study and analyse the place of leadership in the understanding of development, so as to appropriately appreciate and understand the prospects and challenges of effectiveness in governance and public service delivery, particularly in the reality of Nigeria (Madueke 2008, Onolememen 2015). This is a truism, particularly so because, the capacity of leadership delivery in terms of good

governance and transformational change depends on the individual idiosyncrasies of people in power and the structures within which they exercise such powers. This aligns with Anyadike and Emeh (2014) submission that links development in local and global contexts to leadership competence and dedication along with the apparatus of government within such polities. This, perhaps inform the paradox of development in Nigeria where, in spite of the huge natural endowment and resources, it has remained grossly underdeveloped, leaving her populace in abject poverty, high rate of unemployment; worst record of crime rate and insecurity, poor health care delivery and prevalent economic degradation (Ogundiya, 2010). It is therefore arguably right that the primary bane of development in Nigeria is that of leadership. The outcome of governance is essentially a reflection of the quality of leadership input invested into it per time, especially in terms of resource mobilization and allocation for transformative change and development.

It is therefore vital to note that enhanced democratic governance, the achievement of societal goals, and been able to influence actions of the public centres on leadership. Thus, lack of quality leadership in governance can pose as a threat to democracy and development of a nation. Mourkogiannis and Fisher (2006) say ‘Leadership is the ultimate advantage, as when it is present, it makes all other advantages possible [while] poor leadership can turn even the best advantage into a disaster. Good governance requires that countries should withdraw from economic intervention in terms of aids, grants etc and grip more to free-market in issues of economic development. Thus, good governance is an enabler of economic development and poverty alleviation strategy. It is the search for good governance that made the Nigerian youths through #EndSARS protest demand for better condition of living as a result of decades of worsen economic crisis as a result of political and economic corruption and the dwindling revenue from crude oil. This has resulted to collapse of infrastructure and the increased distrust of government. This paper reviews literatures on leadership and governance processes in Nigeria with a view to establishing linkages between these and the circumstances that led to the #EndSARS protest.

## **2. Leadership: A Review**

Leadership can be viewed from different perspectives based on context, personalities and processes in the exercise of influence. Leadership is manifests in the family, private or public organisations, religious associations and government. It is about influencing others to positively work towards solving a common problem or advancing a common cause. Most times, it is a process that comes with huge privileges and benefits for those who exercise such influences. According to Hart & Uhr (2008) ‘leadership is routinely admired, vilified, ridiculed, invoked, trivialised, explained and speculated about in general discourse and in everyday conversation’. However, leadership comes with responsibility and what has also often been called ‘burden of leadership’ as a result of the challenges leader encounter in performing expected roles in different contexts. The ability to shoulder these responsibilities and still perform well on leadership expectation has also raised questions on whether leaders are born or made.

Northhouse (2013) stated that leadership as ‘a process whereby an individual influences a

group of individuals to achieve a common goal'. Riggio and Murphy (2003) stated that 'leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent'. It is obvious that these definitions recognize leadership as a process that involves an individual who has some level of influence and ability to accomplish the goals and objectives of any particular group. Other researchers also described a leader in different ways. Fiedler and Garcia (1987) defined a leader as "someone who is elected or appointed or who has emerged from the group to direct and coordinate the group members' efforts toward some given goal. The leader generally plans, organizes, directs, and supervises the activities of group members and develops and maintains sufficient cohesiveness and motivation among group members to keep them together as a functioning unit". This means that a leader show the 'WHAT' and 'HOW' a thing gets done. Of all the definitions, Winston and Patterson (2006) gave the most comprehensive one which states that: 'A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more followers who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the followers to the organization's missions and objectives causing the followers to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational missions and objectives. The question of leadership is hinged on the crossing point of structure and behaviours, interface of persons and institutions. It suggests actors create, implement or interpret the laws that are binding on existing social institutions and play the state roles (Dagaci, 2009).

### 3. Governance

World Bank's Governance and Development report of 1992, the notion of governance included good governance and since then government programs has been developed focusing on Public sector management, accountability, a legal framework for development and transparency, and information which are elements of good governance. This implies that governance is "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development." The report emphasized the role of states in providing public goods and services and called attention to the quality of public institutions. Arguing further, 'Governance can be referred to as the' conduct 'as well as institutions that define how authority is exercised in a given country' (Kaufmann, Kraay & Zoido 2000). Salman (2009) affirmed that governance should take account of different methods through which governments representatives are 'selected, monitored, held responsible, and replaced'; and also the ability of government to provide and oversee approaches, strategies and guidelines; that will establish monetary and social cooperation between them and the public (Nicholas, Kehinde, Imhonopi and Evbuoma 2016:38).

Broadly, the concept of governance, is the same as saying 'the process of making decision and the process of decision implementation (or non implementation)'(UNESCAP, 2007).While acknowledging that the concept of governance is a slippery one as leadership, 'Torfing (in Bevir, 2010:563-564) defines it as a general concept for any pattern of ordered rule including hierarchical government'. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conceives it as 'the exercise of political, economic and administrative power to administer a nation's affairs' (cited in McCawley, 2005). World Bank, stated that conduct and

institutions by which power in a country is used for the common good. This includes (i) the process by which those in power are selected monitored, and replaced, (ii) the competence of the government to effectively manage its resources' and apply sound policies, and (iii) the respect of people and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (ibid). Virtually all the foregoing attempts at defining governance are diminished by their tendency at reductionism. It would seem that for these scholars and institutions, the concept is only applicable to state actors. A more appropriate conceptualization acknowledges that governance could and indeed exists at some form or level in all social organizations, as attested to by Michels (in Brown, 2000) in his Iron Law of Oligarchy thesis. Our preference, therefore, is for UNESCAP'S (2007) conception of governance as 'any pattern of ordered rule', and applicable' in several contexts such as corporate governance, global governance, national governance and local governance'. This broader conception has allowed, paradoxically, a more nuanced conceptualization, governance framework, and its adjunct, governance paradigm. Whereas governance framework refers to the processes and structures by which an independent organization is run, including the attendant patterns of functionality of the processes and structures; by governance paradigm is meant a nuanced pattern or model of governance (Mimiko 2017:8-9)

According to Gery Stoker (1997), there are five basic theories that can be used to scrutinize and elucidate governance.

These are the propositions: 1. Government refers to a set of institutions and action that are drawn from but also beyond government. 2. Government identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues 3. Governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relations between institutions involved in collective actions. 4. Governance is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors 5. Governance recognizes the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority.

He sees government as able to use new tools and techniques to steer and guide (Adeyemo and IHEMEJE, 2008:20-21) governance but accomplishing good governance in poor indebted poor countries, is hindered by the widespread practice of corruption in various forms found in most if not all developing countries.

#### **4. Impact of Leadership on Governance**

Leadership is very vital as long as good governance is concerned. It promotes development across societies and organizations, as it is a necessary factor in influencing the actions of an organized or structured group towards the setting of goals and achievement of objectives. Accordingly, 'underscoring the issue of valuable leadership in modern societies is the way in which politics is played as well as what the people who seek power use it for that eventually shapes what we term governance to be or not'. This ought not to be (Iyoha, et al 2015; UNDP 1998; World Bank 1989). At this moment, the responsibility of leadership in governance has

become more essential to the socio-economic and political development of nations across the continents of the world. Ogbuide (2012), identified ‘poor leadership and corruption in all levels of governance as the two major constraints to the achievement of good governance in Nigeria. A report of UNDP (1997) clearly stated that the sustainability of human in any country is determined by yardsticks of measuring “good governance”. In an emerging country such as Nigeria, good governance is key to economic and socio-political development’. It is therefore essential to elucidate what good governance really means. The report on good governance by UNDP (1997), argued that

‘good governance depends on public involvement to ensure that political, social and economic priorities are based on a broad societal consent and that the poorest and most helpless members of the society can directly influence political decision-making, particularly with respect to the distribution of national resources. Remarkably, good governance is valuable, unbiased, and promotes the rule of law and institutional transparency.’

Also, The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2012) identified and highlighted eight characteristics of ‘good governance namely; participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable, inclusive, and follows the rule of law’. ‘Participation may be obtained either directly or by legal intermediaries or members. Thus, good governance necessitates equal legal structures that protect all people, especially minorities and those who are marginalized in society. It also necessitates that institutions establish marks that meet society's needs, including the long-term use of economic and socio-political growth.

In Africa, there is a growing consensus that good governance is critical to transforming the economy and fostering growth.

‘Certain virtues are connected with good governance, features for which all important institutions around the globe have come to agree with. This comprise respect for human rights, rule of law; strengthening democracy through public involvement and pluralism; encouraging transparency, accountability, anti-corruption policies and practices and capacity in community management’ (UNDP 1998; World Bank 1989).

The institutional capacity to use power and make sound decisions over time in economic, social, and environmental areas is critical to good governance (World Bank 2005). Dickson (2011) claims that if every sector of Nigeria's economy is expected to function, the country would need good governance to realize its potentials and advance citizens' well-being and growth. ‘Good governance is one of the most significant factor in eradicating poverty, discrimination, as well as enhancing growth and development’ (Khan 2007). Many Nigerians are of the opinion that without good governance the country continue experience political, economic, social and human crisis. Thus, from the foregoing it is clear that good quality leadership with a sense of responsibility to the elements of good governance is a necessity.

Quality governance within the boundaries of a popular democracy should be based on two things- a constitution appropriate to the special concerns and situations of Nigeria and leadership apt not only to the demanding concerns of Nigeria, but the exact needs of the people. Hence good and qualitative governance require features of leadership such as forbearance, tolerance, intellectual capacity, diligence, selflessness, statesmanship, a passionate sense of mission are some of the virtues that are necessary to make a success in this nation. 'Regrettably past governments have lacked these essentials or at best have possessed one without the other and this has led them to groping in the dark on how to deliver good governance' (Dickson, 2012). Since Nigeria's independence, government has been struggling with governance and development and this can be linked to leadership crisis in every tier of governance.

In addressing leadership crisis in Nigeria, Kolade (2012) was of the opinion that

'Nigeria will continue to experience bad governance unless it adopts a system that cultivate people to come into leadership positions through mentoring and performance. He added that it is only good leadership that can bring Nigeria out of the present predicament and that this is necessary for producing an environment where persons regularly perform to the best of their ability. that governance involves inputs by both the leader and the follower. He asserted that getting good governance in Nigeria will not just come on a platter of gold. He suggested a need to provide leadership education and training that places value on service delivery, quality, accountability, checking of excesses of leadership positions, institutionalising a culture whereby position holders step aside when being alleged of wrong doing and open celebration for leaders who perform excellently well. Recently, good governance has been an important subject in economic development discourse because of its connection to information dissemination which, could improve resource allocation, enhance efficiency and increase the prospects of economic growth provided it is made available on time and without being distorted'.

The ability to assign scarce resources, which establishes the locus of control (Dagaci 2009), is critical to achieving success in the leadership process. As a result, leadership should be viewed as a "privilege to represent" rather than a "display of muscle or ability to amass public resources" (Kolade 2012). Leadership begins with self-leadership, which means that you must first lead yourself. Accountable and transparent administrations that respect public involvement and rule of law are necessary to make certain that meagre resources are well utilised and investments are made in the vulnerable and poor people.

## **5. Appraisal of the #Endsars Protest**

The longing for good governance in Nigeria cannot be better seen than the #EndSARS protest

championed by the Nigerian Youths to voice out against the rampant police harassment, brutality and extrajudicial killings perpetuated across the country by the arm of the Nigerian Police Force responsible for anti robbery also known as Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). In 1992, SARS was established to fight the increasing crime rate as a result of armed robbery in the country. (<https://ewn.co.za/2020/10/21/analysis-why-#EndSARS-protests>). In the last few years there has been various complaints and accusation by the public of the illegal activities of the squad. These illegal activities include extortion of money from youth, illegal arrest and detention and terrorising of innocent citizens based on suspicions.

People arrested by SARS were "subjected to a variety of methods of torture including hanging, mock execution, beating, punching and kicking, burning with cigarettes, waterboarding, near- asphyxiation with plastic bags, forcing detainees to assume stressful bodily positions and sexual violence" (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/25/africa/nigeria>).

Though the protest started as this, it must be noted that the unrest is not just about SARS but the effect of bottled up years of anger and frustration over the dehumanising face of government policies and programmes, absence of rule of law, poverty in the land as well as high energy costs. One word associated with the protest 'end bad governance in Nigeria' which signifies dissatisfaction towards the current state of governance in Nigeria further confirm this. The snowballing impact of these balls into one. Thus, this was to be taken as an opportunity to see that these anomalies over the years are corrected and never to be experienced again.

Like the disease of cancer which starts from its root and spreads to other organs if not treated early, the effect of the #EndSARS protests started from Nigeria but continued to be felt across the globe (over 97 countries) by people who lend their support and held #EndSARS protests in various other countries such as UK, USA & Canada to support Nigerians as well as raise global awareness to the cause. This was to send a signal to other countries of the world that a consciousness for good governance was gaining ground like never before especially in countries that had suffered so much neglect as a result of it. A look at the #EndSARS protest across Nigeria revealed that its activities in Five (5) States were outstanding. These states include: Lagos, Federal Capital Territory, Rivers, Oyo and Ogun. Also, among these states, Lagos witnessed a large number of protests being the epicentre of all protests. (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/25/africa/nigeria>)

"Soro soke" meaning "speak up" in the country's Yoruba language was one popular slogan heard throughout the protest. It was chanted whenever a person wanted to address the audience. It has been described as "an #EndSARS battle cry, a tone of rebellion, a note of valid belligerency and a chant of unification in the Nigerian struggle against police brutality and terrible governance". Economic imbalance has gotten to excessive points in Nigeria, according to the United Nation Human Rights Commission, also Oxfam submitted that in 2019 about '70% of the country's population lives below the poverty line. It has been estimated that the young people under 30years make up about 40% of Nigeria's population'. They are faced with unemployment, under-employment and other harsh conditions of living. This further corroborates what Chatham House opined that if 'Nigeria's unemployed youths

were its own country, it would be larger than some countries in Europe and Africa’.

(<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/25/africa/nigeria>).

The protest has been reported to have been started as a result of the death of a young boy tortured and killed by men of SARS on October 3, 2017. This led to the online harassment campaign of #EndSARS. This effort gradually brought the Nigerian youths together and they continued to reinforce this cause that SARS must be scrapped. It is with this that the protest began using the power of the social media to bring themselves together first and then to assemble at their various states where they were resident. Between 2018 and 2019, due to the gubernatorial and presidential elections, various police harassment experiences reduced as a result of deployment of police officials to man elections. ‘This reduction ended as soon as the elections were concluded. Soon, Nigerian youths began sharing their police harassment experiences again on the social media and this went viral like never before and thereafter actions followed evident in the protest itself’ (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/25/africa/nigeria>).

The #ENDSARS protest had been described as a well co-ordinated activity with support from other well meaning Nigerians who were also tired of bad governance. An observer noted that ‘this young Nigerians are doing an excellent job. There is good organization, food and water as well as music to keep them from being distracted have been arranged for them. Medical equipments and medical personnel are on ground to help in case of any emergency. They organise themselves in such a way that they have people catering for their needs by selecting some from the crowd to attend to security and financial needs’. (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/25/africa/nigeria>)

It estimated that over ‘70% of the Nigerian population is under 30 years of age to which category they fall. These young Nigerians are mostly affected by government harsh policies that have made public infrastructure absent meaningful sources of livelihood hard. Other things that caused the protest include the unwholesome lifestyle of political class. More public resources goes to the hand of politicians for the overall interest of the people such as education, health among others’.

(<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2021/02/nigeria-end-impunity>)

With gathered momentum among the Nigerian youths which became a threat to the government,

on October 20, 2020 the Nigerian army was sent to repress by all means the peaceful protest with its main stage at Lekki. It was alleged that twelve (12) protesters were shot at and killed. Since then the Nigerian government have been alleged to cover up this violent repression coupled with the freezing of bank account of those identified as leaders of the protest and fines to be paid by news agencies who reported the alleged shooting.



With the news of killings of the peaceful protesters by the Nigerian military, the Nigerian citizens expected the President to address the nation immediately but this did not happen. By the time the President Buhari would address the nation few days after, it was an issue of a thinly veiled threat to the Nigerian youths as perceived by the people. The address of the President was received as one that failed to show concern for the people considering the issue at hand since he made no mention of the Lekki incidence. Many people felt disappointed and this led to series of damage of both private and public property. (<https://www.amnesty.org>)

Many celebrities and Black Lives Matter activists who shared in the ideal of the #EndSARS protest sought audience with President Buhari demanding justice and the humane conduct for Nigerian people during the protests. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/End\\_SARS#\\_Background](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/End_SARS#_Background))

One thing to be noted in all this is that a new social agreement is being agreed upon. Nigerians are now making their voice to be heard clear and loud thus making a new way of relating with the citizens. Public servants now know that it is not business as usual. Secondly, the Nigerian youths are now redefining and reinventing ways to good governance in Nigeria and institutionalising a new way of having your rights and enjoying it as a citizen.

## 6. Conclusion

As the search for transparent and accountable leadership that impacts on the governance process continues, it is crystal clear that there is no substitute for good governance. Anything short of this will continually meet with resistance from the people. It is expected of the leadership to do the needful as issues arise since they have been saddled with the responsibility for this. The commitment of leadership to good governance is vital to the growth and progress of any nation, Nigeria inclusive. The duty of all is to make sure and insist that good leadership and effective governance is in place. Given the role leadership play in the attainment of good governance, there must be concerted effort at ensuring effective leadership.

In all sincerity, the challenges of leadership and governance in Nigeria today are enormous but the gains that come with it far outweigh it all. Good governance is possible and achievable but rests on how prepared the leaders are by embracing the principles of fairness, justice and equality. Public resources must be well utilised for the masses putting their interest first in nation building process. This way the interest of all would be captured making it the nation's objective. The citizens have an essential duty to play in order to guarantee that the necessary good governance through quality leadership is attained through conscious and deliberate concerted efforts and not looking for short-cuts.

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