POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND DICTATORSHIP IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN STATES

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Abstract

The study examined political leadership and dictatorship in post-colonial Africa. Political leadership has influenced the nature of governments that had sprang up across Africa in the post-colonial era. The nature of political leadership had determined whether countries were administered by civilian or military dictatorships. The study employed documentary research to gather data while logical inference was used analyze the data. The study revealed that the nature of political leadership determined the emergence of dictatorships whether it is civilian or military. The study also revealed that one of the ways to curb dictatorships include fully embracing multi-party democracy by African countries. The study concludes by observing that dictatorships still exist in Africa due to the inability of the African Union to enforce the Lome Declaration of 2000 which prohibits unconstitutional government across the African terrain. The study recommends that democracy should be institutionalized across Africa and the Lome Declaration of 2000 should be enforced strictly by the African Union across Africa in order to curb the emergence and proliferation of dictatorships.

Key words: Political Leadership, Leadership, Dictatorship, Colonialism, and Post-colonial.

1. Introduction

According to Chikerema (2013) the contemporary state in Africa is a remnant of a colonially imposed system**.** Colonialism was not a new occurrence on the eve of Western European scramble and partition of African territories.Before the advent of Western Midwifed colonialism in Africa there was an internal African colonialism in which powerful African empires such as the Oyo Empire, the Benin Empire, the Kwararafa Kingdom, The Kanem-Bornu empire, the Sokoto Caliphate, the Kingdom of Dahomey and a pocket of other powerful African States made vassals out of weaker tribes and caused them to pay tributes to them as a mark of their dependency and loss of independence. Most of these African states were created by conquest and assimilation of conquered people and their institutions to ease and facilitate governance. These assimilations took place in the form of cultural diffusion through marriages and the imposition of the conquerors culture or the adoption of the conquered culture if it will help the

consolidation of power by the invading force (Aidan,1974; Gwyn,2016).

In post-colonial Africa the nature and disposition of the political leadership largely determined the emergence of either political dictatorships or military dictatorships. Political dictatorships emerged through the orchestration of civilian regimes that convoluted the democratic process into one party states and autocracies while military dictatorships emerged either through overthrowing civilian regimes or by shooting themselves into power for one reason or the other as it happened across Africa in the 60's and 70's (Khisa,2024).

2. Objectives

The general objective of the paper is to examine political leadership and dictatorship in Africa. However, the specific objectives of the study include:

ii. To examine the relationship between political leadership and dictatorship in Africa.

ii. To identify ways dictatorships can be curbed in Africa.

Methodology

The study employed documentary analysis in gathering and analyzing data for this research work. These include text books, journals, government records and documents and other secondary sources of information.

Theoretical framework

The elite theory was adopted for this study. The elite theory presupposes that power lies with the elites in a society and not with the people. Important to note is that elites cuts across all facets of the structures that make up a nation. These include the political, religious, military, economy and the civil society. According to Jan (2018) in examining the elite theory in terms of power relations in the society observed one of the characteristics of elite theory is that power is concentrated at the top amongst relatively small number of people called elites and that power flows from predominantly top-down direction from elites to non-elites and elites determine major political and social outcomes in a country. The elite theory does not only concentrate on politicians as the leaders of the people but see elites as constituted by all levels of individuals who control and are largely in charge of decision making for a larger number of people and in this case a country. Elites refer to the think tanks who dictate and influence policy networks, control the financial networks of a state and exert significant power over corporate, government, and societal decisions. Elite theory posit that power is concentrated in the hands of the few elites because they are united due to their common background and interests and ability to manipulate and institutionalize their positions while the non-elites are largely disunited and powerless (Silfen and Deric,2011). Some proponents of the political elite theory include Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels. James Burnham, Floyd Hunter amongst others (Ekundayo,2017).

In a nutshell some assumptions of elite theory as identified by Ekunday (2017) include 1)that power resides with people who hold key positions in the economic, political and military institutions in any

society;2)that all men love power and the elites understanding this do not want to surrender power;3) Power reinforces the psychological and intellectual differences between the elite and the people because all men are not equally endowed.3)The society is divided into two main groups the ruling class who are in the minority who wield power and the ruled; and that the minority rule over the majority in every society.

The theory is relevant to the study as it aptly captures the role of the military and political elites in African states even though in the minority had repeatedly transformed themselves into authoritarianism and dictatorships irrespective of the process by which they came to power either through the ballot box or through the barrel of the gun (Lindstaedt and Frantz, 2011; Baturo, 2016).

Conceptual Review

Colonialism

Colonialism is a system of government in which a stronger nation imposes political control over a weaker country for their benefit. According to Richard (1991) colonialism is the practice of extending and maintaining political, social, economic, and cultural domination over a territory and its people in pursuit of interests defined in an often distance metropole who also claim superiority. Colonialism involves the domination of another territory by a country for the major purpose of exploiting the resources of the colonized country for the benefit of the colonizer.

Political Leadership

Political leadership is a subtype of human social leadership involved in social processes intended to yield governmentally sanctioned methods of group goal achievement (Masciulli, Molchanov, and Knight,2009). Here, political leadership is described as a process whose purpose and goal are to achieve certain ends. Political leadership refers objectively to the act of governance by those entrusted with the responsibility of leading the state essentially through the democratic corridor deploying the principles of democracy for the good governance of the state.

Dictatorship

A dictatorship is a form of government which is characterized by a leader or a group of leaders, who hold governmental powers with few or no limitations to their power. The leader in a confirmed dictatorship is called a dictator. Dictatorship is a system of governance in which the apparatus of government is at the behest of an individual – the dictator or leader- or a group of individuals who govern without any organized rules of law but develop laws that are incidental to their grip on political power and the people. Ferim (2012) further describes dictatorship by revealing that dictatorship can be best explained as the emergence of individuals who are law-makers in their own right and invoke constitutional provisions to suit their retention of power and self-perpetuation.

Ferim (2012) position on the description of dictatorship aligns with that of Robert (2008) who states that in political

science dictatorship refers to an authoritarian form of government largely dominated by a single individual and unrestrained by law or other checks. Dictatorship is historically associated with the Ancient Greek concept of tyranny, and several ancient Greek rulers have been described as "tyrants" that are comparable to modern dictators. The concept of "dictator" was first developed the early Roman Republic (Daniel and Guriev, 2022). A Roman dictator was a special magistrate that was temporarily appointed by the consul during times of crisis and granted total executive authority. The role of dictator was created for instances when a single leader was needed to command and restore stability (Papanikos,2022). The historical ontology of the evolution of dictatorship observes emergency situations of crisis as one of the key factors that precipitate its emergence.

According to Daniel and Guriev (2022) dictatorship in its earliest form as originated in the early Roman Republic referred to a constitutional office with a temporary grant of absolute power to a leader to handle some emergency situations. A dictator here refers to an individual who is vested with executive authority to carry out certain functions without regard for the rule of law and constitutionalism. Handing over executive power to an individual to exercise without necessary checks and balances create the atmosphere of tyranny which is associated with dictatorship. It is important to note that in modern times dictatorship began to emerge as a governmental phenomenon in the 19th Century. According to Richter (2005) Dictatorship developed as a major form of government in the nineteenth century, though the concept was not universally seen pejoratively at the time, with both a tyrannical concept and a quasi-constitutional concept of dictatorship understood to exist. In Europe it was often thought of as either Bonapartism or Caesarism. In its emergence in the governmental scene in the 19thcentury it was a mixture of tyranny and some elements of liberalism that did not in any way diminish the potency or the evidence of obvious tyranny.

Types of Dictatorship

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (1965) and Ronald (2019) some types of dictatorship with all the inherent elements of authoritarianism and totalitarianism include:

Military Dictatorships – This occurs when the military ascend to power by seizing political power and suspending the constitution which prohibits military take-over of power and stipulate military obedience to civil authority. Because of its lack of recourse to the rule of law all military controlled governments usually degenerate into chronic dictatorships and tyrannies.

One Party State – This is the degeneration of a state into being controlled essentially by one party. The state presents the picture that it is a democracy but in actual sense, it is a dictatorship of a privileged few who are deemed to be loyal and faithful to the leadership. Communist countries are good examples of one party-state that believe they are serving the interest of the people. One party-states

abound around the globe especially during the cold war era.

Personalist Dictatorships: Personalist dictatorships are regimes in which all power lies in the hands of a single individual. They differ from other forms of dictatorships in that the dictator has greater access to key political positions and the government's treasury, and they are more commonly subject to the discretion of the dictator (Peceny,2003). In personalist dictatorships the affairs of government is personalized to the leader. He is in charge totally of the affairs of the country and rule it according to his whims and caprices and that of his appointed stooges. Personalist dictatorships are common in Sub-Saharan where weak state institutions provide the loopholes and opportunities for personalised dictators to emerge.

Absolute Monarchy: Is a monarchy in which the monarch rules without any legal inhibitions as it were. Heexercise full executive powers with little or no checks and balances as obtainable in constitutional monarchy. In this type of monarchy, power is limited to the royal family and legitimacy is established by historical factors.

It is important to note that dictatorship has emerged all over the world without any exception. All the continents of the world have experienced dictatorships in one country or the other no matter how limited. Dictatorships have been a global phenomenon especially with the emergence of communism and the cold war era that was the fallout of this epoch.

Dictatorship in Africa

By historical accounts dictatorship in Africa was mild in the pre-colonial era. The system of government in Africa which was predominantly monarchical was constitutional in nature. Traditional political institutions operated within the limited of well-structured unwritten constitutional framework. The constitution of African societies were unwritten because Africans had not developed a system of writing but largely utilized oral traditions to preserve and transmit the legal framework that guided the conduct in their societies (Babatola and Johnson,2023).In its operations provisions were made for checks and balances and this put in check decent into dictatorships and abuse of power by monarchies and other forms of leadership that was prevalent within the African hemisphere. While the monarchies were constitutional ,the states or nations that were a cephalous or stateless developed African type democracy which can be termed as the rule by the village square democracy with the age grade system playing significant roles in the day to day running of the affairs of the state – whether it was a village , or a group of villages in the case of small tribes or a large swathe of villages who trace themselves to a common ancestry and therefore have a genetical tie that binds them together. Irrespective of the size of the nation or tribe the story remains the same all across the African precolonial political landscape that in the exercise of political leadership across Sub Saharan Africa political dictatorship was minimal compared to other parts of the word (Babatola and Johnson,2023).

It must be noted that all dictatorships in Africa whether military, one party-state, or personalized or absolute monarchy as declared by self-made Emperor Jean Bokassa of the Central African Republic in the 70's were post-colonial creations (Darkwa,2022). Dictatorships in Africa emerged largely as a result of the deliberately ill-equipped state system imposed on it by the colonial masters on the eve of decolonization and on the theory that dictatorships tend to produce durable and stable development but events in the continent provide evidence of failure of dictatorships to meet the needs of citizens (Nega and Schneider,2012).Colonialism imposed a system of government that was somewhat alien to the African political experience and no sooner had they handed over power at independence that the system began to experience shock waves that led to the emergence of dictatorships across the African continent. This occurrence made expectations of a relatively smooth transition from a colonial midwifed development to meaningful and patriotism driven development independence unattainable (Decalo,1985).

Some of the dictatorships in Africa in the 20th century in the postcolonial era include the emergence of Abdul Gamel Naser in Egypt in 1952 which was the first military intervention in African politics, Kwameeh Nkrumah in Ghana, Muammar Ghadafi in Libya, Mengistu Haile Miriam in Ethiopia, military regimes in Nigeria, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Samuel Doe in Liberia , Jerry Rawlings in Ghana , Kamuzu Banda in Malawi ,White Africans Minority rule in South Africa, Idi Amin of Uganda, and a host of others both military and civilian. The military have dominated the chart of dictatorships in Africa with over 100 successful coups in 35 countries across the continent (PSC Report,2025)

Military dictatorships have emerged in Africa due to factors of its socio-political and socio-economic development. Most of the reasons that were advanced at the early stage of the intervention or metamorphosis of dictatorships whether military or civilian respectively could be summarized within the ambit of these two paradigms. It is within these two paradigms that other factors such as political instability, corruption, lack of infrastructure, lack of respect for rule of law. It is reported that by 2012, there had been over 200 coups and attempted coups in African countries from their various times of independence. There were incessant coup attempts within very short intervals in the 1960s and 1970s, and over two-thirds of African states have had a coup experience (Souare, 2014; McGowon, 2006). It should be noted that each coup no matter how long or short-lived carried with it the baggage of dictatorship. All the military coups without exception intervened with a litany of excuses bothering on the ills they said were bedevilling their countries which they had come to rectify by seizing power but time has shown that military regimes are not actually solutions to bad governance (Khisa,2024). Many-a-times the succeeding military regimes or dictatorships were often worse than the preceding ones. For instance, the General Abacha military dictatorship in Nigeria between 1993 – 1998 was believed to be more draconian than the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida before him who was in government between 1985 – 1993.

Relationship between Political Leadership and Dictatorship in Africa

There is a relationship between political leadership and dictatorship in Africa. It must be established that dictatorships do not only refer to military regimes but also civilian administrations that have transformed to authoritarian and dictatorial regimes (Lindstaedt and Frantz, 2011; Baturo, 2016). Dictatorships can be formed by a military coup that overthrows the previous government through force or they can be formed when previously elected civilian administration make their rule permanent. In essence dictatorships do not just refer to military regimes or the manner of acquisition of power by a regime but the nature of the exercise of power by a political leadership validates and ensconces the facts of authoritarianism or otherwise. Inherent in the practice of dictatorships is the principles of authoritarianism and totalitarianism which can be classified as military dictatorships, one-party dictatorships, personalist dictatorships, or absolute monarchies (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1965; Ronald,2019). Important of note is that the nature of dictatorships determines outcomes in the national life of the country and influences its economic performance, international relationships and other political outcomes.

The above explains the reason why shortly after assuming independence most of the regimes in Africa metamorphosised into dictatorships. Chikerema (2013) observes that instead of constructively consolidating their hard-won political independence many African leaders quickly became tyrants, dictators, and one-party state rulers. In agreement with the above Marume (1988) argues that many opposition leaders have been charged with treason in Zimbabwe, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and arrested for challenging sitting presidents in North Africa which subsequently led to the Arab revolutions of the 2000's.In underscoring the transformation of regimes into dictatorships Hartman(1983) in agreement with Marume (1988) argues that African leaders have introduced repressive legislations much worse than that of the colonial administration which empowers them to arrest ,detain ,torture, kidnap and kill citizens under the pretext of protecting national sovereignty and promoting some foreign backed ideologies such as Marxism, communism, socialism and Ujama (African socialism in Tanzania).

These actions by African leaders who quickly descended into dictatorships robbed the media, judiciary, and civic society of professional and civilized independence, with example been POSA and AIPPA in Zimbabwe. He argues that into transformation to dictatorships the army, police and secret service become subservient to members of the ruling party and turn a blind eye to the notorious transgressions by anyone from the establishment. Important to note is that the authoritarian regimes that developed out of Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya and amongst others across Africa were political regimes the acquired through the colonially midwived democratic process (Hartman,1983).

Effects of Dictatorships on Post-Colonial Africa

Ethnicity and Exclusion

Colonialism has impacted the political and economic conditions of the contemporary Africa. Post-independence African states are a western model. African states adopted the more centralized and authoritarian system of administration of their colonizers. Post-independence African political system is characterized by ethnic based exclusion and marginalization (Onapajo and Suleman, 2022). The colonial masters deliberated manipulated ethnicity in the creation of sates in Africa. It created states that were ethnically antagonistic towards each other and were inadvently involved in a supremacy battle. The politicians in a bid to acquire power manipulated the power of ethnic nationalism that was handed over to them by the colonial masters. Post-colonial Africa witnessed the consequences of ethnicisation of the state (Geddes, Frantz, and Wright,2014).

In colonial Africa, ethnicization of governance was a divide and rule strategy of the colonial powers to keep Africans at logger-heads with each other. In the ensuing debacle there emerged the politics of exclusion where the major tribes who often were the winners in electoral contest because democracy is all about numbers took all leaving minority tribes and the opposition at the mercy of themselves (Chikerema,2013).Ethnicity and exclusion created a scenario where inter-tribal conflict was practically inevitable and became the order of the day in post-colonial Africa leading to senseless bloodshed and avoidable civil wars that cost lives and destruction of properties over several decades since independence. Inter-tribal wars across the African landscape have created in its wake a massive litany of carnage that is an unmitigated disaster to the growth and development of Africa as a continent.

One Party states

Political leadership in post-colonial Africa within a short period after independence degenerated into one party states that did not accommodate the essential tenets of democracy which involves the accommodation of various interests and concerns of the opposition through multi-party system. African-states tended to one-party system, and though opposition parties emerged they are highly restricted in their operation (Onapajo and Suleman, 2015).

Corruption and Economic Mismanagement

Besides, the exploitation of Africa in the colonial era. African resources were extensively exploited by dictatorial administrations, thereby rendering countries in Africa where these regimes exist economically weak and perpetually dependent in their interaction with the global economy. Post-colonial Africa has witnessed wholesale corruption and economic mismanagement that engendered the plundering of African resources by many post-colonial African leaders who were in power principally to achieve primordial interests. They were involved in chronic primitive accumulation that frustrated any chance of economic

development of their nations. Examples of such wholesale corrupt regimes included that of Mobutu Seseko of Zaire, Samuel Doe of Liberia, Hussein Habre of Chad, Mugabe of Zimbabwe and a host of others across the African continent. The above assertion is supported by Ferim (2012) who observes that under the leadership of dictators in Africa people have witnessed a number of atrocities by amassing billions of dollars from the country for their personal use, buying luxurions apartments in Europe, ruling by decrees, appointing close relatives to top positions in government and institutionalizing a geroncratic government that is corrupt and antithecal to the development of their countries (Douglas,2006;Transparency International,1999).

Political Instability and Incessant Military Coups

Dictatorships in post-colonial Africa created political instability that retarded the growth of many African countries. No meaningful development can occur in an atmosphere of incessant coups and change of government especially in any country Marume (1988).

Control of African economies by Brentwood Institutions

Brentwood institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF have held African economies bound with their structural adjustment programmes that have unleashed more suffering on African people , pauperized the hitherto thriving middle class, disrupted the productive and manufacturing capacity of African countries through dependence on foreign raw materials and finished products, devaluation of national currencies to abysmally low and economically unviable levels and a debt burden that has mortgaged many unborn generations of Africans. According to Akinola (2021) strongly report that the World Bank and the IMF which the key Brentonwood institutions emerged in the 1990's as major players in efforts to improve economic growth in Africa but many critics have argued that SAP virtually had no impact on the macroeconomic performance of African economies but rather created a series of internal political and economic contradictions that have continued to haunt the continent to this day as countries that have implemented their policies continue to suffer from high levels of poverty and became more dependent on external financial resources such as loans, development aid, and food aid than before they got involved with Bretton Woods institutions in order to fund their economies. This period under review was when dictatorships held sway in Africa and they saw their relationship in pandering to the recommendations of these institutions as having political advantage in swaying the West to support their grip on power.

Neo-colonialism

Neo-colonialism otherwise called new form of colonialism is a challenge in post-colonial Africa. Most African countries remain tied to the apron strings of their former colonial masters. Most dictatorships in Africa were sustained by their country's former colonial masters until recently when the wave of democracy began to massively blow across the globe making undemocratic governments unpopular in

the international comity of nations. Neo-colonialism helped to build and even sustained dictatorial regimes across Africa as they tried to embrace Western economic and political systems liberal ideology which has raised several contradictions that continue to stunt sustainable peace and development of the continent as is exemplified in the adoption of Western backed economic policies such as the Structural adjustment programmes whose implementation critics observe have further impoverished the continent (Akinola,2012;Akinola and Makombe,2024).

Ways to Curb the challenges of Dictatorships in Post-Colonial Africa.

It is important to note that political leadership which determined the nature and characteristics of governance in post-colonial Africa is responsible for the subsequent emergence of dictatorships which became responsible for the socio-political and socio-economic state of post-colonial Africa. Some of the ways to curb dictatorships across the globe and in Africa include: Compelling dictatorships across the world to liberalize their government by embracing multi-party democracy; Beyond compelling dictatorships to embrace democracy, the international community must ensure that democracy is practiced to the letter in countries that have tendencies to revert back into dictatorships e.g. Niger where the military took over power in July, 2023;Across the globe the doctrines of free and fair elections should be promoted and enforced. Countries that fall short of the principles of free and fair elections which is an essential principle of democracy which usually provides a strong ground for military dictatorships should be sanctioned and treated as pariah states (Suleman and Onapajo,2022) ;Regional bodies must be firm and unbiased in their show of contempt for all types of coups and mechanisms must be instituted that checkmate foreign interference in African countries that can institute dictatorships; re-orienting democracy to suit local circumstances; and addressing adverse socio-economic conditions that allow that can give room for the emergence of dictatorships and allow political instability to thrive (Suleman and Onabanjo,2022).

It is also important in order to curb the role that ethnicity play in the emergence of dictatorships in Africa that African States should do a state realignment like the Westphalia Conference of 1648 where European nations negotiated and agreed on terms for workable states (Geddes, Frantz, and Wright, 2014).The way African States were fashioned by the colonialist was such that the level of internal attritions and ethnic hostilities will keep them divided for the benefit of European and imperialist interests (Chikerema, 2013).

In addition to the above another fundamental means to curb dictatorships in Africa is through the enforcement of the Lome Declaration on the Framework for an OAU response to unconstitutional changes of government of 2000. The Lome Declaration as it has become famously known identified four cases of unconstitutional change of (a democratically elected) government, namely, i) a military coup d'e tat ii) an intervention by mercenaries; iii) a seizure of power by armed dissidents; and iv) a refusal by an incumbent government power

after free, fair and regular elections. The sanction for the breach of this declaration in any country in Africa included suspension of the country concerned from OAU.As the OAU transisted into the African Union the declaration was reaffirmed in the Constitutive Act of the African Union which includes amongst its governing principles the condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments' (Zamfir,2017).

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the nature of political leadership determined irrespective of whether it is military or civilian determines whether a government becomes dictatorial or not. This is supported by Lindstaedt and Frantz (2011) and Baturo (2016) who argue that dictatorships do not only refer to military regimes but also civilian administrations that have transformed to authoritarian and dictatorial regimes.

In addition, the study revealed that to curb dictatorships in Africa the Lome Declaration of 2000 against unconstitutional government should be enforced strictly in any country where the provisions of the declaration is breached in order to safeguard democracy, good governance and rule of law across the continent. This is supported by Zamfir (2017) who observe that the Lome Declaration against unconstitutional government in Africa was created with the objective of promoting democracy and good governance. He argues that with its creation the African Union succeeded in developing a robust framework for dealing with coups d'etat which have affected African countries development since independence.

Conclusion

The study concludes by observing that dictatorships still exist across African countries largely due to the inability of the African Union to strictly enforce the Lome Declaration on unconstitutional governments.

Recommendation

The study thus recommends the following based on the findings of the study:

Democracy should be institutionalized in all African countries; and

In order to curb political dictatorship, the African Union should put mechanisms in place to deal decisively with any breach of constitutional government by enforcing the principles of the Lome Declaration of 2000 which outlaws' undemocratic government.

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