

Innovations

The Impact of Politics on Nigeria's Development: A Critical Review From 2015-2024

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Abstract: *In contemporary Nigeria, politics has become both a career and indeed an industry that is not predicated on production. It is regarded as a highly lucrative occupation, not necessarily as a call for service to the nation, but as an opportunity for expropriation of the common wealth through primitive accumulation of capital. The struggle to get into politics in Nigeria is almost akin to warfare. Contestants and competitors engage in all manner of intrigues including violence, appeals to ethnic and religious sentiments and outrageous manipulation of elections to attain political positions. They control and manipulate the state coercive instruments of power for their personal and class aggrandizement. These politicians include Presidents, Governors of states, Members of the National and State Assemblies, Local Government Chairmen, Political Parties' Chieftains, top government functionaries and the ever increasing multitude of political appointees. The cost of governance balloons to unconscionable heights as the government of the day borrows endlessly with devastating strings from external bodies to balance the National budgets. It is against this backdrop that this study is primed to interrogate the debilitating impact politics has on Nigeria's development within the period under study. Extant literature maintains that the country's development has been retarded over the years as a result of colonialism, neocolonialism and failure of leadership. These factors are merely symptoms of a deeper and all embracing root cause. This study posits that the nature and character of Nigerian brand of politics has adversely affected Nigeria's development trajectory. This apparent contradiction has given rise to high double digit inflation, massive devaluation of currency, poverty, insecurity and a spiral of underdevelopment. To facilitate this study, the qualitative research method is adopted since we are dealing with human behavior patterns and manifestations.*

Keywords: *Development, Economy, Governance, Politics, Poverty.*

Introduction

Nigeria's independence in 1960 was a season of high expectations from the people. Unfortunately for the people, their hope of enlightened leadership was a mirage. It turned out an inglorious history of one misstep after another in the precarious journey to nationhood and development. The common narrative among many scholars is that leadership failure was responsible for Nigeria's development challenges. Achebe (2012) stated that the chaos enveloping all of us in Nigeria was due to the incompetence of Nigerian ruling class. This clique, stunted by ineptitude, distracted by power games and the pursuit of material comforts, was unwilling, if not incapable, of saving our fledging new nation. There is no doubt that leadership is strategic to Nigeria's development. However this leadership failure narrative had been a hypothesis spanning some sixty years that is yet to be proven on its own momentum. Indeed this argument has invariably thrown up a critical question: If leadership failure is solely responsible for Nigeria's retarded development, what then is the cause of leadership failure? What has kept leadership qua leadership of Nigeria in a permanent state of motion without movement? For more than six decades now, Nigeria is yet to realize her manifest destiny in the comity of nations with respect to genuine national growth and development. There must be something else driving this leadership crisis, a motive force with peculiar dynamic. That dynamic motive force eventually turns out to be politics which encapsulates leadership. It has often been said that every society gets the type of leadership it deserves, Moghalu (2021) had argued that it is the country's politics which is focused on power capture by the elite and the consequent opportunities for corrupt enrichment, patronage and rent creation, rather than economic productivity and improving the standard of living of citizens broadly that has framed this outcome and reality. There is therefore an inexorable nexus between politics and development in the Nigerian context. The quality and character of politics and the type of leadership that emanates from the process to a large extent defines and accounts for Nigeria's development debacle.

According to World Bank (2024) Nigeria offers limited opportunities to most of its citizens. Weak job creation and entrepreneurial prospects stifle the absorption of the 3.5 million Nigerians entering the labour force every year. The poverty rate is estimated to have reached 38.9% in 2023, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty line-the world's second largest poor population after India. It must be emphasized here that development is not monolithic. It is evaluated on the basis of the performance of a number of indicators which include state of the economy in terms of GDP per capita, Inflationary trends, Human Development Index, Good governance, Corruption Perception index rating amongst others. Appraised against these denominators, Nigeria is still trapped within the vortex of development quagmire. Obamuyi and Fapetu (2016) had observed that despite the

rebased GDP in Nigeria, most relevant economic, financial, and social indicators have pointed to an inescapable distress for the national economy. Nigeria foreign exchange reserves fell to 34.51 billion Dollars by January 2015, from 43.24 billion Dollars in 2014. Manufacturing sector accounts for 3% of Nigeria's GDP, by far the lowest among the major emerging markets, and the fourth lowest in Africa. These negative ratings underscore the country's socio-political and economic predicament which has already become a national emergency.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is apt and proper to contextually explain the key concepts used in this research in order to fully articulate and streamline the propositions. Economy is easily recognized as the live wire of the society comprising of production, distribution, marketing, industrialization and exchange in monetary terms. As corroborated by Will (2024) an economy is a complex system of inter related production, consumption and exchange activities, which ultimately determine how resources are allocated among participants. Indeed for Marxist scholars, the economy represents the substructure, the foundation of the social system while the other social aspects are regarded as the super structure. On the other hand, Politics revolves around power and authority. It has diverse definitions among leading scholars. However for this study, politics is concerned with all activities related to the seizure, consolidation and use of state power, Adagbiri (2019). It can also be defined as the ability to persuade and influence the sovereign electorate to provide political power and authority in the governmental affairs of the state. (Bueno, 2012). By all accounts, politics has a close and abiding affinity with the state, power and authority. Development in the context of this paper denotes the process of change that emanates from the ability of people to control their physical and biological environment in order to improve their living conditions. As argued by Orluwene (2014.) development first and foremost is a phenomenon associated with changes in man's humanity and creative energies, not in things. It is the unending improvement in the capacity of the individual and society to control and manipulate the forces of nature as well as themselves and other individuals and societies for their own benefits and that of humanity at large. Development is an indication of human progress in all its ramifications and diversities. However, the process of development in Nigeria has been stagnated by politics through poor governance and unbridled corruption.

Governance is the art of managing a country, society or an organization to ensure social harmony, peace, prosperity, rule of law and equal justice for all. It is an attribute of effective and efficient administration of the polity for peace and sustainable development. As related by Mehraj and Shamim (2020) governance means more than maintaining law and order. In other words, we can say that it is a

participative system in which those who are called upon to govern on behalf of the people are motivated with a will to giving their best, serving and doing good to the people. Governance is the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs. Poverty is another factor that goes with underdevelopment occasioned by poor governance. It is a human condition of want, inadequacy, denial of opportunity or access and assault on dignity. Poverty according to Korankye (2019) is defined as pronounced deprivation in well being, comprising many dimensions. These dimensions include low incomes, inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity, low levels of good health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation and inadequate capacity and opportunity to better one's life. Poverty contradicts development in all its manifestations. Poverty and other negative indices combine under the controlling influence of selfish and class biased political actors to distort and undermine Nigeria's development potentials

Methodology

According to Ugwu and Eze (2023) the qualitative research method is the study of the nature of phenomena, which includes their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear or in the perspectives from which they can be perceived but excludes their range, frequency and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect. The guiding proposition or hypothesis of this research is that politics as an identified phenomenon or cause undermines Nigeria's Development. With data collected from mainly secondary sources, the paper proceeds to perform the analysis through content and textual processes. Inferences are thus drawn from the analysed data profile on the basis of reliability, predictability and causality. As noted by Oranga and Matere (2023) qualitative method is effective in obtaining specific information about behaviours, values, opinions, and social contexts of particular populations. The use of some quantitative data on economic indices in the study would serve to strengthen the validity of findings.

Theoretical Underpinning:

To facilitate a proper grounding of this study, we engaged State Capture as our theoretical framework of analysis. Although state capture is intrinsically associated with high scale corruption by firms and big corporations who exploit the greed of public officials with bribe to manipulate public policies, laws, rules and regulations for their private interest. Yet the concept equally mirrors the massive and unrelenting domination of the entire state apparatuses and commanding heights of the national economy by Nigeria's political elite for private and class interest. Barret (2023) defined state capture as a type of systemic corruption whereby narrow

interest groups take control of the institutions and processes through which public policy is made, directing public policy away from the public interest and instead shaping it to serve their own interest. The concept came to limelight through the efforts of Hellman, Jones and Kaufman (2000) who defined state capture as shaping the formation of the basic rules of the game (ie laws, rules, decrees and regulations) through illicit, non transparent private payments to public officials. From all indications and by all accounts, state capture involves political power stakeholders in positions of authority who take advantage of their positions to defraud the state through numerous business fronts. The central argument of this paper is that the nature and character of politics in Nigeria undermines the country’s development potentials through the instrumentality of the state that is under the bondage of politicians. The way and manner the business oligarchs connived with public officials and politicians to thwart laws, rules and regulations as state captors in Eastern Europe during the Transition to market driven economy is the same way the Nigerian power elite hijacked the postcolonial state for purposes of primitive accumulation and expropriation of the common wealth. It is in the light of this scenario that Clingendael (2020) defined state capture as systemic political corruption in which politicians exploit their control over a country’s decision making processes to their own advantage. It boils down to the same experience in Nigeria, where the same politicians and top civil servants have controlling shares in the leading conglomerates in the country. The concept of state capture is essentially a situation where leading political stakeholders convert the power of the state and its coercive instruments to serve personal and class interest at the expense of public good and general welfare of the people. This makes politics the most lucrative and money spinning occupations in Nigeria characterized by the syndrome of poor governance, poverty, weak institutions and a general slide into a vicious cycle of underdevelopment. The following table depicts the nature of state capture and its impact on the society.

Table 1. The three Pillars, Mechanisms of Capture and their Impact

Pillar of capture and objectives	Mechanisms available to captor states	Impact
Formation of constitution/ Law/policy	Ensure political control over military, police, intelligence services	Undermines rule of law as military , police and security services abuse their extensive powers to keep them in office
Secure control over	Shape the laws governing state	Economic development is

<p>the means of violence, shape the roles of the game as they apply to politics and key economic sectors</p>	<p>owned enterprises in key economic sectors-natural resources, banking and finance, utilities in ways that retain extensive political control. Change constitution to extend term limits/parliamentary scrutiny of laws.</p>	<p>skewed towards sectors that the elite can control, reducing opportunities for other sectors. Bank lending to politically connected firms leads to high default rates and endangers financial sector stability</p>
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SOURCE: State Capture and Development: A conceptual Framework

Manifestations of the impact of politics on Nigeria’s Development.

Poor Governance and Corruption

Politics is at the core of Nigeria’s socio-economic engagements. It has invariably been turned into a means of production by the elite class that inherited power from the departing colonial authorities after realizing that it lacked economic power. Ake (1982) observed that the new nationalist leadership had to rely on political power as the means of creating their economic base. It unfortunately created a tendency to make political power the means of accumulation. Political outcome is measured by the dividends that accrue to the people in terms of good governance, poverty alleviation, security and rule of law. On the contrary, according to Okoi and Iwara (2021) Nigeria has consistently ranked low in the world governance index in areas such as government effectiveness, political stability, presence of violence and terrorism, rule of law and the control of corruption. Nigeria was perceived in the 2020 Transparency International Corruption index as a highly corrupt country with a score of 25/100 while its corruption ranking increased from 146 in 2019 to 149 in 2020 out of 180 countries surveyed. To all intents and purposes, Nigeria’s political actors are driven by the narrow narrative of selfish interest instead of a commitment to the common good. The governing and ruling classes in Nigeria betray an inescapable proclivity to neglect the essence of governance which is essentially to provide development to the people. As a consequence, the people wallow in abject poverty and squalor in the midst of potential wealth. Muoghalu (2021) had rightly observed that politics has been a contestation for personalized unaccountable power by factions of a political elite for the purpose of corrupt self enrichment, control of patronage and the creation of economic rents with instruments of state authority. This mismanagement of national resources by the members of the political class who wield power has been a tradition from one administration to the other. The only difference was simply the degree of despoliation of the national endowments. According to Egwu (2017), how do we explain the fact that over 50 years now, we are unable to generate and distribute electricity, supply water to our people, reverse the ugly and avoidable infant mortality, set up and run an effective

educational system, agree on rule of engagement for getting into power, reverse the cycle of violence that attends our elections, contain corruption, instill national discipline and create a more humane and caring society. This in a nutshell addresses the Nigerian political conundrum. It has persisted in the last sixty years without any visible signs of abating and consistently inhibited the process of development. The Muhammadu Buhari administration between 2015 and 2023 was mired in unprecedented scourge of corruption, mindless nepotism, rampant kidnapping and rampaging violence by insurgents and other non state actors. Corruption however topped the list of all the failings of that administration. The United States country report (2021) described the scale of corruption under Mr Buhari as 'massive, widespread and pervasive' attributing this to a lack of application of relevant laws against corrupt practices among officials in his regime. Corrupt practices remain the major means through which the political office holders and their accomplices drain the public coffers. It is an unmitigated irony to realize that in Nigeria election or appointment into public office is publicly perceived as an opportunity to steal and amass illicit wealth. In the country's political culture, access to power is a veritable opportunity to grab as much as you can from the public treasury. Indeed kinsmen would blame one if he or she fails to take advantage of the closeness to power. That is the extent corruption has permeated the social fabric and now been widely accepted as a norm by the citizenry.

In a rather twist of irony, kleptocracy has actually replaced democracy in Nigeria. The impact of this debilitating malady is the reason Nigeria has been unable to live up to its manifest destiny. Jegga (2022) had lamented that corruption is the single greatest obstacle preventing Nigeria from achieving its enormous potentials as it drains billions of dollars a year from the country's economy, stymies development and weakens the social contract between the government and its people. Politics in Nigeria thrives on corruption which has unfortunately been elevated to a cardinal principle of socio-political and economic mantra. Politics has turned corruption into a weapon of underdevelopment under different guises and manifestations. During his tenure Buhari introduced an unmitigated culture of nepotism which undermined expertise and competence, thereby promoting mediocrity and poor productivity in the country. Appointments into the Military, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) the Judiciary and other high profile establishments were lopsided in favour of the Northern region of Nigeria from where Buhari hails. Shehu (2022) argued that top appointment into the country's security services by President Buhari since 2015 favours officers from the northern part of the country.....between 2015 and 2020, only two of the eight security chiefs were from the south, also as of April 2021, a regional analysis of heads of security agencies including paramilitary and anti graft agencies based on their states of origin, shows that 12 out of 16 of them (75%) are from the northern part of the country while just four (25%) are from the

southern part of the country. This imbalance in Appointments and other forms of discrimination in personnel recruitments and admission into Unity schools followed the same trend of being skewed in favour of Candidates from the North. This practice was a gross violation of the principle of Federal Character as enshrined in Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution as amended. The polity was thus polarized along ethnic and religious lines.

Table 2 Showing Some Corruption Cases

S/NO	Individual/Group Involved	Amount Stolen
1	Ahmed Idris, Former Accountant General of the Federation	N109.4 billion Naira
2.	Jonah Otunla, one time Accountant General of the Federation	24 billion Naira
3	Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) padded (ie added illegal fund) to the 2021 Budget	300 billion Naira
4.	Members of the National Assembly padded the 2022 National Budget	100 billion Naira
5	Ghost Workers salaries (January-June, 2022)	49.9 billion Naira
6	Principal Officers of the National Assembly, indicted for padding the 2016 Budget	481 billion Naira
7	Alleged criminal elements between January and July 2022 stole 437,000 barrels of oil and gas daily	10 billion Naira

SOURCES: Punch Newspapers, Human and Environmental Development Agenda (HEDA)

Table 3: Lopsided Appointments in Heads of Security Agencies and their state of origin

Heads of Institutions	Agencies	State of Origin	Region
Leo Irabor	Defence	Delta state	South
Ibrahim Attahiru	Nigerian Army	Kaduna state	North
Isiaka Oladayo Amao	Nigerian Airforce	Osun state	South
Awwal Z. Gambo	Nigerian Navy	Kano state	North
Usman Alkali Baba	Nigerian Police	Yobe state	North
Yusuf Magaji Bichi	DSS	Kano state	North
Ahmed R. Abubakar	NIA	Katsina state	North

John Mrabure	Nig. Correctnal Service	Delta state	South
Mohammed Babandede	Nig. Immigration service	Jigawa state	North
Hameed Ibrahim Ali	Nig. Customs Service	Bauchi state	North
Ahmed Abubakar Audi	Nig. Sec./Civil Defence	Nasarawa state	North
Boboye O. Oyeyemi	Fed. Road Safety Comm.	Kwara state	North
Dr Liman A. Ibrahim	Federal Fire Service	Niger state	North
Abdulrasheed Bawa	EFCC	Kebbi state	North
Bolaji Owasanoye	ICPC	Ondo state	South
Buba Marwa	NDLEA	Adamawa state	North

SOURCE: International Centre for investigative reporting (icirnigeria.org)

Weak Economy and Poverty

Nigeria’s economy under the period in focus was not robust. Productive forces, manufacturing and industrial clusters were stunted by lack of government support and enabling environment. The precarious state of oil prices in the international market, dwindling GDP per capita, currency devaluation and rising two digits inflation combined to put the nation’s economy in dire straits. World Bank (2024) revealed that from 2015-2022, Nigeria’s growth rate decreased and GDP per capita flattened, driven by monetary and exchange rate policy distortions, increasing fiscal deficits due to lower oil production and a costly fuel subsidy programme, increased trade protectionism and external shocks. Against this increasingly bleak backdrop, the leadership of the country continued to distort and disarticulate the economic potentials of the country through corruption and nepotism. The economy suffered from lack of diversification and over dependence on oil at a time oil was no longer driving the global economy. Worse still, Nigeria had been unable to meet the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) allotted production quota of 1.5 million barrels a day. In its latest monthly report, for August, the global oil Cartel said Nigeria’s oil production decreased to 1.081 million barrels per day (bpd) in July 2023. In the same month, Libya produced 1.173 million bpd, Angola produced 1.49 million bpd and Algeria produced 955000 bpd respectively. Although oil is still critical to the national economy, it only contributed 5.4% to Nigeria’s GDP in the third quarter of 2023 according to the National Bureau of Statistics report (2023). As an oil producing country, Nigeria was supposed to enjoy the benefits of petrol dollars and a more buoyant economy. However due to crass mismanagement and attendant political considerations, the country was unable to maintain its three Refineries with the result that it exports crude oil and in turn imports refined products from abroad. This is easily one of the reasons that Nigeria’s oil and gas is said to be a curse to the country. Despite the abundant resources and access to

cheap labour, this has not translated to development instead the vast oil reserves in Nigeria have been a curse (Mohammed, 2022)

Beyond the oil and gas sector, Nigeria’s economy from 2015 to 2024 had continued on a downward trend in virtually all the basic economic indices. The cost of governance in terms of stupendous emoluments paid to members of the political class, the humongous cost of maintaining public bureaucracy including salaries to non existing civil servants referred to as ghost workers, and provision of scanty infrastructures resulted to budget deficits. Since the economy is being manipulated by the dominant governing class it eventually yielded to negative outcomes like inflation and high cost of living, social crises engendered by poverty and disinvestment by foreign conglomerates. Punch Editorial (2024) stated that in Nigeria poverty stood at 46% in 2023.....as the naira depreciated significantly. It exchanged N464 per Dollar in May 2023, plunged to N1,900 per Dollar in early 2024. Formerly reckoned as Africa’s largest economy, Nigeria has ceded the top three continental slots to South Africa, Egypt, and Algeria. It is now fourth in Africa with a GDP of 252.73 billion Dollars....inflation spiked to a 28-year high of 33.69 percent. There is a near economic collapse in Nigeria since the advent of Tinubu as President. His removal of the fuel subsidy and increase in electricity tariffs for Band A consumers ignited an unprecedented spike in prices of goods, fuel, transportation and other social services. Nigerians are currently witnessing the harshest economic conditions since independence. According to Maclean, Awwal and Aina (2024) Nigeria is facing its worst economic crisis in decades with skyrocketing inflation, a national currency in free fall and millions of people struggling to buy food. Only two years ago, Africa’s biggest economy, Nigeria is now struggling to drop to fourth place this year.

Table 4: Selected Indices to Show Nigeria’s Development Status (2020-2024)

Index	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	432.2 billion USD	440.834 billion USD	477.386 billion USD	375 billion USD	252.73 billion USD
GDP per capita	2,075 USD	2,066 USD	2,163 USD	1,687.57 USD	1,109.9 USD
Inflation rate	13.25%	16.95	18.8%	28.29%	33.20%
Poverty rate	42%	39.1%	42.6%	38.9%	38.8%
HDI	0.54	0.535	0.55	0.45	0.548
Corruption perception index	150 out of 180 countries	154 out of 180 countries	150 out of 180 countries	145 out of 180 countries	-----

	with a score of 25/100	with a score of 25/100	with a score of 24/100	with a score of 24/100	
Unemployment rate	5.63%	5.26%	3.83%	5.0%	-----

Source: World Bank. UNDP

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has juxtaposed the leading and preponderant role politics play in Nigeria with its impact on the trajectory of the nation’s development potentials. It manifestly shows by the use of economic data and statistics and other non numeric indices the crushing influence of power politics over good governance and quality service delivery to the people. The essence of government is the provision of social services and security of lives and property of the citizenry. It also encapsulates the right to basic infrastructures and facilities like good pipe borne water, health care, electricity and quality educational institutions for the people. Good governance equally involves the rule of law and cultivation and sustenance of an inclusive and participatory democracy. However, as the results of the study clearly shows, the Nigerian state and government have been captured by a group of powerful political elite for their own massive corrupt enrichment at the expense of the national economic development. The consequence has been a steady decline of the economy exemplified by rising inflation, widespread poverty, free fall of the national currency, worsening corruption perception and human development indices. This goes to prove the hypothesis that politics in reality impacts negatively on Nigeria’s Development. In the light of the above reality, this paper hereby recommends a total overhaul of the entire political infrastructure through patriotic and far reaching restructuring of the country and utilization of political power as a vehicle for national reconstruction and development. The elite must undergo a process of new orientation in order to appreciate politics as an opportunity for national service and not a means of capturing the state for exploitation and expropriation of the national wealth. With a new mindset about politics as a process of national transformation based on a solid economic foundation, Nigeria would be on the path of genuine development. Government should apply the necessary laws to combat and stem the tide of corruption and ensure that there is consequence for any form of abuse of office or infractions

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