

Bridging the Gap: Synergising Patriotism, Leadership, and Followership for Nigeria's Nation-Building

Auwalu Musa

*Department of Political Science
Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna,
Kaduna State, Nigeria
musaarwal@rocketmail.com*

Abstract

The challenge of nation-building in Nigeria is rooted in the persistent gaps between patriotism, leadership, and followership. This study explores the dynamics of these gaps and their impact on the country's development, highlighting the need for synergy between citizens and leaders. The primary objectives of this research are to analyse how patriotism can be fostered, leadership can be strengthened, and followership can be more engaged in the nation-building process. This study employs a secondary source of data collection and content analysis methodology, reviewing existing literature, reports, and case studies on patriotism, leadership, and followership in Nigeria. The findings reveal that while Nigeria has made progress in several areas, there is a lack of effective coordination between leaders and followers, often marked by a deficit in trust, accountability, and national pride. The research identifies key barriers to synergy, such as political instability, inadequate civic education, and economic inequalities. In conclusion, the study argues that bridging these gaps requires a multi-faceted approach, including political reforms, effective leadership, and proactive citizen engagement. The contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on the interconnection of patriotism, leadership, and followership as crucial elements for sustainable nation-building in Nigeria. The study provides policy recommendations aimed at fostering a culture of unity, accountability, and collective responsibility among both citizens and leaders.

Keywords: Synergising Patriotism, Leadership, Followership, Nation-Building

Introduction

Nation-building is an ongoing process that involves strengthening a nation's institutions, infrastructure, and collective identity. Nigeria, one of Africa's largest and most diverse countries, faces unique challenges in this regard. Synergizing patriotism, leadership, and followership in Nigeria's nation-building process has been an area of scholarly attention, as these components are essential in achieving sustainable development and social cohesion. This

study seeks to explore the gaps in the interplay between these elements and identify strategies to bridge them, fostering a more unified and prosperous Nigerian society.

On the global stage, nation-building is seen as a critical component of international peace and security, particularly in post-conflict societies. The post-World War II period saw an increased focus on building stable, democratic nations as the foundation for global peace. Global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have emphasised the need for strong leadership, inclusive governance, and active citizen participation in building resilient nations. For instance, countries like Germany and Japan, after the devastation of World War II, underwent significant nation-building efforts characterised by a strong sense of national unity, visionary leadership, and the active involvement of citizens in governance. These examples illustrate the powerful combination of patriotism, effective leadership, and responsible followership in shaping the future of nations. In the case of Nigeria, however, these factors remain underdeveloped, often leading to social instability, corruption, and weakened state structures (Ake, 2000). Moreover, the role of international organisations in fostering nation-building cannot be overstated. For example, the role of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) in peacekeeping missions or post-conflict reconstruction has been pivotal. However, nations like Nigeria that struggle with internal divisions often find it challenging to fully harness these global frameworks due to entrenched leadership challenges and weak followership engagement in national policies (Mazrui, 2005). This global context provides a critical lens through which Nigeria's struggles with leadership, followership, and patriotism can be understood.

Africa, as a continent, has faced significant challenges related to governance, leadership, and the role of citizens in nation-building. Many African nations, including Nigeria, have dealt with the legacies of colonialism, ethnic divisions, and political instability, which complicate the effective synergy between leadership, patriotism, and followership. In Africa, the challenges of leadership and followership are often compounded by ethnic and regional tensions that hinder national unity. For example, during the 1990s, Rwanda faced ethnic violence, driven mainly by poor leadership and the absence of a cohesive national identity, which tore the country apart (Des Forges, 1999). On the other hand, countries such as Botswana have achieved a relatively stable democratic transition, with a strong sense of national unity, good governance, and citizen participation in governance (Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2002). These examples show the contrasting outcomes of nation-building in African countries, highlighting the importance of leadership, followership, and patriotism as guiding principles. The African Union's agenda for 2063 emphasises the need for "inclusive governance" and "effective leadership" across the continent, underscoring the importance of these factors in achieving sustainable development and social cohesion. In the case of Nigeria, these elements need to be better aligned, as historical divisions and political corruption have undermined efforts to build a cohesive nation-state (Adebajo, 2010).

At the subregional level, Nigeria plays a key role in ECOWAS, which fosters regional integration and peace across West Africa. ECOWAS has been instrumental in peacekeeping missions, notably in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s, where the organisation's leadership helped stabilise these countries (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS,

2008). As the largest and most influential member of ECOWAS, Nigeria is expected to provide leadership both within and globally. However, Nigeria's internal challenges, such as political corruption, a lack of strong followership, and insufficient national pride, have hindered its ability to project effective leadership on the continental stage (Musa, 2024). The synergy between leadership, patriotism, and followership is especially significant in these contexts, as Nigeria's role in regional peace and stability requires national cohesion and responsible governance. Furthermore, in subregional matters, Nigeria's leadership has sometimes been challenged by domestic discontent, as seen in the insurgency in the northeast (Boko Haram), which has led to a failure to provide security and nation-building strategies at home. This, in turn, affects the country's credibility in leading regional initiatives, underscoring the importance of effective governance that integrates the roles of citizens (through followership) and leaders, guided by a strong sense of national pride and commitment to peace and stability.

On the national level, Nigeria's history of leadership challenges, including military rule, political corruption, and regional tensions, has made it difficult for the country to fully embrace the concepts of patriotism, leadership, and followership in a way that would drive nation-building. Nigeria, with its diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, faces the challenge of fostering a unified national identity, often undermined by the actions of political elites who exploit these divisions for personal gain (Suberu, 2001). For example, during the military dictatorship in the 1990s, there was widespread repression, and citizens were disillusioned mainly with the leadership, leading to a lack of patriotism and diminishing civic engagement (Ogbondah, 2000), with only a few patriotic military leaders but led without constitutional backings. Similarly, the recent EndBadGovernance demonstrations and EndSARS movement, which was driven mainly by youth activism, illustrated the deepening divide between Nigerian citizens and their leaders and the lack of trust in the political system. However, there are instances where Nigerian leaders have shown the potential to foster patriotism and nation-building. Despite his flaws, President Goodluck Jonathan's management of the 2014 Ebola outbreak was widely praised locally and internationally, highlighting a moment of effective leadership that united citizens for a common purpose. Likewise, the leadership of Lagos State under Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu has prioritised infrastructure development and governance, demonstrating how capable leadership can foster a sense of civic responsibility and pride. Similarly, the leadership of Borno State under Governor Professor Babagana Zulum has exemplified patriotism, as he consistently prioritises the welfare of his citizens, even in the face of ongoing security challenges. However, for true nation-building to be achieved, these instances of exemplary leadership must be replicated on a larger scale across the nation, with both leaders and citizens actively contributing to the process.

The primary objectives of this research are to examine how patriotism can be nurtured, leadership can be strengthened, and followership can be more actively engaged in the nation-building process in Nigeria. This study adopts a secondary data collection approach and employs content analysis methodology, reviewing relevant literature, reports, and case studies on patriotism, leadership, and followership within the Nigerian context. Despite Nigeria's rich cultural diversity, vast natural resources, and youthful population, the nation continues to grapple with significant challenges in pursuing sustainable development. Patriotism, leadership, and followership are critical to the process of nation-building, yet the relationship

between these elements has often been fragmented, creating a gap that stifles national progress. This gap exists due to the failure to align these elements into a cohesive force capable of driving meaningful change. By understanding and addressing this disconnect, Nigeria can better harness the potential of these components for a more unified and prosperous future.

Conceptual Clarifications

Patriotism

Patriotism is a concept that can be understood in various ways, often reflecting a deep emotional connection to one's country, characterised by a sense of pride, loyalty, and a commitment to the nation's well-being. From a classical perspective, patriotism involves a devotion to the values and ideals of one's country, especially in times of conflict or national crises (Smith, 1991). It has often been described as the "love of one's country," a sentiment that drives individuals to make sacrifices for the nation's prosperity (Homer-Dixon, 2006). More critically, however, some scholars see patriotism as a complex social construct that can be both a unifying force and a tool for political manipulation (Billig, 1995). In Nigeria, patriotism has played a vital role in the country's history, particularly during national unity, such as the fight for independence or collective efforts to overcome crises like the Ebola outbreak (Olaleye et al., 2014).

Leadership

Leadership can be defined as the ability of an individual or group to guide, direct, or influence others towards achieving shared goals. It is commonly understood in terms of both authority and the exercise of power to initiate and implement policies (Northouse, 2018). Scholars have emphasised the moral and ethical responsibilities of leaders, which include ensuring the welfare of their citizens and guiding them through social, economic, and political challenges (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leadership in the context of nation-building is seen not just as holding political office but also as the capacity to inspire confidence and cultivate a collective vision for the nation's future. In Nigeria, leadership has often been a contentious issue due to periods of military dictatorship, corrupt governance, and inadequate responsiveness to the people's needs (Kure, 2020). Effective leadership, particularly in post-independence Nigeria, remains a critical factor in addressing the nation's developmental challenges.

Followership

Followership refers to the role and behaviour of those who are led, encompassing the willingness of citizens to support, follow, and engage with leaders in the pursuit of national goals. While followership may initially seem passive, it plays a crucial role in determining the success or failure of leadership efforts (Kelley, 1992). A key aspect of followership involves active participation in societal processes, including adhering to laws, contributing to national development, and holding leaders accountable. In the Nigerian context, followership has been characterised by both support for and disengagement from leadership due to corruption, poor governance, and political disenfranchisement (Hadi, 2015). Recent developments, such as the EndSARS movement, reflect a growing shift towards more active and critical followership, where citizens demand reforms and accountability from their leaders (Abimbade, Olayoku & Herro, 2022).

Nation-building

Nation-building refers to the complex process of constructing or structuring a national identity, which involves political, social, and economic efforts to create a cohesive and unified state. It is a multifaceted concept that integrates the establishment of effective institutions, social integration, economic development, and the cultivation of a shared sense of identity and purpose among citizens (Gellner, 1983). Nation-building is often driven by leadership and requires the active participation of the population. In Nigeria, nation-building has been a particularly challenging task due to the country's ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Efforts to create a unified national identity have been hindered by regionalism, corruption, and the centralisation of power in the hands of a few political elites (Musa, 2023). Nation-building in Nigeria remains dynamic and ongoing, requiring effective leadership, active followership, and a strong sense of patriotism to foster unity and progress.

Patriotism, Leadership, Followership and Nation-Building: A Nexus within the Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, patriotism often emerges as a means to transcend ethnic and religious divisions, promoting national solidarity in times of crisis, as evidenced by the collective response to the Ebola outbreak (Olaleye et al., 2014). However, patriotism is frequently challenged by deep-seated ethnic and regional loyalties that often undermine national unity. Leadership in Nigeria has a complex legacy, shaped by colonialism, military rule, and democratic transitions. It is the driving force behind the nation's policies and development strategies. However, leadership has been marred by corruption, authoritarianism, and a failure to address the populace's needs, resulting in a lack of trust in political figures (Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nkah, 2015). In Nigeria, particularly in recent years, followership has evolved from passive acceptance to active engagement, as seen in movements such as EndSARS (Abimbade, Olayoku & Herro, 2022). This shift indicates a growing recognition of the role citizens must play in shaping the nation's future. Nation-building in Nigeria is an ongoing project that requires not only strong leadership but also active citizen participation and a sense of collective responsibility. Given the country's diverse population, nation-building is a delicate process of balancing inclusivity with the establishment of effective governance institutions. This process remains highly contested, especially in light of corruption, inequality, and regional disparities (Unya & Onyemauwa, 2022).

The interrelationship between patriotism, leadership, followership, and nation-building is critical in understanding Nigeria's national development trajectory. These concepts provide the foundation for the collective effort to address the nation's challenges, including political instability, economic development, and social cohesion. However, for nation-building to be successful, a synergy between these elements is necessary, ensuring that the leadership guides with integrity, the followership engages actively, and patriotism fosters unity for the common good.

Analytical Framework: Transformational Leadership and Civic Patriotism

This study is anchored in an analytical framework that emphasises the interconnected roles of patriotism, leadership, and followership in the context of Nigeria's nation-building process. The

core of this framework is the belief that effective nation-building is not merely about the actions of political leaders but also involves active, responsible citizenship rooted in patriotism and driven by engaged followership. It highlights how these elements must work in synergy to foster a national identity, improve governance, and address Nigeria's challenges regarding unity, political stability, and economic growth.

Key scholars buttressing this analytical framework include influential leadership theorists such as James MacGregor Burns (1978), whose transformational leadership model underscores the importance of leaders inspiring and motivating followers toward a shared vision. Burns' emphasis on values such as trust, loyalty, and shared purpose resonates with the idea of patriotism, where citizens are united by a commitment to national development. Similarly, Robert K. Greenleaf's (1977) Servant Leadership Theory contributes to this framework by highlighting the duty of leaders to serve the interests of the nation and its citizens, while Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) in *Democracy in America* reinforces the idea that an engaged citizenry is crucial to the success of democratic governance. Furthermore, Herman Van Gunsteren (1991) discusses the mutual responsibility between leaders and followers in democratic systems, emphasizing that both groups play an integral role in pursuing national objectives.

The analytical framework operates under several key assumptions that provide its foundation. First, it assumes that patriotism, leadership, and followership are interdependent elements, all of which must function together for successful nation-building. It suggests that for Nigeria to achieve its potential, citizens must be patriotic and actively engage in nation-building, complementing the leadership provided by elected officials. Furthermore, the framework assumes that the leadership should promote ethical governance, ensuring that leaders are accountable and prioritise the welfare of the people. A critical aspect of this framework is the assumption that active engagement is necessary for the nation's progress, not only from leaders but from followers as well. The theory also assumes that a shared vision of national development is essential, where both leaders and followers are committed to the long-term goals of political stability, economic development, and social cohesion. However, the framework is not without its critiques. Some scholars' views could be used to argue that the analytical framework places too much emphasis on leadership while neglecting structural barriers, such as corruption, political patronage, and weak institutions that may impede the effectiveness of the synergy between leadership and followership. For example, in Nigeria, entrenched political elites often perpetuate systems that prioritise personal or regional interests over national unity, which can undermine the cooperative relationship between leaders and followers (Goshwe, 2024). Additionally, the framework assumes a level of cultural homogeneity in terms of patriotism and national unity, which may not apply in a country like Nigeria, characterised by deep ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. Critics also argue that the assumption of active followership may overlook the disenfranchisement of large segments of the population, who may feel politically alienated due to factors such as poverty, lack of education, or political apathy (Suberu, 2001).

Despite these critiques, the analytical framework offers significant strengths. It presents a holistic approach to nation-building by recognizing that leadership, patriotism, and followership must work together to achieve meaningful progress. This synergy fosters national

unity, as it emphasises the importance of collective action and shared values among the citizenry. The framework also promotes long-term national development, encouraging leaders and followers to think beyond immediate political gains and focus on building institutions, improving infrastructure, and ensuring socio-economic growth. Furthermore, the emphasis on ethical leadership provides a relevant framework for addressing issues such as corruption, insecurity, and poor governance, all of which have plagued Nigeria's development (Okagbue, 2011). By encouraging leaders to inspire patriotic values and followers to engage in nation-building actively, the theory contributes to fostering a more cohesive and participatory democracy in Nigeria.

The relevance and applicability of this analytical framework to the study of synergizing patriotism, leadership, and followership for Nigeria's nation-building is evident, especially considering the country's complex historical context. Nigeria has grappled with persistent challenges, including ethnic divisions, corruption, and political instability, which have hindered its progress and cohesion as a nation. For instance, the civil war of 1967–1970, fueled by ethnic and regional tensions, underscores the deep-rooted divisions that still affect Nigerian society. Additionally, corruption remains a pervasive issue, as seen in the findings from Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, which consistently ranks Nigeria among the most corrupt nations. This theoretical framework provides valuable insights into how a synergy between leaders and followers, underpinned by a shared vision of patriotism, could work towards achieving national unity and overcoming these divisions.

The framework emphasises the importance of leadership that inspires collective national goals while simultaneously fostering a citizenry actively engaged in the political process. For example, Nelson Mandela's leadership in post-apartheid South Africa, where he advocated for reconciliation and nation-building, is a pertinent illustration of how leaders can work with the populace to bridge deep divides. In the case of Nigeria, national leaders who prioritise inclusive governance, such as Goodluck Jonathan's National Conference (2014), which aimed to address national unity issues, demonstrate efforts to align leadership with public participation. However, the success of such initiatives often depends on the responsiveness of the citizenry, and the current disconnect between the political class and the people calls for a renewed focus on fostering patriotism and active followership to support such efforts. Moreover, this framework is relevant for addressing contemporary challenges in Nigeria's democratic process. Political accountability and transparency are critical for ensuring leaders remain answerable to the people. In Nigeria, incidents such as the EndSARS protests in 2020, which highlighted the demand for accountability from the government in the face of police brutality, reveal the growing desire among citizens for a more accountable system of governance. The framework's emphasis on active citizen participation is thus timely, encouraging Nigerians to understand their role in the democratic process, not only by voting but by engaging in peaceful activism, holding officials accountable, and contributing to public discourse. Furthermore, the framework's call for political education and citizen engagement is crucial, particularly in a country where large swaths of the population still struggle with political disenfranchisement and apathy. According to Afrobarometer surveys, many Nigerians are skeptical about the political system and feel excluded from meaningful decision-making processes. By promoting a more informed and engaged citizenry, this theoretical framework encourages people to take

ownership of their nation's future. It advocates for civic education programs highlighting the importance of informed voting, public debate participation, and grassroots movement engagement.

Patriotism in Nigeria: A Divided Sense of National Identity

Patriotism, which is typically defined as a deep devotion and loyalty to one's country, holds immense potential for fostering national unity and collective action. In the case of Nigeria, however, patriotism is often constrained by the complex interplay of ethnic, regional, and religious identities. These identities, deeply embedded in Nigeria's socio-political landscape, tend to overshadow a broader sense of national loyalty, resulting in a fragmented national unity. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society, Nigeria faces the challenge of uniting diverse groups under a single national identity that transcends these divisions. While patriotism has the potential to be a unifying force, it is often undermined by a loyalty to one's ethnic group, region, or religion, which fragments national solidarity (Hassan & Musa, 2010; Musa, 2023).

This fragmentation is particularly evident during national elections, where political candidates often appeal to ethnic or regional sentiments rather than promoting policies to foster national cohesion. The 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria serve as concrete examples of how deeply ingrained ethnic and regional politics influence voting patterns. In 2015, the contest between Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari revealed how divisive ethnic and religious sentiments shaped political discourse. Jonathan, who hailed from the Niger Delta, enjoyed significant support from the South-South and South-East regions, while Buhari, a northerner, garnered strong backing from the predominantly Muslim North. According to data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Buhari's victory was largely due to his overwhelming support in the northern and some western states. At the same time, Jonathan secured most of the southern states. This pattern of voting, driven by ethnic and regional identities, highlighted the lack of a unifying national identity that could transcend such divisions (Babalola, 2020).

In the 2019 elections, the division along ethnic and religious lines persisted, with Buhari, once again, relying on northern support and Jonathan's political allies continuing to represent the South. The ethnic and religious polarisation during these elections underscored how a more parochial sense of loyalty often trumps a broader sense of national unity. In a country like Nigeria, where regionalism remains deeply entrenched, the emergence of political leaders who appeal to ethnic identity rather than national unity erases patriotism (Musa, 2023; 2015; Hassan & Musa, 2014). The result of this fragmented patriotism is a lack of commitment to the broader good of the nation. National unity and the willingness to prioritise collective interests over personal, ethnic, or regional loyalties are often undermined. This phenomenon is evident not just in elections, but in national issues such as the allocation of resources, appointments to government positions, and the distribution of development projects. For instance, the controversy over the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and its mismanagement of funds speaks to the lack of trust in a national identity that binds the various groups. The Niger Delta region, home to the country's oil wealth, has often felt marginalised by the federal government, which, in the eyes of many in the region, prioritises the interests of other areas, particularly the northern regions (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Leadership in Nigeria: A Crisis of Vision and Accountability

Leadership in Nigeria has long been characterised by a crisis of vision and accountability, with significant consequences for national development. Political leaders, often preoccupied with personal or ethnic interests, have failed to articulate and implement a cohesive national vision that aligns with the needs of the broader population. This has resulted in weak governance, marred by systemic corruption, mismanagement, and a lack of accountability. The failure to prioritise the common good over narrow personal or group interests has perpetuated a cycle of poor governance, where citizens face widespread inequality, poverty, and insecurity. For instance, during both military and civilian regimes, the leadership's inefficiency has been evident in the country's failure to build essential infrastructure, enhance the education system, or improve healthcare services. The period of military rule, saw widespread human rights abuses and economic mismanagement, with little regard for long-term national progress. Military regimes in Nigeria are infamous for their extensive corruption, which drained national resources and left the country deeply in debt (Osoba, 1996). Even after the return to civilian rule in 1999, leadership in Nigeria has continued to struggle with similar issues. The democratic administrations of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007) (Hassan & Musa, 2011), Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015), and Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023) witnessed widespread corruption scandals and mismanagement of public funds, particularly in the oil sector, which remains the backbone of the Nigerian economy.

The 2015 and 2019 elections further exemplified the leadership crisis, as electoral fraud and manipulation allegations dominated political discourse. These issues reflect a deeper problem of lack of transparency and accountability in governance. Despite efforts to address corruption, such as establishing anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigeria has suffered from a weak institutional framework that fails to hold corrupt leaders accountable (Onuoha, 2017). This lack of accountability extends to key developmental sectors, where, for instance, inadequate funding of public education and healthcare has resulted in poor service delivery and a high level of poverty (Musa & Bayero, 2024).

The ongoing crisis of leadership has exacerbated Nigeria's social and economic challenges. The World Bank (2024) estimates that by 2023, 38.9% of Nigerians will live below the poverty line, equating to approximately 87 million people, making Nigeria the country with the second-largest population of poor individuals globally, after India. Additionally, the nation's infrastructure remains underdeveloped, characterised by frequent power outages, inefficient and unaffordable transportation networks, insufficient healthcare systems, acute hunger, limited income and high illiteracy, all of which impede economic growth and national development.

Followership in Nigeria: From Passivity to Active Citizenship

Followership in Nigeria plays a pivotal role in the country's political landscape, and its passive nature has contributed significantly to the challenges faced by the nation. Historically, Nigerians have been conditioned to accept authoritarian rule, where their involvement in political decision-making was either limited or suppressed. The long history of military dictatorship, which spanned much of Nigeria's post-independence era, created a culture where

citizens were largely excluded from meaningful participation in governance (Ake, 1996). As a result, many Nigerians have developed a sense of disengagement from the political process, often viewing themselves as powerless in effecting change.

A prominent indicator of passive followership in Nigeria is voter apathy, which has remained a consistent issue across various electoral cycles. Despite the country's return to civilian rule in 1999, citizen engagement in elections has remained low, with millions of eligible voters opting not to participate in the polls. For example, in the 2019 presidential election, only 28,614,190 voters (35.66%) out of 84,000,084 registered voters cast their ballots, marking a notable decline from the 43.65 percent turnout observed in previous elections (Madubuegwu & Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2023). Several factors contribute to this low voter turnout, including widespread disillusionment with the political system, a lack of trust in electoral processes, and the belief that voting will not be count and result in meaningful change.

The youth demographic, making up a substantial portion of the electorate, is notably impacted by political disengagement. According to Iyora (2023, February 13), over one-third of Nigeria's 93.4 million registered voters are youths. However, many young Nigerians, disillusioned by decades of poor governance, corruption, and unemployment, often perceive the political system as disconnected from their daily realities. This sense of alienation has led to a growing cynicism about the ability of the government to address their concerns. The EndSARS movement in 2020, a youth-led protest against police brutality, was an example of how Nigerians, particularly the youth, have begun to demand accountability from their leaders, but such activism has yet to translate into broader political engagement consistently.

The challenge is to transform passive followership into active citizenship, where Nigerians fully embrace their roles in the democratic process and take responsibility for shaping the nation's future. Achieving this requires a cultural shift that fosters greater political engagement, particularly among the youth, through voting, civic activism, and holding leaders accountable. The 2019 general elections serve as a notable example of increased youth involvement. According to Yiaga Africa (2023), the elections were among the most contested since Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999, featuring 91 registered political parties, 73 presidential candidates, 1,904 senatorial candidates, and 4,680 candidates for the House of Representatives. The *Not Too Young to Run* legislation, which lowered the age threshold for contesting political offices, marked a significant milestone by legally empowering young people aged 25-30 to run for seats in the House of Representatives and State Houses of Assembly for the first time in Nigeria's post-independence history. While this legislative breakthrough represents progress, the challenge remains to sustain this momentum and translate heightened political engagement into meaningful and enduring change (Yiaga Africa, 2023).

The Missing Gap: Synergy between Patriotism, Leadership, and Followership

The missing gap in Nigeria's socio-political landscape is the lack of effective synergy between patriotism, leadership, and followership. Each element plays a crucial and interconnected role in the nation-building process, yet they often fail to function harmoniously, resulting in a fragmented approach to national development. Patriotism serves as the moral compass for collective action, leadership provides direction and vision, and followership ensures the active

participation of citizens in realizing that vision. However, in the Nigerian context, these components are often at odds with one another, leading to a cycle of disjointed efforts that undermine progress.

Patriotism, in its ideal form, should inspire Nigerians to work together toward the common good of the nation, transcending ethnic, regional, and religious divisions. However, the reality is that patriotism in Nigeria is often overshadowed by tribal and regional loyalties, which diminish the collective commitment to national development. For instance, in the 2015 and 2019 general elections, political candidates frequently appealed to ethnic constituencies, prioritizing regional support over a national agenda. This trend highlights the absence of a unified national identity, where loyalty to Nigeria as a whole is subordinate to more parochial allegiances (Habib, 2024, December 10). Strengthening a national sense of patriotism that encompasses Nigeria's diversity, rather than dividing it, is essential for moving the country forward. Leadership in Nigeria, despite the democratic transition since 1999, has often failed to meet the expectations of the people due to issues of corruption, poor governance, and a lack of visionary leadership. Nigerian leaders have frequently pursued personal or ethnic interests at the expense of national development. For example, the inability to address basic infrastructural needs like education, healthcare, and energy demonstrates a systemic failure in leadership (Aboekwe, 2019). The focus on short-term political gains rather than long-term development has perpetuated cycles of mismanagement. To bridge the gap, leadership must evolve to prioritise the collective interests of Nigerians, committing to policies that benefit all citizens equitably, and fostering an environment of accountability and transparency.

Followership in Nigeria has traditionally been passive, with citizens often disillusioned by the political system and feeling powerless to create meaningful change. This disengagement is particularly evident in low voter turnout rates, as seen in the 2015 and 2019 elections, where large numbers of eligible voters abstained from voting due to skepticism about the electoral process and political apathy (Ngara & Udefuna, 2021; Mahmud, 2015). The shift from passive followership to active citizenship is crucial for ensuring that leaders are held accountable and that policies reflect the needs of the people. To achieve this, Nigerian citizens must be empowered to participate more actively in the democratic process, not just during elections, but in day-to-day civic engagement. This transformation requires extensive political education, media literacy, and the development of channels for meaningful public participation in decision-making.

Bridging this gap necessitates a concerted effort to integrate these components into a cohesive strategy for national development. Reforms must prioritise education to foster a culture of unity and shared responsibility. Nigeria can cultivate a generation that values patriotism and political engagement by equipping the youth with a sense of duty toward national cohesion and civic participation. Leadership reforms should ensure the leadership class is committed to ethical governance, transparency, and accountability. Finally, followership must evolve into active citizenship, where Nigerians are proactive in holding their leaders accountable, demanding transparency, and participating fully in the nation-building process. In summary, the synergy between patriotism, leadership, and followership is critical for Nigeria's growth. By aligning these components, through educational, political, and institutional reforms, Nigeria

can build a more inclusive, accountable, and prosperous society. Strengthening this synergy is the key to overcoming the barriers to national development and achieving long-term peace and progress.

Conclusion

The gap between patriotism, leadership, and followership in Nigeria has significantly hindered the nation's potential for growth, stability, and development. Despite the country's wealth of resources and cultural diversity, the lack of synergy among these key elements has perpetuated cycles of disunity, poor governance, and disengagement. To overcome its challenges and realise its full potential, Nigeria must foster a harmonious alignment of these components. A collective national pride that transcends ethnic, regional, and religious divides is crucial to fostering unity and shared purpose. This requires creating a vision of patriotism that embraces the diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds of the population. National loyalty should be grounded in a shared history, common struggles, and collective aspirations rather than regional or ethnic identity.

Strengthening patriotism in Nigeria demands a comprehensive national education strategy that promotes the idea of "unity in diversity." As Musa (2023) asserts, cultivating a civic culture that encourages patriotism across ethnic and regional lines is critical for addressing Nigeria's political and social challenges and fostering more inclusive governance. This strategy should include political education, media literacy, and stronger accountability mechanisms, which would transform passive followership into active citizenship. Encouraging Nigerians to view their participation in elections and civic life as part of a collective effort to shape the future is essential. As seen in other democracies, active citizenship ensures that leaders remain accountable and governance aligns with the will of the people (Putnam, 2000). To bridge this gap, Nigeria's leadership must evolve to prioritise long-term development goals over short-term political gain. Leaders must focus on transparency, building strong institutions, and fostering policies that promote national cohesion. Ethical leadership is vital in breaking the cycle of corruption and mismanagement, which has stalled progress. A renewed commitment to the common good, grounded in patriotism, will enable the country to overcome its current challenges and lay the foundation for sustainable development.

Ultimately, patriotism, leadership, and followership must work together to propel Nigeria toward a prosperous, peaceful, and stable future. A unified national identity, effective governance, and an empowered citizenry will pave the way for Nigeria's development. By addressing the missing gap and cultivating a culture of collaboration and mutual responsibility, Nigeria can unlock its full potential and become a model of growth and development in Africa.

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