

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND THE EAST ASIAN MIRACLE: BREAKING THE ‘JINX’ FOR THE NEXT GENERATION IN AFRICA

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Introduction

When Africa as a continent is mentioned, what comes to mind might be a dark continent, slavery and colonial legacies, and failing and failed states. This paper seeks to deepen the understanding of political leadership styles in Africa, specifically Nigeria, as a factor that is connected to the development discourse within the global context of developing societies.

This comparative study examines personality traits and institutional factors in historical narratives and experiences of political leadership styles. It further relies on existing leadership theories, which explain the widening gap between developed and developing nations. Specifically, East Asia’s rapid growth and development which is termed the “East Asian Miracle”, (Page, 1994; Vogel, 1991) provides the framework for comparison with these countries who were socio-economic and political “class mates” of most African countries in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Further, the argument put forward by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) as to “why nations fail” states that countries are more likely to develop the right institutions when they have an open pluralistic political system with competition for political office, a widespread electorate, and openness to new political leaders. They further reinforce their arguments with the example of the “Arab Spring” witnessed in North Africa and the Middle East as a situation where these factors were not present and therefore the right institutions did not develop. To this end, the central comparison of this study is the political leaders’ personality styles in the East Asian experience and African context, which lacks adequate investigation. Hence, this study seeks to improve on the research on political leadership styles and development within developing societies with an aim at further synergy for research across areas (regions) and disciplines.

Methodology

This study employs secondary sources such as books, reports, newspaper articles, media documentaries amongst others. Given the obvious limitations arising from resources available, the review of literature will be pivotal to this research. Further, the methods of study will be geared towards seeking a new paradigm for developing nation-states. This will be done using the selected cases of Nigeria and Ghana and the East Asian ‘tiger’ country of Singapore using qualitative approaches and complimented sparsely by quantitative methods.

Results and Discussion

The narratives of historical, socio-cultural, and political experiences within ethnic plurality and homogeneity factors have sought to understand, explain and sometimes justify the dichotomy between developed and developing nations, globally. This study interrogates the component of political leadership style, as key to understanding the whole. The literature on leadership styles has been dominated by studies from organizational theory and management (Hartley and Benington, 2011) as well as other disciplines. However, significantly less work is available on cross-regional studies within the political leadership context.

The aim of this exploration is to widen the possibilities of awakening the consciousness of future African generations, specifically those in Nigeria so that they may recognize that political leadership is pivotal to coping with challenges. One recommendation put forward amongst others are institutional reforms and systematic inquiry leading to compulsory restitution by African leaders, found culpable of plundering their commonwealth. This could be as alternative to public prosecution.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the debate on political leaders and their styles of governance in the developing regions of Africa, Asia and beyond. In addition, this study adds to the leadership discourse faced by “failing” and “failed” states in these regions in terms of evidence based academic research within the framework of theories and methodologies in global context.

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