

# Followers' Behaviour and Leadership Effectiveness in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Evidence from 2010–2024

**Amb. Ike-Onuigbo Chinyere Gift, Ph.D**

*Department of Urban and Regional Planning / Independent Researcher, Nigeria*

## ABSTRACT

*Leadership effectiveness in democratic societies is commonly examined from the perspective of political leaders, institutions and policy outcomes, while comparatively less attention is given to the behavioural role of followers. Yet democratic governance depends not only on the quality and conduct of leaders but also on how citizens, voters, party members, civil society actors and other political followers respond to, support, challenge and constrain those who exercise political authority. This study examines the relationship between followers' behaviour and leadership effectiveness in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, focusing on the period 2010–2024. The study adopts a qualitative documentary research design, drawing on peer-reviewed literature, official electoral records, scholarly analyses of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and relevant conceptual literature on followership. Followership theory provides the principal analytical framework, complemented by democratic-participation and political-accountability perspectives. The analysis identifies five major dimensions of followers' behaviour: electoral participation, political loyalty and clientelism, civic monitoring and criticism, collective mobilisation, and compliance or resistance to political authority. Evidence indicates that followers have simultaneously enabled and constrained leadership effectiveness. Supportive and participatory followership can strengthen political legitimacy, electoral competition, policy implementation and accountability, while passive, client list or personality-centred followership can weaken institutional accountability and encourage elite domination. The study also identifies declining presidential-election turnout between 2011 and 2023 as an important indicator of changing citizen participation. However, lower turnout should not automatically be interpreted as political apathy because participation also occurs through protests, civil society activity, digital mobilisation and other forms of political engagement. The paper argues that leadership effectiveness in Nigeria should be understood as a relational and co-produced outcome rather than an attribute belonging exclusively to political officeholders. It concludes by proposing a follower-centred framework for democratic accountability based on informed participation, constructive criticism, institutional loyalty, issue-based political engagement and civic responsibility.*

## KEYWORDS

*Followership, leadership effectiveness, political behaviour, democratic governance, Nigeria, Fourth Republic, political participation, accountability*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership has traditionally occupied a central position in political and organisational research. Studies of political leadership frequently concentrate on the personality,

institutional authority, policy decisions and governing capacity of officeholders. Such approaches are valuable, but they can overlook a fundamental fact: leadership does not operate in isolation. Leaders require followers, and followers can either reinforce, modify or constrain the exercise of leadership.

Followership scholarship has increasingly challenged leader-centred approaches by treating followers as active participants in the leadership process. Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe and Carsten argue that leadership cannot be fully understood without examining followers and following behaviours because leadership is a relational process involving leaders and followers. Similarly, more recent scholarship has expanded followership research beyond passive obedience to examine follower roles, behaviours, expectations and the social construction of leadership.

This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria. Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, Nigeria has experienced an uninterrupted period of constitutional democratic government. The period examined in this study, 2010–2024, encompasses four presidential electoral cycles—2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023—and several significant political developments, including changes of governing parties, electoral reforms, political protests, digital mobilisation, debates concerning democratic accountability and continuing concerns about institutional performance.

Existing Nigerian scholarship has extensively examined leadership, elections, political parties, democratic consolidation and governance. Arowolo's analysis, for example, explicitly identifies a leadership–followership relationship in explaining democratic difficulties in Nigeria and argues that leadership dispositions can shape followership behaviour. Earlier Nigerian scholarship similarly argued that followers constitute a major constituency capable of influencing, selecting, monitoring and challenging political leadership.

Nevertheless, there remains a need to place followers themselves at the centre of the analytical discussion. The important question is not simply whether Nigerian leaders have governed effectively, but also how the behaviour of citizens and political followers has affected the conditions under which leadership is exercised.

This study therefore investigates the relationship between followers' behaviour and leadership effectiveness in Nigeria's Fourth Republic between 2010 and 2024.

#### *A. Problem Statement*

Nigeria's democratic experience has survived longer than previous civilian republics, but the endurance of electoral democracy has not eliminated concerns about governance quality, institutional accountability, political participation and citizen trust.

Recent scholarship on Nigeria's Fourth Republic has identified continuing challenges involving political parties, institutional accountability, democratic norms and the effectiveness of political leadership. The Cambridge volume *Democracy and Nigeria's Fourth Republic* notes persistent concerns about democratic governance, political institutions, accountability and the relationship between political elites and democratic institutions.

However, explanations that focus almost exclusively on political elites can inadvertently portray citizens as passive recipients of leadership. Such an approach underestimates the

ways in which citizens participate in political processes through voting, party organisation, political communication, protests, civil society organisations, community mobilisation and digital platforms.

Conversely, attributing governance problems primarily to followers would also be analytically inadequate. Citizens operate within institutional, socioeconomic, legal and political environments that constrain available choices.

The research problem, therefore, concerns the reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers. Specifically, how do followers' behaviours contribute to, reinforce, modify or constrain leadership effectiveness?

### *B. Research Questions*

The study addresses the following questions:

- What forms of followers' behaviour characterised Nigeria's Fourth Republic between 2010 and 2024?
- How did followers' behaviour influence political leadership effectiveness during the period?
- What relationship existed between electoral participation and leadership accountability?
- How did client list, personality-centred and issue-based political followership affect democratic governance?
- What forms of followership can strengthen leadership accountability and democratic effectiveness in Nigeria?

### *C. Objectives of the Study*

The general objective is to examine the relationship between followers' behaviour and leadership effectiveness in Nigeria's Fourth Republic between 2010 and 2024.

The specific objectives are to:

- Examine major forms of followers' behaviour in Nigeria's Fourth Republic;
- Analyse the relationship between political participation and leadership effectiveness;
- Examine how supportive and critical followership affects political accountability;
- Assess the implications of voter participation and disengagement for democratic leadership;
- Develop a follower-centred framework for improving democratic accountability in Nigeria.

## **II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### *A. Followership*

Followership should not be equated simply with obedience. Uhl-Bien et al. conceptualise followership through both role-based and relational/constructionist perspectives. Their

approach recognises followers as participants in the leadership process rather than merely recipients of leader influence.

From this perspective, political followers include:

- Voters;
- Party members;
- Supporters of political candidates;
- civil society organisations;
- Community organisations;
- Activists;
- Journalists and public commentators;
- Interest groups;
- Citizens participating in protests;
- Citizens engaging in political communication; and
- Institutional actors who operate under political leadership.

Thus, followership encompasses a broad range of behaviours through which individuals respond to political authority.

#### *B. Followers' Behaviour*

For the purpose of this study, followers' behaviour refers to observable or documented ways through which citizens and political constituencies respond to political leadership.

Five dimensions are identified:

##### *1. Electoral participation*

This includes voter registration, voting, electoral mobilisation and engagement with electoral processes.

##### *2. Supportive followership*

This involves loyalty, mobilisation and cooperation with political leaders or organisations.

Critical followership

This includes questioning political decisions, demanding accountability, criticising policies and resisting abuses of authority.

##### *3. Collective mobilisation*

This encompasses demonstrations, protests, civil society campaigns, community organisation and digital mobilisation.

##### *4. Passive or dependent followership*

This refers to political behaviour characterised by limited independent evaluation of leaders, excessive personality loyalty, patronage dependence or political disengagement.

These categories are analytical rather than mutually exclusive. A citizen may simultaneously support a leader on one issue and challenge that leader on another.

### *C. Leadership Effectiveness*

Leadership effectiveness in this study is not defined simply as popularity or electoral success.

It is conceptualised through five dimensions:

- Policy responsiveness – the extent to which political leadership responds to public needs;
- Accountability – the extent to which leaders and institutions are answerable to citizens and legal institutions;
- Institutional performance – the capacity of political institutions to implement decisions and maintain democratic procedures;
- Legitimacy – the degree to which political authority is accepted as procedurally and constitutionally legitimate; and
- Democratic responsiveness – the capacity of leadership to respond to citizen demands through lawful and accountable mechanisms.

This multidimensional understanding prevents electoral popularity from being treated as synonymous with effective governance.

## **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### *A. Followership Theory*

The principal theoretical framework is Followership Theory.

Uhl-Bien et al. argue that leadership research has historically given insufficient attention to followers. Their review proposes two major perspectives: a role-based approach and a constructionist approach that treats leadership as a relational process.

The theory is particularly appropriate to democratic politics because citizens do not merely receive leadership. They help constitute political leadership through electoral choices, political support, criticism, mobilisation and institutional participation.

The theory therefore suggests that leadership outcomes are partly co-produced by leader and follower behaviour.

### *B. Constructive Followership*

Carsten et al.'s research on social constructions of followership demonstrates that followers may understand their role in very different ways. Some understand following in terms of obedience and deference, while others emphasise expressing opinions, taking initiative and constructively challenging leaders.

This distinction is particularly important for democratic governance.

A follower who accepts every political decision without scrutiny may provide short-term political stability but weaken accountability. Conversely, a follower who critically evaluates political decisions while respecting democratic institutions may strengthen accountability.

### *C. Political Participation Perspective*

The study also draws upon democratic participation theory, which treats citizens as participants in governance rather than merely electoral consumers.

Voting, political discussion, public criticism, civil society activity and protest constitute different forms of political participation. Consequently, democratic participation cannot be measured exclusively through turnout.

## **IV. METHODOLOGY**

### *A. Research Design*

The study adopts a qualitative documentary research design.

This approach is appropriate because the objective is to examine documented patterns of political behaviour and leadership–followership relations across a fourteen-year period rather than generate artificial quantitative observations.

### *B. Study Period*

The study covers 2010–2024.

The period begins immediately before the 2011 presidential election and ends after the first full year following the 2023 presidential election.

### *C. Sources of Data*

The study relies on secondary sources including:

- peer-reviewed academic literature;
- Books and scholarly chapters on Nigeria's Fourth Republic;
- Official Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) records;
- documented electoral statistics;
- Scholarly analyses of political participation;
- published research on followership;
- documented political protests and civic mobilisation; and
- Relevant institutional and governance reports.

INEC maintains official election-result records covering presidential, governorship, senatorial and House of Representatives elections, among others.

#### *D. Data Analysis*

The material was analysed thematically. Five analytical themes were developed:

- Electoral participation;
- Political loyalty and clientelism;
- Accountability and critical followership;
- Collective mobilisation and resistance; and
- Implications for leadership effectiveness.

The study does not claim causal statistical relationships because no original survey or experimental dataset was collected.

### **V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### *A. Electoral Participation as a Form of Followership*

Voting represents one of the clearest institutionalised forms of political followership.

The electoral process allows citizens to select political representatives and potentially remove them through subsequent elections. In principle, therefore, voting creates an accountability mechanism linking followers and leaders.

However, official figures indicate a substantial decline in presidential-election turnout during the period. INEC reported presidential-election turnout at approximately 53.7% in 2011, 43.6% in 2015, 34.7% in 2019 and 26.7% in 2023. This trend is significant but should be interpreted cautiously.

Lower turnout can indicate political disengagement, distrust or barriers to participation, but it does not by itself establish why citizens did not vote. Nor does low electoral participation mean that citizens ceased engaging politically. Consequently, declining turnout should be regarded as one indicator of changing electoral followership rather than a complete measure of citizen engagement.

#### *B. Supportive Followership and Political Legitimacy*

Political leaders require followers who recognise their authority.

Supportive followership can provide:

- Electoral legitimacy;
- Political mobilisation;
- Policy communication;
- Organisational capacity; and
- Social acceptance.

However, support becomes problematic where political loyalty is detached from policy performance or constitutional accountability. A central distinction is therefore between

issue-based support and personality-based loyalty. Issue-based support allows followers to support leaders because of specific programmes or policy commitments while retaining the capacity to criticise other decisions.

Personality-centred loyalty can reduce this critical distance. This distinction is important in Nigeria, where political competition has frequently involved powerful personalities, party structures and networks of political patronage. Scholarship on the Fourth Republic has highlighted the importance of party organisation and elite influence in shaping democratic politics.

#### *C. Clientelism and Dependent Followership*

Clientelism represents another dimension of follower behaviour. Where citizens depend on political patrons for access to employment, contracts, social benefits or other resources, political relationships may become transactional.

Such relationships can create strong short-term political loyalty while weakening broader institutional accountability. The consequence is that followers may evaluate political leaders according to immediate personal or group benefits rather than wider policy performance.

This does not mean that citizens are solely responsible for clientelist politics. Clientelism operates within institutional and socioeconomic environments in which access to public resources can become politically mediated. Thus, both leadership incentives and follower behaviour must be considered.

#### *D. Critical Followership and Accountability*

Critical followership is potentially one of the most important dimensions of democratic leadership effectiveness. A politically engaged follower does not simply ask: "Who should I support?"

The follower also asks:

- What has the leader promised?
- what has been implemented?
- what are the consequences of the policy?
- Are public resources being used lawfully?
- Can the decision be challenged through constitutional institutions?
- What evidence supports the government's position?

Such questions transform followership from passive loyalty into democratic accountability. Earlier Nigerian scholarship specifically argued that citizens possess significant potential to constitute, influence and check political leadership. Arowolo's 2019 study likewise examined the leadership-followership relationship and linked the Disconnect between the two to problems in Nigeria's democratic development.

### *E. Protest and Collective Mobilisation*

Followers do not participate exclusively through elections. Nigeria's Fourth Republic witnessed important episodes of collective political mobilisation, including the 2012 fuel-subsidy protests and the 2020 #EndSARS protests.

The 2020 protests were especially significant because they demonstrated how younger citizens and digitally connected communities could mobilise outside conventional party structures.

The implication for leadership effectiveness is twofold.

- First, collective mobilisation can communicate demands that formal political institutions have failed to adequately absorb.
- Second, sustained democratic effectiveness requires mechanisms through which such demands can be translated into institutional reforms and public policy.
- Third, protest can function as a form of critical followership, but its long-term democratic contribution depends partly on the responsiveness of political institutions.

### *F. Digital Followership*

Between 2010 and 2024, political communication increasingly moved into digital environments.

Social media enabled citizens to:

- disseminate political information;
- challenge official narratives;
- organise collective action;
- monitor public officials;
- mobilise voters; and
- Document political events.

Digital followership therefore altered the traditional relationship between leaders and followers. Political leaders can now communicate directly with citizens, while citizens can respond publicly and rapidly.

However, digital participation also creates challenges involving misinformation, polarisation, coordinated propaganda and political harassment. The democratic value of digital followership consequently depends not simply on technological access but on information literacy and citizens' capacity to evaluate evidence.

### *G. Leadership Effectiveness as a Co-Produced Outcome*

The evidence reviewed suggests that leadership effectiveness should not be treated exclusively as a property of leaders.

A leader may possess formal constitutional authority but encounter:

- Political resistance;
- Misinformation;
- Factionalism;
- Institutional obstruction;
- Public distrust;
- Weak citizen participation; or
- Excessive dependence on patronage networks.

Conversely, leaders operating within a politically informed and institutionally engaged citizen environment may face stronger incentives for transparency and responsiveness. This supports the central proposition of followership theory that leadership is relational and partly co-constructed.

## VI. THE NIGERIAN LEADERSHIP–FOLLOWERSHIP CYCLE

Based on the documentary analysis, the study proposes the following cycle:

*Political conditions → follower expectations → electoral/support behaviour → leadership incentives → policy decisions → public response → accountability or continued support → subsequent political behaviour*

The cycle is continuous.

- Where followers reward competence, transparency and policy responsiveness, political leaders have greater incentives to maintain those behaviours.
- Where followers reward patronage, personality loyalty or short-term material benefits, leaders may have weaker incentives to prioritise institutional performance.

This is not a deterministic relationship. Institutions, courts, legislatures, media organisations, political parties, civil society and economic conditions also intervene.

### A. *Proposed Follower-Centred Democratic Accountability Framework*

The study proposes five principles.

#### 1. *Principle 1:*

Informed Followership - Citizens should evaluate political claims against evidence rather than personality, ethnicity, party affiliation or political slogans.

#### 2. *Principle 2:*

Critical Support - Followers should be capable of supporting leaders while simultaneously questioning policies and demanding accountability.

#### 3. *Principle 3:*

Institutional Loyalty - Citizens should distinguish loyalty to political personalities from loyalty to constitutional institutions.

#### 4. *Principle 4:*

Issue-Based Participation - Political engagement should increasingly focus on measurable issues such as:

- employment;
- infrastructure;
- education;
- healthcare;
- security;
- environmental sustainability;
- public finance;
- urban development; and
- Institutional reform.

#### 5. Principle 5:

Continuous Accountability - Accountability should not begin and end on Election Day. Citizens should monitor policy promises throughout the governing period.

#### *B. Implications for Leadership Effectiveness*

The findings have implications for political leaders, political parties, civil society and citizens.

##### *1. Political Leaders*

Leaders should recognise followers as active democratic stakeholders rather than merely electoral supporters.

Effective leadership therefore requires mechanisms for:

- public consultation;
- transparent communication;
- citizen feedback;
- policy evaluation; and
- Institutional accountability.

##### *2. Political Parties*

Political parties can strengthen democratic followership by encouraging internal debate, policy discussion and issue-based political education.

The literature on Nigeria's Fourth Republic identifies weaknesses in internal party democracy and the influence of party elites as important democratic challenges.

##### *3. Civil Society*

Civil society organisations can help transform political support into informed and constructive participation through civic education, policy monitoring and public-interest advocacy.

#### 4. *Citizens*

Citizens have responsibilities beyond voting.

Democratic citizenship involves evaluating evidence, questioning political decisions, participating peacefully and holding public officials accountable through lawful channels.

### **VII. CONCLUSION**

This study examined followers' behaviour and leadership effectiveness in Nigeria's Fourth Republic between 2010 and 2024.

The analysis demonstrates that political leadership and followership are inseparable dimensions of democratic governance. Followers influence leadership through voting, political support, criticism, protest, party activity, civic mobilisation and digital communication. The study also identifies an important paradox. Followership can strengthen leadership effectiveness when it is informed, critical and institutionally oriented. However, followership can weaken accountability when political loyalty becomes excessively personality-centred, clientelist or disengaged from policy performance.

The decline in presidential-election turnout from 2011 through 2023 provides evidence of changing electoral participation, but turnout alone cannot capture the full range of political engagement. The central contribution of the study is therefore conceptual: leadership effectiveness in Nigeria should be examined as a relational and co-produced democratic outcome. Political leaders bear responsibility for governance, but followers also shape the incentives, legitimacy and constraints surrounding leadership.

Strengthening Nigeria's democratic future consequently requires attention not only to who leads but also to how citizens follow, when they challenge, what they demand, and how effectively they participate in democratic accountability.

#### A. *Limitations of the Study*

The study is based on documentary and secondary evidence and therefore does not claim to establish statistical causality between specific follower behaviours and leadership outcomes.

The findings should also not be interpreted as suggesting that followers are solely responsible for governance failures. Political institutions, socioeconomic conditions, political parties, electoral structures, constitutional arrangements and leadership behaviour interact with follower behaviour.

Future studies should therefore employ mixed-method designs combining surveys, interviews, electoral data and longitudinal statistical analysis.

#### B. *Suggestions for Further Research*

Future research could investigate:

- Followership behaviour among Nigerian youths;
- social-media followership and political mobilisation;
- Voter abstention and political trust;
- Political clientelism and follower loyalty;
- Gender differences in political followership;
- Regional variations in political participation;
- Followership and public-sector leadership;
- Citizen monitoring and government performance;
- Political followership and electoral violence; and
- The relationship between political literacy and leadership accountability.

A quantitative study could subsequently test the proposed relationship using variables such as political participation, trust, political knowledge, leader accountability and perceived government performance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen civic education: Civic education should emphasise constitutional rights, responsibilities, policy evaluation and democratic accountability.
- Promote issue-based politics: Political communication should move beyond personality and identity toward measurable policy commitments.
- Strengthen citizen monitoring: Civil society and professional organisations should develop mechanisms for tracking government promises and implementation.
- Encourage constructive criticism: Political leaders should create legitimate channels through which citizens can question policies without being treated as political enemies.
- Improve political-party democracy: Political parties should strengthen internal participation, policy debate and transparent candidate selection.
- Promote digital literacy: Citizens should receive stronger education in evaluating political information and identifying misinformation.
- Institutionalise public feedback: Governments should create regular mechanisms for citizen consultation and policy feedback.
- Expand research on followership: Nigerian universities and research institutions should conduct empirical studies examining different categories of political followers across regions, age groups and socioeconomic groups.

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