



Trust in Leadership and the “Thirty Pieces of Silver” Syndrome in Nigerian Politics

Abstract

Trust in leadership with its culture of accountability, integrity, honesty, transparency, and other political virtues, is in constant struggle with the dominant politics that enthrone betrayal for selfish gain over national good. Consequent upon this ugly syndrome of betrayal, the nation has not only been affected politically, but, also, it has stunted the growth of the nation socially, economically, infrastructurally, and developmentally, leaving Nigeria on the verge of collapse as the resultant common good of leadership trust has been shortchanged with selfishness. The paper aimed to critically look into the political landscape of the Nigerian state which has thrown its principle of leadership trust into oblivion with a syndrome that characterized leadership at different levels, institutions, and agencies, as betrayers of some sort. To achieve this, the paper briefly made conceptual analysis of politics, leadership trust, and thirty pieces of silver. The paper evaluated Nigeria's leadership terrain, and detects that politics in Nigeria is at a crossroads. Through some glaring political scenarios, the paper observed that betrayal is commonplace among political actors and institutions such as the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), the Judiciary, and others that should by law preserve the national glory in the global stage. The paper argued that if this leadership unevenness is sustained and left unchecked, it will not only undermine Nigeria's leadership and political institutions, but, also, render the process of nation-building difficult, if not impossible. To avert this ugly situation, the paper recommended that Nigeria should strengthen its political institutions by implementing electoral reforms that promote accountability, fairness, and transparency.

Keywords: Politics, Leadership Trust, Thirty Pieces of Silver, Nigerian State.

Introduction

Escaping the grip of colonialism, it was in high expectations that Nigeria would be among the towering countries in politics and political leadership in the global stage. But, unfortunately, patriotism,

commitment and accountability have appeared a mirage in the nation. This is due to the fact that the nation which was handed over to the indigenous leaders has experienced developmental setbacks in almost all facets of national live-wires

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given that successive indigenous leaders in all levels of governance, have not shown altruistic responsibility in the exercise of their mandates. Leadership which ought to be trust-oriented and stewardship has lost its pristine pride of place as its expectations have been ambushed by the people at the helm. As it is in the nation today besieged by underdevelopment both in human and national growth, who would stop one from pointing accusing fingers to the political actors in the stage of politics? Since every wound points to the object that inflicted it, and every crime points to its perpetrators, therefore, any nation seeking a cure must first locate the cause of its afflictions.

It is unfortunate that over the years, Nigeria has not had a leader that respects his manifesto nor act true to his political promises. The nation is captured by political actors with plausible and enticing manifestoes accompanied with other humanitarian gestures of monetary and material inducing tokens just to have the mandate of the people. But, unfortunately, immediately they succeed in having their ways, the whole game changes. This is the case where the masses whose mandates were sought for, will turn back to beg these political actors to have a good living even in its minimal measure. The citizens do not receive only the opposite of what they voted for, but, they are also greeted with utmost abandonment by these leaders in exchange for their political allies, party

members, foreign allies and other private agenda that matter most to them.

The questions that beg for answers are: how do we build leadership trust beyond silver? Does the betrayal experience in the hands of those at the helm worth it? Do political actors know that betrayal for personal benefits leaves the nation empty? Who can the citizens actually trust to lead? It is arguably that betrayal of trust in the nation's political space has caused more harm than good in the economic, socio-political, and developmental domains of national life, making Nigeria witness arid growth within and in the comity of nations. Since ignoring this ravaging syndrome will amount to living in perpetual denial, this paper considers it necessary to look into this cankerworm that has upturned the national expectations with the aim of exposing its heinous characteristics, and as well reveal its implications for national growth, human development, and political and economic stability.

Clarification of Concepts

For ease of understanding, this paper makes clarifications of the following concepts: Thirty Pieces of Silver, Politics, and Leadership Trust.

Thirty Pieces of Silver

Though idiomatic, this phrase originates from the biblical narrative (Matthew 26: 14 -16) which exposes how the biblical Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, cheaply sold his master, Jesus Christ to the Jews for only 'thirty pieces of silver'.

The phrase, as symbolic as it is, portrays betrayal, often for individual gain. Put differently, it is anything given for a treacherous act. It implies an act carried not out of a sense of moral obligation, but for personal enrichment. From any angle this phrase is looked at, it symbolizes dishonor and disloyalty. Therefore, thirty pieces of silver as derived and used in this context, is a potent of betrayal and cost of personal gain over group or national loyalty and common good.

Politics

Politics for Adrian Leftwich (2015), is the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations among individuals, such as the distribution of status or resources (p. 68) Unfortunately, the above definition lacks clarity being that politics is only concerned with the use of power, but, it does not clarify whether the power can be used at one's will and for selfish end or for the common good of the people. The Greek philosophers on the other hand considered politics as dealing with all the activities and affairs of the city state (polis). Politics, for them, is an all-inclusive term that makes no distinction between the state and the government. Politics, for them, is the total study of man, society, morality, state, and so on. In this sense, politics is not restricted to mere institution of governance, but, also, a mechanism for achieving societal goals. Hence, politics is a societal platform which advances the promotion of good living and orderliness for the purpose of

achieving a healthy and sustainable society (Onyemachi, 2025, p.38).

Leadership Trust

Shoorman et al., as captured by Salman Sarwa et al. (2025), consider leadership trust as a foundational climate condition that shapes how employees experience fairness, support, and direction (p.138). Though the above definition appears to have an industrial background that pictures the employer and employees relationships, but the crux of the definition is that it brings out the characteristics of leadership trust. Effective leadership in every clime is characterized by trust, consistency, honesty, good judgment, positive relationship, empathy, and transparency. On a general sense, therefore, leadership trust is the confidence followers or groups have in their leader's character, competence, and consistency which foster a secured environment for higher performance. At its core, leadership trust is the belief and assurance members have in the integrity, ability and purpose of their leaders. It is built on the ability of leaders to create a trustworthy and reliable environment within their members. Leadership trust, therefore, implies credibility in one's actions, reliability on one's promises, integrity in one's adherence to moral principles and norms, and commitment in one's effort towards achieving the desired objectives of the group one is at its helm. This affirms Innocent Asouzu's (2003) position when he describes leadership as "the unification of all human interests towards

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the determination of the destiny of the whole man" (p. 67). Hence, trust-based leadership plays a vital role in creating effective groups and achieving tangible results.

Nigeria's Political Landscape and the Question of Trust

In politics, trust within a group is not an optional approach, but an integral and pivotal one. It is a virtue that impacts practically all facets of a group functioning and success. In the political space, trust in leadership sets the direction for all decisions, and influences all actions to group and national challenges. It is disheartening that in all levels, Nigeria's way of politicking has lost the moral status of trust that gives hope and assures performance. Chris Ijiomah (2011) could be correct when he made the point that the leadership disappointments our people have suffered in the hands of almost all the creams of this population has in part been caused fundamentally by our leaders' insensitivity to the moral dimension of knowledge (p.62). Nigerian politics has less become a call to service and more about conquest whether by hook or crook. The most visible actors are politicians who are at the base level in the democratic process.

On the political party level which serves as the bedrock of leadership, no one can be trusted given the fact that little material enticement from opposing party can swift the loyalty of a flag bearer of a party. This is made manifest during

elections that should supposedly produce credible leaders. Here, party representatives even at the heart of the voting exercise at the polling units go as far as compromising by bargaining with their opponents by way of monetizing the votes and shortchanging the results. One wonders if political parties which are the grass-root in politics fall short of trust, and carries this moral burden, what then do we expect from the elected individuals at the helm? This, points to the belief that no ideal leader can come from a party whose membership and structure has no moral footing. This informs the position of the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan when he said as recorded, that, Nigerian politics is about betrayals. Politicians in the country cannot be trusted (Ambali, 2025). He went further to say that, "You find it difficult to see somebody who will say the same thing in the morning and in the evening" (Adibe, 2025). In other words, Nigeria is dominated by betrayers in her political arena. If a one-time president, having piloted the national leadership would share his experience in politics publicly, it means that the nation's political climate is in a mess.

More disturbing to Nigerians is the deceptive slogan of our politicians that has blurred the moral compass of humanity. Political actors hold onto the expression that in politics 'there is no permanent friend, no permanent enemies, but only permanent interest'. And they hack on that deceptive expression to betray trust of moral standing. They

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appear elusive of the fact that any interest that is devoid of a sound reasoning, moral footing, and in the interest of the common good, is a betrayal. The above political expression and trend has taken a worrisome dimension since 1999, when Nigeria returned to democratic rule (Kwen, 2025). There is no gainsaying the obvious that selfish interest is the main driver behind this unbridled betrayal among Nigerian politicians. It is in this light that Innocent Asouzu (2004) notes that humans are fundamentally beings who seek to satisfy their interests first because they have perceived this act as good in itself. In this case, all seek to acquire all good things for themselves and for themselves alone. It is for this reason also that they perceive their interests as fundamentally good even when such have lost credibility (p. 60); so much so that, inasmuch as their personal interest and egoistic impulse is met, they are ready to eat their vomit, betray their principals, and abandon a party with sound ideological leadership and policies. Rather than compete on ideas, political actors and jobbers invest in manipulating the electorate, institutions and systems. In regrettable cases, sometimes, some individuals whom the commoners believe and trust in their vocal approaches to condemning political ills, go on as well to betray the masses either through their unexpected silence over an anomaly or their sudden switch of allegiance because they have been bought over by those political actors, thereby, incapacitating their moral rectitude to condemn looming evils in the nation. Daniel Bwala and

Reno Omokri among others, stand out according to public analyst as politicians that have eaten their vomits just for selfish end. Substantiating the above claim, Omokri, betrayed public trust when after branding the Tinubu administration as incompetent, and an administration that is bereft of morality, went back to serve as an Ambassador on the appointment by the same president he labeled a 'Drug Barron'. Bwala, on the other hand, as recorded, who was seen by the common masses and those affected by the activities of bandits and terrorists as speaking for them as well as condemning the leadership of President Ahmed Tinubu, ate his words when he denied claims that he previously accused the Nigerian president of creating a militia to influence the 2023 election (Arizia, 2026). Sometimes, one wonders the conscience that is guiding both these politicians at the helm and political jobbers. Just because of personal gratification, not only that the trust reposed in these elected and appointed political individuals is betrayed by them, but, also, the common good of the nation is sold out.

A searchlight to the institutions of Nigeria to include Independent National Electoral Commission, Judiciary, Security agencies, and others, captures these institutions as not being far from this ravaging syndrome. One wonders what is really happening in these institutions that should be the national pride of the nation and hope of the citizens. The relationship between these institutions and the public trust is a growing crisis of confidence. It

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is sad that the question of trust is dead in these institutions. Very unfortunate that these institutions appear to have been bought over by political bigwigs in the nation, such that their actions, verdicts, operations are dictated by these actors in politics. These institutions are opportunistic that they serve the political actors just for personal gain at the expense of the trust citizens reposed in them. Their services and loyalty are geared towards the few individuals in power rather than the welfare of the nation. They have through their actions betrayed the hope of the common masses. Once adorned as the 'last hope of the common man', many citizens now feel they are increasingly catering for the political elites and wealthy individuals.

The Independent National Electoral Commission which cuts deep in Nigeria's political landscape has a fair share in this menace that has done more harm than good in the nation. In the social contract as it were, Nigerians trust that in matters of elections, votes will count, results will be accurately documented and announced, while winners will have their day, losers will be accepted; and INEC is supposedly to be the unbiased referee of the exercise. But the questions are: is INEC living up to expectations or has it broken the trust? Has INEC become the biggest threat to Nigeria's elections? When one considers allegations of election irregularities, perceived partnership within INEC commissions, post-election disputes, and so on, one would conclude that INEC's repeated

failures in logistics and transparency, have branded them a symbol of betrayal of national trust. Consistent technical glitches that conveniently occur at critical moments during elections, have brewed suspicions about whether or not these failures are strategically orchestrated. INEC seems to have lost its institutional credibility, electoral integrity, as well as betrayed the trust reposed in them by the masses. This institution, as seen in the past decade has turned from being credible and unbiased umpire into a monument of national electoral saboteur that compromises credibility and integrity just for personal gain in the service of the political actors at the expense of the commoners.

In democracy, it is believed that elections which are the ultimate expressions of citizen's will, should be a sacred process where power is expected to flow from the ballot, and not from backroom bargains. Regrettably, in Nigeria, the electoral ideal is under siege. Whether by complicity, action or inaction, the activities of INEC have contributed to the erosion of public trust and electoral integrity. This is because when belief in an institution dies, turnout dies; and when turnout dies, democracy dies too. These days, Nigerian citizens as well as voters have lost hope in INEC. It is a traditional slogan in electoral process that votes count, but in the Nigeria of the present, votes do not count; and that being the case, elections in Nigeria become theatre. Victory as it were, is given to the highest bidder from among the contestants of party lineal. The

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prestigious institution that conducts election in the nation has been hijacked by the political powers that be. The political actors are the ones influencing the actions and procedures of the institution so much so that with the cooperation of INEC, many skills, techniques, and logistics are deployed to give the desired results during elections. The constitutional independence of INEC seems to be only on paper because reality says otherwise. 'Independent', as ascribed to it by the constitution, is a misnomer if citizens have lost trust of its impartiality. In corroborating the above, Marcel Mbamalu (2026) concludes, that, "the final verdict is this: INEC is on trial. The Constitution gave INEC one job: free, fair, credible elections. The evidence says it's failing". (*Punch*, para. 21). One does not expect democracy to live when voters trust and expectations have been killed. It is against this misnomer that the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission, Prof. Joash Amupitan as recorded by Tony Akowe (2026), has warned staff of the Commission against manipulating election results and engaging in activities that will undermine the credibility of electoral process in the country (*The Nation*, para. 1). The Chairman's reaction stems from the prevalent act of indiscipline and mistrust that have characterized the Commission as its institutional integrity has been thrown overboard.

Judiciary which should ideally be the final arbiter of disputes, on the other

hand, has not lived to their oath and national calling. Even when INEC would claim to have done a credible election, the courts decide the winners; and sometimes INEC gets blamed for court outcomes. Today, in the Judiciary for instance, there is deep frustration over unequal application of justice. While the poor masses get punished and face harsh sentences for minor offences they committed, High-profile political actors and public officials facing corruption or multi-billion-naira embezzlement charges receive lenient plea deals or minimal fines. The rule of law that should guide the nation is thrown over-board given the gross disregard for the court orders which diminishes the independent authority of the court and leaves the common citizens without protection. Hence, one country, two laws in operation in the Nigerian state. Aisha Yesufu as recorded by Joseph Atainyang (2025), corroborated this when she said that the Nigerian judiciary has become a plaything of corrupt politicians and no longer offers protection to the common man (*WatchmanPost*, para. 3). Uncharacteristically, "it is also becoming the norm in a good number of our states that judges dare not give judgments against the interests of their governors or states, irrespective of the position of the facts and law" (Onozure, 2022). If this is the case, then, the Judiciary has not only been compromised, but, also, captured by the politicians as governors and political elites now see themselves as the emperors of a sort, lords of the manor, and demi-gods over their respective chief judges

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Implications of Thirty Pieces of Silver in Nigerian Politics

Betrayal of trust, no doubt, hits national growth so hard. Political betrayal in particular has affected Nigerian leadership with its immediate consequences of erosion of trust in social capital. The core of social capital is people working together to achieve a common goal. But innovation is stalled in the nation's political space when people stop sharing ideas, partnering on projects, and voting during elections. The reason is that when trust is lost, public relationships become weaker. This manifests itself from the inner circle when party members stop cooperating with the party members at the helm. Expectantly, when the party representatives' activities are at variance with the parties laid down principles, ethics and rules, the party members withdraw their support for the actors, thereby, giving way to sabotage, destructive criticism, and mass defection from the party.

More so, the institutions that provide one service or the other, on the other hand, will be reluctant to cooperate with government. In this light for instance, Tax compliance will drop, regulations will be bypassed, and talented citizens will withdraw their services. When this is the case, institutions like schools, hospitals, judiciary, and other agencies that provide the basic services for national growth will suffer setbacks.

Furthermore, in the economic domain, it is a fact that trust is like grease for

businesses, partnership, and diplomatic ties. Internally, when trust is lost in leadership, citizens find it hard to invest in their country or partner with their government; and that will make local entrepreneurs to stop expanding. Externally, foreign investors will not be willing to invest in a nation with a betrayal tag. It will not stop there. It will also affect the already existing foreign investors that have being with that nation to pull out. Countries with low trust in their leadership, face challenges of stunted growth and credibility. Hence, low trusting nations are more prone to making decisions that will lead them on the path to lower growth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper critically looks into the political landscape of Nigeria which has thrown its principle of leadership trust into oblivion with a syndrome that characterized leadership at different levels, institutions, and agencies, as betrayers of some sort. The paper achieves this by briefly making conceptual analysis of politics, leadership trust, and thirty pieces of silver. The paper, after evaluating Nigeria's leadership terrain, detects that politics in Nigeria is at a crossroads. Through some political scenarios, the paper observes that betrayal is commonplace among political actors and institutions to include Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), the Judiciary, and others that should by law preserve the national glory in the global stage. Leadership trust with its culture of accountability, integrity,

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honesty, transparency, and other political virtues, is in constant struggle with the dominant politics that enthrone betrayal for selfish gain over national good. Given this ugly syndrome of betrayal, the nation, has not only been affected politically, but, also, it has stunted the growth of the nation socially, economically, and developmentally, leaving Nigeria on the verge of collapse as the resultant common good of leadership trust has been shortchanged with selfishness. The paper without delay, argues that if this leadership unevenness is sustained and left unchecked, it will not only undermine Nigeria's leadership and political institutions, but also render the process of nation-building difficult, if not impossible.

Consequently, the following recommendations would help checkmate the anomaly in focus that is common place in Nigeria's political sphere towards a more service-oriented and people-centred politics, ultimately leading to a desired all-round growth and leadership:

- i. Nigeria should strengthen its political institutions by implementing electoral reforms that promote fairness, accountability, and transparency.
- ii. Elect as well as appoint leaders of integrity, uprightness, and unimpeachable purity of private life by conducting a thorough investigation of the past and present records of the

candidates vying for any political office.

- iii. By making politics less attractive to politicians through a reduction of the allure of wealth and power.
- iv. Rebuild as well as redefine politics by constructing political parties that will endure beyond election cycles, outperform cynicism, and outlive ambition.

By addressing the already established political challenges and adhering to the recommendations, the Nigerian state can strengthen its political institutions, promote political stability and ensure that the desired people-centred and service-oriented politics in the desired leadership trust will promote the common good, and advance a culture of transparency, honesty, integrity, and accountability. This will foster an environment of trust, respect, cooperation, and unity, against betrayal with its attendant divisiveness, segregation and self-centredness that does not only impoverish the nation, but, also, breaks rather than make the nation (Onyemachi, 2026, p.32).

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