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# Surviving Continuity: The Albatross of Legislators and Legislative Assemblies in the Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria

William E. Odion<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The legislature is one of the vital institutions of democracy. It bears the burden of carrying the peoples' mandate and is saddled with making law-making function for the good governance of the state. Unfortunately consolidating democracy in Nigeria with the character content of the legislature remains an arduous task. This is because past legislature studies have revealed that it was be-deviled among other ills with corruption. Therefore, the focus of this paper was to investigate why they are prone to the tendencies that have damaged the institution's reputation, as well as the obstacles to legislator continuity in office. This is to determine how to enhance their capacity for democratic consolidation and political development in Nigeria. The objective was to describe the character of the Nigerian legislature and the consequence of democratic consolidation and identify observed challenges that made continuity in the office of the legislators impossible. The discourse was also extended to identifying how the capacity and performance of the legislative institution can be enhanced for democratic consolidation and political development in a fragile democracy such as Nigeria. This paper is qualitative and the methodology adopted was the use of secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journals, newspapers, and the Internet to gather data for analysis. The theoretical framework applied was the Dicey theory. The finding was that the legislative institution has not necessarily engendered democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Conclusively, it is argued that since the human element in Nigerian politics had significantly contributed to the aberrations and absurdities that had characterized democratic practice and consolidation in the country, it only requires the legislative institution to be disciplined, purge itself of corrupt tendencies, people-oriented legislations and enforcement of the rule of law to reinforce democratic consolidation.

*Keywords: Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Election, Legislature, Continuity*

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## **Introduction**

Legislature serves as an essential component of any democratic government and a major factor in its sustenance. Its existence predates the advent of modern democracy and its emergence dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The popularity of the legislature cannot be separated from the wave of democratic growth across the continents. However, it differs in composition from one system to another. For example, in a parliamentary system, members of the legislature are fused with the members of the executive while in the presidential system of government, the legislature and the executive are separated. Again, in some countries, members of the legislature were elected while they were appointed in others. Despite the differences, the legislature across many countries has a structural character that distinguishes them from other arms of government. Essentially, they have powers to make laws and act as watchdogs on behalf of the people, hence to accomplish this task the assembly must be made up of men and women of proven integrity and good character. It is through their actions of eschewing temptation that confidence and trust are built as well as constituting a unit of good governance and democratic sustenance. Nevertheless, in the consolidation of democracy, the legislature plays a role. The continuity and discontinuity in the office of the legislature and legislative institutions remain a factor in the determination of democratic consolidation. Features such as established political culture, preponderance of institutions that faithfully translate individual and societal preferences into public policy, and continuous but legitimate extension of their life expectancy in office beyond the short term reflect the import of the legislature in the democratic consolidation process. The extent to which the Nigerian legislature has conformed with the above, in terms of character and composition remains part of the focus of this paper.

The objectives of this paper therefore were to situate the functions of the legislature in a democracy, to describe the character of the Nigerian legislature and its effects on democratic consolidation, to identify the bottlenecks to legislator's/legislature's continuity in Nigeria, and to discuss the enhancement of the capacity and performance of the Nigerian legislature to attain democratic consolidation and political development in a fragile/fledgling democracy. To achieve the above, the following research questions were interrogated: What

are the functions of the legislature in a democracy? What is the character of the Nigerian legislature and its effects on democratic consolidation? What are the bottlenecks to legislative continuity in Nigeria? How can the capacity and performance of the Nigerian legislature be enhanced for democratic consolidation and political development in a fragile/fledgling democracy?

## **Research Methodology**

Data for this paper were gathered from secondary sources. These sources included textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, and internet materials. The materials sourced were mostly on conversations around the legislature, elections, politics, and democracy in Nigeria. Specifically, data gathered related to issues before, during, and after the elections. Some newspapers were sampled because of their wide coverage and availability. They included *Business Day*, *Punch*, *Tribune*, and *Vanguard*. However, personal observation also played a fundamental role in strengthening the analysis.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The “Dicey theory” was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. It recognized the existence of three different but complementary arms of government – the legislature, executive, and judiciary. It further emphasized the twin theories of parliamentary supremacy and sovereignty. The argument is that parliament has under the English constitution, the right to make or unmake any law whatever; and further ... no person or body is recognized by the law as having a right to override or set aside the legislation of parliament. (Ginsburg, 2009).

In many climes, the legislative arm of government (parliament, assembly, congress) bears the exclusive responsibility for law-making, and in the performance of this all-important function, the arm is expected to enjoy sovereignty or independence of interference from any other arm of government. Unfortunately, in the Nigerian contemporary democratic context, the parliament experiences challenges such as the setting aside by the judiciary of the laws



made by the legislature; interference in the appointment of Principal Officers of the House by the executive; refusal to assent to bills, etc. Thus, their liberty is limited.

It has been argued that though the British constitution is dominated by the sovereignty of parliament, parliamentary sovereignty is no longer, if it ever was, absolute (Emrah, 2013, p. 159 cited in Ogali, 2022). Corroborating the above argument, Ogali (2022) argued that the degree of independence exercised by the legislative arm differs in each political context but mainly in Third World countries like Nigeria. It is being eroded by the day due to the desperation demonstrated by political leaders who were often intolerant of any form of opposition, coupled with the peculiar circumstances of economic underdevelopment in third-world countries like Nigeria.

### **Literature on the Legislature and its Functions**

The legislature is one of the three main organs of government in a democratic state. It is a body or representative of the people charged with the responsibility of making laws for the country or a part of it and policies, representing the interests of their people, and serving as a check on the executive arm of government. It is an indispensable political institution in modern-day democratic government (Ogunna, et al., 2002). The organ cannot be separated from liberal democracy as they are constructed around it.

The legislature plays a major role in the confirmation of appointments made by the executives such as ministers/commissioners, diplomatic and consular officers, approval of budgets, and negotiation and ratification of treaties. The legislature is also a forum for ventilating anger and grievances and a fertile ground for grooming future leaders (Akpotor, 2002). In sum, Onuoha (2009) in discussing the functions of the legislature argued that the legislature has powers to perform several functions, some of which include, law-making for the good governance of the state, passing of resolutions on matters of public concern, the exercise of oversight functions over the ministries and departments of government to ensure strict compliance with the laws and regulations, confirmation of appointments into executive and judicial positions. Of all

the duties and functions of the legislature, the most crucial, exclusive, and fundamental is the power to make laws.

Apart from its law-making responsibility, the legislature affects and is a crucial indicator of the state of health of a democratic government (Meny and Knapp, 1993, p. 186). Thus, it indicates or is used to measure the level of democratic development of a country. The idea of legislature derives from Abraham Lincoln cited in Remy's (1994: 13) classical definition of democracy as "government of the people, by the people and for the people". Deduced from this definition is the existence of the representatives of the people due to the technical impossibility (as a result of the complexities of contemporary societies) of all the people ruling and carrying on the business of government as was the original conception of the Greeks about democracy.

Stultz (1968) cited in Egwu (2005) identified several characteristics that are common to the legislature in the third world. These features also apply to Nigeria's legislature. They include popular election of legislators, constitutional supremacy, the absence of lobbying by private interests, uninformed debates often focusing on parochial concerns of legislators, executive dominance, and a functional ambiguity arising from a limited decision-making role.

The legislature may be unicameral or bicameral. By unicameral we mean a legislature that consists of only one chamber while a bicameral legislature consists of two chambers – the lower and the upper chambers. Variations in legislature across countries are informed by four main variables which include the constitutional structure of the country, the political-cultural peculiarities of the country, the party system of the country, and the system of representation in the country (Uki, 2020). At the Federal level in Nigeria is the bicameral legislature – the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives is headed by the Speaker of the House while the Senate is headed by the Senate President. The reason behind the adoption of the bicameral structure according to the 1979 constitution (as amended) is to guarantee the equality of the unit as well as reflect the population distribution between states. At the State level is the unicameral legislature which is often headed by the Speaker. These Principal Officers are usually elected by and from elected members.

The most important, prominent, and contentious bill often passed by the Nigeria legislature is the Appropriation Bill. It remains so because it has to do with resource allocation. Sharing the resources among the various sections of the country is a difficult task. So, the appropriation process is always faced with the problem of disagreement because everyone struggles to get something done in his area, even when it is obvious that the resources are inadequate. It is important to note that the process or job of legislation is not done during plenary (Akpotor, 2002). The real job is done during committee sittings. Therefore, a legislator may not be vocal on the floor of the House but may be very useful and active in the real job of legislation (committee level). This means that the efficiency and effectiveness of a legislator can only be judged by what he does in the relevant committee. It is only in the committees that a legislator can influence easily what and how a particular law would be, and influence projects to his constituency (Odion, n.d).

### **Character of Nigerian Legislature**

Certain features are identifiable in an attempt to situate the character of the Nigerian legislature as an institution. For example, corruption which is endemic in Nigerian society has also permeated the legislative institution. It has severely led to instability in the parliament with damaging consequences for the institution. Accusations and counter-accusations coupled with a lack of transparency have become identifiable features of the Nigerian legislature. Corruption as the Nigerian experience has shown is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation. The reason the parliament is prone to corruption is that it has become a culture of many institutions in Nigeria. Decades of entrenched corruption, as argued by Igbinovia and Aigbovo (2009) fueled by petrodollars have created “respectably corrupt” people in high and low places. Thus, the tendency is for any public officer to take advantage of his position for his benefit. It is worrisome and discomfoting that the name of the Assembly keeps appearing in executive fraudulent activities. The real problem is that the Assembly, as a democratic institution established to checkmate the excesses of the executive arm and promote democracy and development has failed disastrously (Ogali 2022, p. 136). Corruption by elected parliamentarians

in Nigeria has stigmatized and damaged the image of the government, weakened its credibility, and reduced the effectiveness of the legislative institution and development programmes. In the Nigerian parliament, parliamentarians have been involved in several corrupt scandals such as the 'Emehgate', contract scam, the fuel subsidy scam, the tenure elongation amendment bribe allegation, budget padding, and bribe, the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) report, Mantu and the Hajj scandal, the NITEL-Pentaspice management contract saga, the 'Missing ship saga', Ajaokuta Steel scandal, etc (Elekwa, Eme and Okonkwo, 2009). Members of the probe panel on the National Integrated Power Project (NIPP) Scheme were accused of receiving gratification of N200 million from the NIPP contractors for the probe panelists to give the contractors a safe landing. As a pointer to the all-pervasive nature of corruption in Nigeria, especially among the ruling elite, the probe panel on land allocation in the FCT revealed that the Chairman of the probe panel, Senator Sodangi had himself benefitted inordinately in the raffle called land allocation in Abuja (Igbinovia and Aigbovo, 2009).

Another characteristic of the Nigeria federal legislative chambers as experience has shown is that it has almost become a rehabilitation home or dumping ground for old, expired, and unproductive politicians. In particular, the current trend that is characteristic of ex-governors who could not use their state resources to better the lot of the citizens in their state, after serving out their two-term tenure, is to aspire to join others in the legislative chambers. Many of them are also known to be very old and under investigation for alleged corrupt enrichment of state resources. The reason the parliament attracts these sets of persons is that they need to sustain the culture of presiding over state resources for personal gain and security by removing them from the prying eyes of the anti-corruption agencies.

In addition, the Nigerian legislative institution is subservient to the executive arm. They are subjected to manipulations as they have overbearing chief executives to contend with. The legislative institutions are mere rubber stamp institutions, not able to carry out effective oversight functions, only passing motions that do not have the force of law. The bills passed have not been able to urgently address critical and national issues. Whereas the legislature has

been largely driven by rational political consideration rather than national interest or constitutional principle, the high-handedness of the executive arm of government has reflected in situations where the hallow chambers mostly at the state level are vacated and moved to Government House as was the case in Edo and Rivers State respectively, due to internal wrangling and high politics. The invasion and harassment of the National Assembly by the Directorate of State Services (DSS), the refusal of President Muhammadu Buhari to appear before the House of Representatives, the delay in the former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor, Godwin Emefiele's appearance before the House of Representatives to explain the naira redesign issues, as well as President Muhammadu Buhari veto on four consecutive occasions of the Electoral (Amendment) Bill, 2018 is suggestive of an overbearing executive.

Moreover, the other reason why the parliament is subservient to the executive is that the growth of the executive due to its vast/enormous powers and resources has placed it in a vantage position above the legislature. The situation is made worse with the existence in the Assembly of the "President's/Governor's boys" who had their nominations as well as their electoral victories traceable or attributed to their endorsement by the President/Governor as the case may be. Furthermore, to be discerned in the character of Nigerian legislature sometimes is the tendency to be combative. Tension and anxieties that infiltrate the executive and legislative institutions seem to transform them into battlefields where individuals and cliques emerge and fight each other for status and power. These could emanate from power play, interest, or competition for resources. In a presidential system of government, conflict between the executive and legislature is normal. Ordinarily, the concept of separation of power demands cooperation and interdependence in the business of governance among the organs of government. It also requires that they check on each other and not interfere in the area of jurisdiction and authority of each other.

Unfortunately, in the application of the above concept, a frosty relationship has been developed. The process of the emergence of Senator Bukola Saraki as Senate President unbalanced the Presidency and the APC, and so the National Assembly under Bukola's leadership never enjoyed a cordial relationship with the executive. The relationship was combative with the request by the

President for the confirmation of Ibrahim Magu as EFCC substantive Chairman rejected twice by angry lawmakers between 2016 and 2017, citing damning reports against him from the Directorate of State Service (DSS) as reasons for the rejection. Though there were political undertones, occasioned by the frosty relationship, he however remained in an acting capacity until when he was arrested on July 6, 2020, and subsequently suspended on July 10, 2020, over allegations of corruption and abuse of office. In the same vein, the 2018 Electoral (Amendment) Bill suffered Presidential veto four consecutive times, while Senate President Bukola Saraki was also arraigned before the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) on a 13-count perjury charge shortly after he assumed office. This was not unconnected with his disregard for the party choices for the leadership of the Senate, though he was cleared of the allegations by the Supreme Court three years later.

Finally, oversight functions by the legislature have been abused and turned into avenues for witch-hunting while the executive kept using its power of veto to moderate the activities of the legislature. The tendency therefore is to resort to fisticuffs with the executive. There have been situations where popular bills that would have improved the well-being of the citizens and contributed to national development are truncated in the legislature or executive such as the Electoral Act Amendment 2010. Arguably, the abuse of oversight functions by the parliament may find explanation in the endemic systemic corruption in the society and the frosty relationship between the executive and the legislature which allows the legislature to deploy it as a weapon to regulate the excesses of the executive.

The National Assembly introduced the Electoral (Amendment) Bill, 2018, to address the controversies that trailed the 2015 general elections, especially the place of technology in the country's election, and to improve the country's electoral process generally. Unfortunately, the Bill suffered from executive-legislative disharmony as it suffered Presidential dissent four consecutive times (Yakubu and Babatunde, 2020). The politicisation of the issue by parliamentarians resulted in the inability of the National Assembly to muster the constitutionally required two-thirds vote to veto the President's veto in the national interest. It is believed to constitute a major setback in the conduct of

the 2019 general elections as the Bill hitherto contained many provisions that were intended to address the challenges against the conduct of transparent and credible elections in Nigeria. Often the appointees/members of the executive refuse to honor invitations to appear before the parliament without any sanction, thus making them rubber stamps and toothless bulldog legislative institutions.

### **The Nigerian Legislature and Democratic Consolidation: A Critique**

The cumulative effect of the above analysis is that the legislature has not lived up to the expectations of the Nigerian people particularly in reforming the constitution, and electoral system in a manner that will ensure the liberalization of the electoral system, accountability, and deepening of democracy. Consolidating democracy with the above character content certainly leaves much to be desired.

Corruption affects development in several ways. It undermines the aspiration to create an orderly, fair, and decent society. It is commonly understood to imply and entail the misuse of public power and resources for personal gain. Besides the fact that corruption, when indulged in by legislators, damages the reputation of the legislature, it negatively impacts the passage of quality bills/laws, and development and makes the citizens lose confidence in the institution. With pervasive acts of corruption, compromise, settlement, budget padding, etc, it would be difficult to conclude that the parliament has indeed been instrumental to the process of development and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

The Nigerian legislative institution as a dumping ground for old and recycled politicians affects the quality of legislation. It batters the image of the legislative institution as it prevents fresh ideas from being introduced or injected into governance, particularly when previous elective officials such as governors who could not perform in their states and are mostly under investigation by the anti-graft agencies find the place as a shield. Though some bills have been passed and assented to by the President, the tendency mostly has been to query the quality of such bills and how they have imparted on the citizenry, good governance, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. In the argument of Seer

(1977, cited in Ojo, 1998), development is measured by what is happening to poverty, inequality, and unemployment. With poverty pegged at 62.9% (Ikpoto, 2022) quoting the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria has been described by the World Bank as the ‘poverty capital of the world’ (Alikor, 2022). The inequality gap was still extremely wide (Ogunyemi, 2022), while the unemployment level kept rising significantly in Q3, 2023 at 5.0% (an increase of 0.8% from Q2, 2023) (NBS, 2024). It can be argued that the bills passed have not translated to development in the Nigerian context.

The absence of internal democracy in many political parties coupled with the legislators negotiating for automatic tickets, personal political and economic interests have beclouded their sense of mission, thus losing every sense of responsibility. This made Ogali (2022) argue and describe it as a “*sleeping and rubber stamp Assembly*”, out there to do the bidding of their paymaster. A rubber stamp legislature oftentimes, cannot assert, check, and balance the other organs of government, particularly the Executive. The lack of checks and balances in a democratic system provides the impetus for disregarding democratic consolidation as impunity and high-handedness remain the consequence. Investigative or oversight functions may occur during the budgetary process, during the normal course of a legislative session, or on special occasions when it reviews the executive programme or some of its establishments or agencies. Unfortunately, effective oversight and democratic consolidation are hampered by a rubber-stamp legislature that is constrained by an overbearing executive to which it is already subservient.

The National Assembly amended the Electoral Act 2010 at a late hour. A Bill that was important for the conduct of the 2015 general election was passed by the House of Representatives on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 2015, whilst the Senate passed the same on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 2015. The President assented to the Bill on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, 2015, two days before the conduct of the 2015 Presidential election. However, because the amendment came late and apparently, it was not available to legal practitioners, no single reference was made to the Amendment Act in the determination of the challenges faced by the card reader machine in the conduct of the elections. However, the argument here is that the late amendment of a critical bill such as this calls into question the



rationality of legislative proceedings and the lack of an effective mechanism to gazette and publish new laws in Nigeria. The unanswered question remains why did the National Assembly amend a law to govern elections very close to the elections and at a time when the election management body could not have taken cognizance of the amendment in its preparations for the elections? (Onyekpere and Nnajiaka, 2016).

Lack of independence is exhibited in the fact that the annual appropriation for the House has to be included in the national/state's annual appropriation that was put together by the executive. The lack of financial independence results in the legislature being rubber-stamped and controlled by the executive particularly as it pertains to who should emerge as Principal Officers. In a presidential system of government, conflict between the executive and legislature is normal. Ordinarily, the concept of separation of power demands cooperation and interdependence in the business of governance among the organs of government. It also requires that they check on each other and not interfere in the area of jurisdiction and authority of each other. Unfortunately, executive impunity and interference as exhibited in the interest of the choice of Principal Officers has become a major problem.

In 2023, besides the fact that the Executive/APC government of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu had zoned the Senate President to the South-South and Speaker, House of Representatives, to the North East (as well as other positions), they also insisted that the choice should be Senator Godswill Akpabio and Honorable Tajudeen Abbas respectively. Though from the political party perspective, it was not viewed as executive interference. Rather, it was viewed as a way of strengthening the relationship between the executive and legislature, forging synergy and consensus amongst the duo. The party stands to benefit and actualize its manifestoes when it can control the legislative assembly. However, it is argued that a leadership that was bleached and tainted, entrapped in a history of corruption, nepotism, and lack of transparency and accountability in previous assignments cannot command the respect of other members as well as Nigerians (Editorial, 2023). Such will end up as a rubber stamp. Nevertheless, the long-term implications of the above scenario were an imposition, instability in the leadership of the parliament as evidenced in successive National and

State Assemblies, downplay of the sensitivity of the matter of who becomes a principal officer in the national interest, delay in legislation that would have impacted on governance and development, and diversion from the real and critical issues of governance, development and democratic consolidation. It has further caused distortion and weakened the sovereign power of the state as several actions of the executive in most cases were not consistent, thus leading to a conflicting relationship between it and the legislature. In the long run, these conflicts impact democratic consolidation negatively.

### **Continuity and Discontinuity of Legislators in the Nigerian Legislature.**

Continuity in the office of the legislator has several implications on political development generally, legislative development and democratic consolidation in particular. Besides the fact that it allows for the building of legislative experience and capacity, it also aids the continuity, implementation, development, and consolidation of good policies that help shape society. Naturally, the life of a legislature may not be enough to pass all the bills, therefore the transition of the life of a parliament from one term to another is necessary for the effective passage of unfinished bills. Dint of hard work, character, popularity, and competence of the candidate rather than financial war chest and rigging are necessary prerequisites for the continuity of parliamentarians in office.

However, several bottlenecks have prevented the smooth transition of one parliament to another intact. They include the desire of governors to occupy legislative positions at the national level after serving out their tenure, with the consequence being the displacement of many sitting legislators in most cases. Defection, which is the movement of members of one political party to another, is yet another reason that affects the continuity of parliamentarians in office. It creates a vacancy within the structure that requires to be filled. Internal party wrangling, due to a lack of internal democracy often displaces and creates room for the replacement of parliamentarians. How the primaries were conducted often robbed many of the serving legislators of their return ticket. Losing outright at party primaries due to the poor performance of hitherto elected legislators can result in the withdrawal or denial of a return ticket.

Recall, which is a democratic process of withdrawing support for a legislator who his constituents felt is not representing their interest in the parliament or has infringed on the laws, also results in discontinuity of such legislator as a member of parliament. As a matter of constitutional right, a legislator is allowed to aspire to higher/other positions or step down for personal reasons or due to zoning arrangements in their constituency. Political instability such as military incursion can abruptly truncate the life and continuity in office of a legislator. Finally, the death of a legislator often creates a vacancy that needs to be filled. The available records showed that in 2015, 2019, and 2023, some very notable and experienced legislators amongst who are listed below, lost their bid to return to the National Assembly as a result of the aforementioned.

### **Some Notable NASS Members Who Lost Their Bid to Return to the Senate in 2015**

S/N	Name	Political Party	Constituency
1.	Magnus N. Abe	PDP	Rivers South East
2.	Victor Ndoma Egba	PDP	Cross River Central
3.	Chris Ekpeyong	PDP	Akwa Ibom N/W
4.	Helen Esuene	PDP	Akwa Ibom South
5.	Igwe Johson Chukwuemeka	PDP	Anambra North
6.	Clever Marcus Ikisikpo	PDP	Bayelsa East
7.	Alkali Saidu Ahmed	PDP	Gombe North East

*Source: (INEC 2015).*

### **Some Notable NASS Members Who Lost Their Bid to Return to the Senate in 2019**

S/N	NAME	POLITICAL PARTY	CONSTITUENCY
1.	Bukola Saraki	APC	Kwara Central
2.	Godswill Akpabio	PDP	Akwa Ibom N/W
3.	Dino Melaye	PDP	Kogi West
4.	Shehu Sani	PRP	Kaduna Central
5.	Ben Murray Bruce	PDP	Bayelsa East
5.	Abiodun Olujimi	PDP	Ekiti South
6.	Mao Ohabunwa	PDP	Abia North

7.	George Akume	APC	Benue North West
8.	Olusegun Mimiko	ZLP	Ondo Central
9.	Abiola Ajimobi	APC	Oyo South
10.	Ibrahim Dankwambo	PDP	Gombe North

**Source:** Azeezat, (28 February 2019, p. 1).

### **Some Notable NASS Members Who Lost Their Bid to Return to the Senate in 2023**

S/N	Name	Political Party	Constituency
1.	Stella Oduah	PDP	Anambra North
2.	Biobarakuma Degi	APC	Bayelsa East
3.	Gabriel Suswan	PDP	Benue North East
4.	Peter Nwaoboshi	APC	Delta North
5.	Sam Egwu	PDP	Ebonyi North
5.	Clifford Ordia	PDP	Edo Central
6.	Phillips Aduda	PDP	FCT
7.	Bala Ibn Na'allah	APC	Kebbi South
8.	Kabiru Ibrahim Gaya	APC	Kano South
9.	Umaru Tanko Al-Makura	APC	Nassarawa South
10.	Francis Alimikhena	PDP	Edo North

**Source:** (Abe, 4 March 2023, p. 1).

In the 2023 general election, only thirty-three (33) out of a total of 109 Senators and one hundred and ten (110) out of 360 Honorable members returned to the Senate and House of Representatives respectively (The Nation Newspaper, April 24, 2023). In the jostle for return to the Senate in the 2023 elections, only fifty-four (54) members survived the primaries while fifty-five (55) lost out. Out of the total number of Senators that survived the primaries, it was only thirty-three (33) that won re-election. The implication has been the flooding of the parliament with newly elected and inexperienced legislators, and the loss of legislative pedigree garnered over time. Again, this has not saved costs for the parliament as funds are required for seminars, accommodation, equipment, furniture, consultancy, logistics, and other retreats to equip them with the business of legislating.

## **Enhancing the Capacity and Performance of the Nigerian Legislature for Democratic Consolidation and Political Development**

To improve the capacity and performance of the Nigerian legislature for democratic consolidation and political development, the following suggestions are made:

To remove dependence on the executive and ensure financial autonomy, it is relevant that the funding of the legislature should be through the Consolidated Revenue Fund. Adequate funding devoid of corruption will help the legislature to improve the state of their infrastructure and personnel. As argued by Okoosi-Sambine (2007), the above, among others, will help in the gathering of more, qualitative information for proposed bills, modernising their complexes, hiring and retaining qualified administrative staff, purchasing modern equipment for especially organized and ordered record-keeping and updating, translation and regular publications of Hansard and bills/laws.

Legislative business is a serious and complex business that requires exposure, experience, and intelligence. Therefore, a constitutional amendment is required to raise the level of education for membership of the parliament from a school certificate (whether passed or failed) to a first degree with public service or recognized private sector experience as an added advantage. To further strengthen the capacity of the legislature, legislative education is advocated locally or internationally. The argument here is that compulsory state or legislature-funded annual training/retreat locally or excursion programmes for legislators abroad to more developed/advanced democracies is required. This must be monitored to prevent abuse. Nevertheless, participation in regular and periodic legislative training and capacity-building programmes has the potential to strengthen legislative business and performance. In the same vein, non-governmental organizations, international agencies, and institutes such as the Electoral Institute of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and the Centre for Legislative Studies should be encouraged to provide local programmes that aim at capacity building for the legislature.

The process of political recruitment must be sufficiently transparent and integrity-driven. This is to ensure that contests for leadership and political

offices are truly contested and won based on merit and popular choice. Where the process of political contest is distorted and manipulated, through non-transparent and unethical practices, the stage is set for governance devoid of ethics, transparency, and accountability (Ojo, 2009). Leaders and political office holders that emerged out of a manipulated process of selection or elite anointing rather than truly contested elections would remain almost permanently dependent on their benefactors or godfathers and therefore incapacitated to ensure ethics, transparency, and accountability in governance through quality legislation.

The legislature must be responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the citizenry. Good governance requires that institutions and processes of government try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. In other words, responsiveness implies and requires that government and the processes of governance are guided by a commitment to meet the genuine and legitimate needs and expectations of the people through quality debates, laws, and adequate public service delivery. No matter the pressure from constituents, the expectation is that the legislator must adopt an open-door policy to respond to all needs. Obtaining loans and deploying same to purchase SUVs does not serve the purpose of good governance and response to the deplorable state of citizens. While citizens were struggling with the scorching effect of oil subsidy removal, the NASS received N160 million each for the purchase of SUVs.

As a way of strengthening the capacity of the legislature, regular town hall meetings must be held and convoked by reputable civil society groups. Town hall meetings serve as a veritable tool for good governance. The major benefit of town hall meetings that are devoid of partisan political considerations is that it provides an avenue for government (represented by an elected representative) and the governed to exchange ideas. Secondly, it provides a veritable platform to correct misconceptions and throw more light on the government's policies and programmes (Onakalu and Odion, 2017). The executive arm of government must allow the House to choose its Principal Officers without interference. This will make popularly elected and accepted principal officers emerge. A situation where the executive decides and interferes with the leadership of the House oftentimes makes the legislature become a rubber stamp and ultimately the

quality of debates and laws is affected.

According to Ojo (2009), where there is good governance, all that is at stake is public interest and there will be nothing to hide. Transparency in this sense means that decisions taken and enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It further means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. Law therefore is supposed to be made available to the general public and engender good governance. Secrecy of legislation is anti-people, democracy, and development. In Edo State for example, the Special Intervention Law of 2021 that empowered the State Governor, Godwin Obaseki to directly intervene in the appointment of Principal Officers of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, against University autonomy and principles of University governance, passed through all the stages of law making in one day without any form of public hearing and was passed. Because the Special Intervention Team (SIT) law, from all intent and purpose, was out to do severe damage to University autonomy, the government kept the law in secrecy from the general public until the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma Chapter decided to challenge the law in court.

## **Conclusion**

This paper attempted a review of the role of the legislature in a democracy. Sustaining the legislative institution has not been an easy task. It was argued and established that the core mandate of any legislature, Nigeria inclusive, is law-making, representation, and oversight. These functions have largely been observed at the NASS but with serious assault mostly at the state and local government legislative institutions. These assaults were often occasioned by internal dynamics within the legislative arm and overbearing Chief Executives in the states who interfere incessantly in the activities of the legislature. The character trait of the parliament suggests an institution that can mostly bark and not bite. Largely made up of old and expired politicians, it has been enmeshed in corruption in the past and this has battered the image of the institution. The institution is self-serving, catering mostly for its welfare while its legislations

rarely translate to improvement in the economy and lives of citizens.

From the analysis above, it is obvious that the Nigerian legislature has not fared well. It has contributed minimally to democratic consolidation. To the extent that quality laws with impactful consequences were not made, it becomes difficult to accept that they have contributed meaningfully to democratic consolidation. Also, the challenges that confront the legislature as argued in this paper are serious limiting factors toward democratic consolidation. However, a new trend was identified as a threat to the continuity of legislators in office and the legislative institution which has translated into consolidated practice. It is the activities of ex-governors who themselves want to become parliamentarians having served out their tenure as chief executives. This has contributed immensely to heating the polity and has become disadvantageous to the political process and democratic consolidation considering that the system allows them to remain in office and contest.

Finally, while admitting that there were challenges bedeviling the legislative institution, a number of measures/solutions were proffered to enhance the capacity and performance of the legislature to deliver on their mandate.



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# Childhood Experiences and Political Attitudes of Citizens in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Many explanations have been put forward for the progressive decline in citizens' interest in Nigeria's political activities, particularly in electoral democracy since the beginning of the Fourth Republic. However, there is a dearth of research on how childhood socialisation and experiences inform people's attitudes to participate or not in political activities in the country. Drawing from a mixed methods approach using surveys and in-depth interviews with 400 participants across the six Area Councils in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) – Abaji, AMAC, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje and Kwali, while relying on the rational-choice model and descriptive and thematic analysis, this paper argues that childhood socialisation experiences have a major effect on the formation of political attitudes of citizens. The paper shows further that citizens' reluctance to participate actively in politics was reinforced by a trust deficit between them and the government, low government performance, as well as institutional and procedural impediments that characterise Nigeria's election management systems. The study recommends that the government should actively promote civic education and enlightenment at all levels of education while this is to be augmented by relevant institutions like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), including by using local dialects. Further still, democratic principles should be entrenched through open government policies and practices to strengthen trust in public institutions, while boosting citizens' political interest and participation.

**Keywords:** *socialisation, childhood experiences, political attitudes; political participation*

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## **Introduction**

Over time, scholars have interrogated the role of childhood experiences and socialisation in the formation of political attitudes and ideologies (Jose, 2024; Pescaru, 2019; Healy and Malhotra, 2013; Jennings, Stoker and Bowers, 2009; Tedin, 1974). Healy and Malhotra (2013), for instance, argued that evidence strongly favoured a crucial and enduring relationship between childhood experiences and political beliefs. Pescaru (2019) relates this to socialisation processes that include the transmission of values, culture and customs, this added to visible codes and citizens' responsibilities to the State and the society, which are inculcated from childhood. Healy and Malhotra (2013) corroborate this thinking by arguing that the agents of socialisation work simultaneously for citizens' patriotism and political indoctrination. This is achieved when people of all ages are put through the process of teaching and learning about all aspects of the political system, using diverse socialisation mechanisms.

Since the beginning of Nigeria's fourth republic, the country has witnessed a declining trend in citizens' willingness to participate actively in the political space, particularly as it concerns electoral democracy. While scholars have provided diverse explanations for this phenomenon across the globe, ranging from sociological, psychological, economic and political perspectives (Patterson, 2009; Wattenberg, 2002), this has been attributed to the inertness of the country's political parties in the Nigerian context (Aliyu et al, 2020), poor democratisation processes, governance failures and weak institutional frameworks, including electoral institutions (Ayeni, 2024; Obi et al, 2023) high levels of illiteracy and ignorance among others.

Be that as it may, and while the foregoing scholarly conclusions are recognised, little research has been done on the diverse ways in which childhood socialisation and experiences influence people's decisions to participate in electoral political processes or not over time (Olasupo, 2015; Schwarz, 2021). This reality subsists despite conjunctural episodes of active citizenry manifest in periodic pockets of public protests, akin to scenarios witnessed across the globe such as in the Arab world, Asia, South America and other parts of Africa (QadirMushtaq & Afzal, 2017; Idris, 2016; Carothers & Youngs, 2015). Using a mixed methods approach that draws from surveys and in-depth interviews with 400 participants across

the six area councils in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) - Abaji, AMAC, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje and Kwali, this paper examines their submissions on the multiple ways childhood socialisation and experiences influence decisions to partake in political processes. The study asks the following questions:

- How do childhood experiences affect the formation of the political attitude of citizens?
- Which among the socialization agents constitutes the dominant factor that influences the political attitude of citizens in Nigeria?
- To what extent do institutional and procedural encumbrances explain the political attitude of citizens?

The Rational-Choice theoretical model and descriptive and thematic approaches are employed to provide analytical interpretations for the study. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: operationalisation of concepts; existing studies and theoretical perspectives; methodological approaches; result presentation and discussion; and conclusion and policy recommendations.

### **Operationalisation of Concepts**

The paper considers three major concepts – socialisation, childhood experiences, and political attitudes – as key to understanding its intent, purposes, findings and interpretations. These are discussed in turn:

**Socialisation:** Socialisation is the process of transmitting and understanding societal norms expectations, values, and beliefs William and Littlefield, 2018). It is also a dialectical process by which individuals exchange, adapt to, and internalise the values of a shared social group over the life course (Saras and Perez-Felkner, 2018). In this thinking, people come in contact with agents that teach them how to become members of their natural and social worlds hinged on sociological processes that occur through socialising, and this is a precursor that explains the process of self-development and an understanding of how the “self” becomes socialised (Mwangi, Gachahi, and Ndung’u, 2019). Scholars have categorised the agents of socialisation into: 1. Micro-level agents: family, peer groups and neighbourhood; 2. Meso-level agents including school, religion

and social class; and 3. Macro-level agents: the global community, media, and social networks (Saras and Perez-Felkner, 2018). It is within this context that political socialisation occurs, by which citizens crystallise political identities that remain largely persistent through their later lives. These categorisations of socialisation agents become important for the paper's understanding of the effects and relationships between childhood experiences and the political attitudes of citizens in Nigeria.

**Childhood Experiences:** Childhood experiences in this paper encompass all the activities, teaching, indoctrination, mind shaping, influence, and orientation, among others, that an individual is exposed to during their early childhood years, which many scholars agree are facilitated by multiple agents of socialisation (Lazer, Rubineau and Neblo, 2009; and McPherson, SmithLovin & Cook, 2001). Thus, during the life course, an individual's experiences are manifested through sustained patterns of interactions at the micro, meso and macro levels, drawing on the major conduits of socialisation (Kumari, 2020). The paper adopts this thinking and argues that childhood experiences are key determinants that produce certain political behaviours in the later years of an individual.

**Political Attitude:** The concept of attitude has been an important subject matter for research in social psychology, sociology, health, marketing, advertising, political behaviour, etc. An attitude was traditionally defined as a readiness to respond favourably or unfavourably towards objects, persons, circumstances or even abstract ideas (Albarracin and Shavitt, 2018; Oskamp, 1991). While this traditional definition argues that attitudes have three interrelated components - cognitive, affective and behavioural, a newer approach has been to move away from definitional perspectives towards attitude-behaviour empirical research, avoiding the favour or disfavour emphasis (Albarracin and Shavitt, 2018).

Adopting the thinking that attitudes are inferred from behavioural responses, where people hold attitudes that are either generally positive or generally negative (Albarracin and Shavitt, 2018; Healy & Malhotra, 2013), this paper understands political attitudes or behaviour as how an individual progressively responds to political activities and processes, which involves a level of decision-making and action about participating or not. Participation

here is taken as voting in elections; participating in propaganda or other campaigns in elections; active membership of a political party; contesting for an elective office; partaking in political demonstrations, industrial actions and similar activities aimed at changing public policies; civil disobedience such as refusing to pay taxes, opposing compulsory military service, among others (1993, p.81).

### **Existing Studies and Theoretical Perspectives**

There are two broad categories of attempts aimed at theorising whether an individual decides to get involved in politics or not: Rational choice and Institutional theories. This, more often than not, explains how socialisation (childhood experiences) transforms into an attitude and thus, political preferences, behaviours, and participation. The shaping of an individual's propensity to vote irrespective of whether the benefits outweigh the cost or vice versa, has always been referenced to inform a strong political attitude. The assumption is that the majority of those that have been politically exposed through their childhood tend to be more interested in political activities than those that lack such exposure (Jose, 2024; Olasupo, 2015).

Family background may not directly convey the political attitudes, values, norms and beliefs to the child. However, what children learn from their families may have political consequences (Jose, 2024; Neundorf and Smets, 2017; Jan-Emmanuel, 2011). Influence through parents' direct or indirect involvement in political activities, regular exposure to news channels at home, family ideology on political involvement and participation, patriotism levels of the parents and other family members, etc. have both short- and long-term consequences on the child's political attitudinal formation. For Turan (1991, p.56), the method of raising children leads to the identification of the authoritarian personality, which may include political value judgment and attitudes, such as disturbing political competition, being hierarchically organised, thinking that everyone has a certain place in society. When the influence of the family on political participation is examined, it may be said that the child carries more or less the influence of the attitudes and choices in the family in the future, especially on the party selection and the level of political interest. Yet, it is important to

underscore that lifelong plasticity from family background may not endure along the life course (Neundorf and Smets, 2017) because of contact with education, peer networks, exposure to media, or a combination of these and others on the individual.

Education, in particular, is found to be associated with a high level of political attitude formation and participation (Persson, 2013). Citizens' political activism and civic engagement in politics are a function of socio-cultural dynamics within which the individual is socialised (Norris, 2004, p.160). Attitude to voting or non-voting, therefore, is a product of one's exposure to socio-cultural networks and agencies. Some individuals would simply retort: 'I am not interested,' 'I don't like voting,' 'I don't like politics,' 'I don't want to be involved in any political activities and so on. Some studies examine the effect of social groups on people's voting behaviour. The central belief here is that if the people in one's social group vote, one will feel obligated to vote to be accepted within the group (Abrahams, Iversen & Soskice, 2011; Herrera & Martinelli, 2006; Olsen, 1965).

The dynamics of peer networks in attitude formation are intriguing and problematic. There is more literature on peer network effects on political participation and attitudinal formation; they are mixed. While some studies find evidence consistent with the claim that people follow their peer network to political affiliations (Campos, Heap, Leite Lopez de Leon, 2017; Sinclair, 2009; and Beck, 2002) others find no association (Mackuen and Brown, 1987). To interrogate the extent to which a peer network or a group could influence the behaviour of an individual, there are fundamental questions posed by Campos, Heap, Lopez de Leon (2017). Such as 1. Is it that people with similar preferences or traits naturally associate with each other or because group dynamics cause individual preferences and attitudes? They concluded that more politically engaged peer groups encourage individual political affiliations to move from the extremes to the centre. People often behave alike when they know each other well. Friends, for example, frequently influence each other, make the same decisions, send their children to similar schools, choose the same types of vacations, vote for the same political party, etc. Lazer, Rubineau and Neblo, (2009) also concluded in their study that among the distinct types of social



ties, friendship is the dominant conduit for influence on political attitudes and behaviours.

The Rational-choice model gained currency as one of the popular theoretical explanations of voters' attitudes. Scholars have been preoccupied with understanding the basis of such questions that some voters ask: 'What is in it for me?' 'Why should I waste my time?' 'Will my vote change the outcome?' A typical rational voter approaches, voting purely from the angle of 'utility maximization' (Kaplan, Gelman, and Edlin, 2007; Blais, 2000; Feddersen, 2004; Downs, 1957). In the same vein, the economic benefits of participating in political activities were also buttressed by Anthony Downs where he argued that a rational person should not vote if the costs of voting outweigh the benefits (Downs, 1957). Transparency and decorum are another option to explain the decision of citizens participating or not participating in political activities.

However, there are instances where an individual's strong willingness to vote is dampened majorly by institutional ineptitude, non-transparency, moneybag syndrome, violence and cumbersome electoral processes. In such a situation, there would be reactions where citizens see politics as dirty, expensive, deadly, and difficult. Based on the foregoing theoretical perspectives, to what extent can political socialization and orientation change citizen's attitudes towards active political participation and preferences, especially in Africa and importantly in Nigeria?

This paper contributes to the dimension of the impact of the early upbringing of children on the formation of political attitudes in Nigeria. Although attention has been given to how political attitudes are formed in the context, the focus has largely been on political institutional, legal, and ideological processes. Yet, because of the progressive waning of interest visible particularly in Nigeria's electoral cycles by voters, there is a need to broaden the scope of how to understand this phenomenon. This is important since electoral democracy is arguably the most significant political activity in a representative democracy.

## **Methodology**

**Design:** The study relied on a mixed methods design, otherwise referred to as *convergent parallel* design (Babbie, 2014). A convergent parallel design involves the concurrent conduct of the quantitative and qualitative research methods. It employed primary and secondary sources of data such as questionnaires and a repository of books, journals, archival documents, and another institutional database, especially from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and the Nigerian Population Commission (NPC). Drawing on the theoretical assumptions offered by rational choice and institutional paradigms, the study investigated the extent to which an individual's attitude to participate or not to participate is shaped by childhood experiences.

**Sampling Population:** The population of the study comprises of all the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) residents (regardless of state of origin) that is above voting age (18 years and above), have lived in Nigeria and witnessed at least one (1) general election and other political activities in Nigeria's fourth republic (1999 – date). This voting age is categorised into two, viz: those that have voters' cards/or that have voted in the past, and those that do not possess voter's cards and thus have never voted before.

**Target Population:** For the first category, the paper adopted the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) voters register as of the 1999 general election. During that period, the population of registered voters in Nigeria was 84,209,007 (INEC, 2023), excluding the number of uncollected PVCs put as 6,259,229. Accordingly, the target population in this study was the total registered voters in Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja which was put as 1,476,451, excluding several uncollected PVCs as 93,868. This will be supported by the experiences and in-experiences of other residents categorised as non-registered voters.

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** Both categories of the respondents as specified above were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Taro Yamane's (1967: 886) method of sample size calculation was adopted in determining the exact target study population from the general voters using INEC voters'

registration for FCT as 1,476,451. Below is the mathematical illustration for the Taro Yamane method and proportional stratified sampling technique from the unit of the population:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Desired sample size

N = Population size

e = Level of significance or Accepted error margin or limit (0.05)

1 = Constant value

Following the formula above, the sample size will be determined as follow:

$$n = \frac{1,476,451}{1+1,476,451 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1,476,451}{1+3,691}$$

$$n = \frac{1,476,451}{3,691} = 399.9$$

The sample size (n) is, therefore, rounded up to 400.

**Data Collection Procedure:** With the use of a questionnaire, data collection took place across selected locations in the six area councils of the FCT, with attention to the diversity of the sample along gender, education, ethnic and religious lines. This was particularly important for the study because of the metropolitan nature of the FCT, ensuring that intersectional considerations are adopted as much as possible.

**Data Analysis:** Collected data was analysed using descriptive and thematic analysis to account for the quantitative and qualitative information respectively.

## Result Presentation and Discussion.

### Demographics of Participants

**Age Distribution of the Participants:** Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. 31 respondents which represented 7.7% were 18-25 years old; 48 respondents which represented 12% were between 26 – 35 years old; 109 respondents which represented 27.3% were 36 – 45 years old; 156 respondents which represented 39.0 per cent were 46 – 55 years old; and lastly 56 respondents which represented 14.0 per cent were 56 and above old. This implies that there were more individuals sampled who were of electoral age in the previous three (3) or four (4) electoral cycles in Nigeria’s electoral system. This means that the respondents were sufficient enough to give account of their childhood experiences about their roles in the last major elections especially in Nigeria’s fourth republic.

**Table 1: Age Group of the Participants**

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
18-25 years	31	7.7%
26-35 years	48	12.0%
36-45 years	109	27.3%
46-55 years	156	39.0%
56- and above	56	14.0%
Total	400	100

*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.*

**Gender Representation of the Participants:** Gender representation, according to Table 2, showed that there were more male respondents (271) representing 67.8% than female (129) representing 32.2% of the respondents. As much as the study intended to know the perception of the female respondents about the subject matter, the outcome of the survey indicated study’s access to male respondents than female respondents. However, the representation of each gender is significant to mix discussion across gender.

**Table 2: Gender of the Participants**

Gender Identity	Frequency	Percent
Male	271	67.8%
Female	129	32.2%
Total	400	100

*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023*

**Educational Qualification of the Participants:** The analysis indicated that majority of the respondents are educated. Table 3 indicated that 195 representing 48.7% of the respondents have post-secondary education. Meanwhile, 92 (23.0%) and 79 (19.8%) of the respondents also possess secondary and primary education respectively. However, 31 representing 7.7% have no formal education. This considered important as majority of the respondents understand the phenomenon understudy.

**Table 3: Educational Qualification of the Participants**

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
No formal education	31	7.7%
Primary education	79	19.8%
Secondary education	92	23.0%
Post-secondary education	195	48.7%
Others	3	0.8%
Total	400	100

*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.*

**Location of Participants in FCT:** The determinant of the distribution of the questionnaire to Local Area Councils in FCT was based on the population percentage of each Area Council to the general population of the FCT. As of December 2023, the National Population Commission (NPC) placed the population of FCT at 3,067,500. Out of the population, Abaji Area Council has 127,900 (4.2%), Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) - 1,693,400 (55.2%), Bwari Area Council - 500,100 (16.3%), Gwagwalada Area Council - 346,000

(11.3%), Kuje Area Council – 212,100 (6.9%), and Kwali Area Council – 188,000 (6.1%). Hence, the questionnaires were distributed based on the Area Council’s percentage of the population (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Distribution of the Questionnaire to Local Area Councils in FCT**

Local Area Councils	No. of Questionnaire	Percent
Abaji Area Council	17	4.2%
Abuja Municipal Council (AMAC)	221	55.2%
Bwari Area Council	65	16.3%
Gwagwalada Area Council	45	11.3%
Kuje Area Council	28	6.9%
Kwali Area Council	24	6.1%
Total	400	100

*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.*

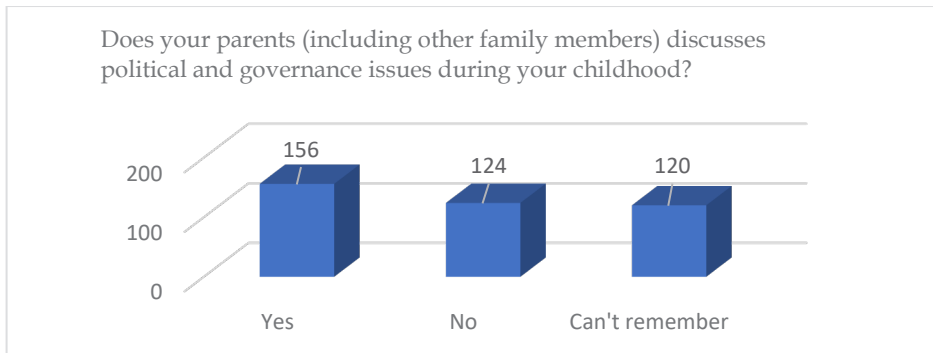
### **Childhood Experiences and Political Socialisation of the Participants**

The study pays key attention to the dynamics of agents of socialisation in the attitude formation of the citizens, which has been argued takes place largely in the context of various activities and experiences through family, school, peer network interactions, and exposure to other variables including media (Campos, Heap, Leite Lopez de Leon, 2017; Jan-Emmanuel, 2011; Olasupo, 2015; Persson, 2013; Roy and Giraldo-Garcia, 2018; and Turan, 1991). The findings indicate that majority of those that were politically exposed through their childhood tended to be interested in political activities than those that didn’t have such exposure. Others who may not have been exposed through childhood may have developed such interest via other outcomes of governance such as the government’s high sensitivity to citizens’ well-being, sound manifestoes of political parties and candidates during electioneering activities, trusted and efficient/effective electoral system, transparent and accountability in government activities, better social services and infrastructure, other incentives and economic benefit of participation.

This corroborates the classical argument of the Rational-Choice Model (Kaplan, Gelman, and Edlin, 2007; Blais, 2000; Feddersen, 2004; Downs, 1957). However, the paper also noted that non-performance of these factors and variables is responsible for negative attitudinal formation and bridges apolitical character in citizens which suggests the reason behind statements and reactions such as ‘What is in it for me?’, ‘Why should I waste my time?’, ‘Will my vote change the outcome?’, ‘Politics is expensive’, ‘politics is dirty’, ‘it is a difficult process,’ ‘I can’t cope with the stress,’ ‘I want to vote but I can’t register,’ ‘I don’t want to die’, ‘it’s too hard!’, etc. as noted under Literature and Theoretical Perspectives Section.

Meanwhile, from the information in Figure 1, family interest in discussing political and governance issues during participants’ childhood is not significant according to the distribution as 156 representing 39.0 per cent stated that their parents and other family members often discuss major events around governance and government activities. While some, 124 representing 31.0% marked, others – 120 representing 30.0% can’t remember.

**Figure 1: Family Members and Often Discussion of Political and Governance Issues During Participants’ Childhood**

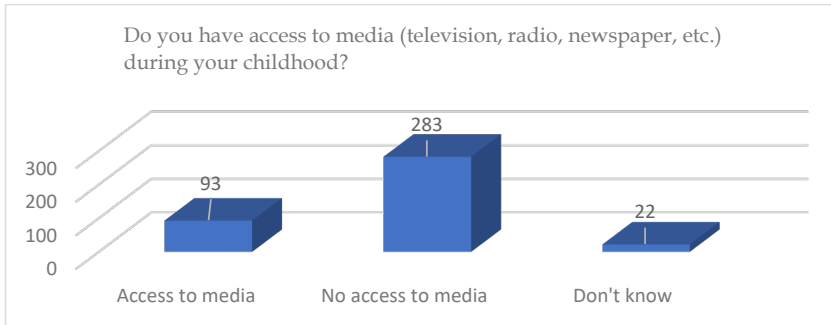


*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023*

In the same vein, the majority of the participant’s families during their childhood did not have access to media as 283 participants marked ‘no access to media’ while 93 participants marked ‘access to media’. However, 22 participants could

not remember (see Figure 2). The implication of this is that participants might have been affected by lack of media exposure in their formation of political attitudes as media exposure has been argued as a critical component of socialisation.

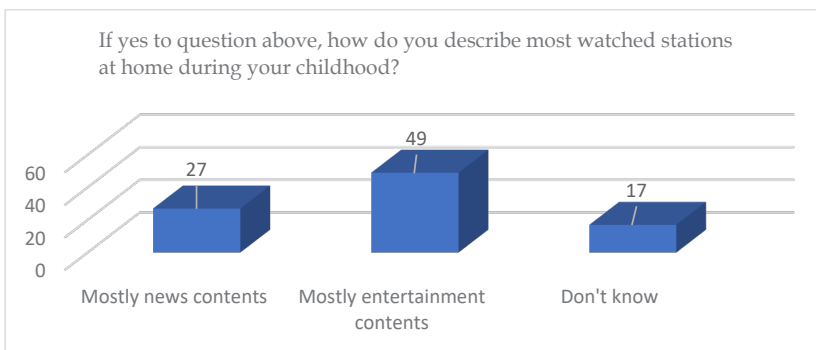
**Figure 2: Assessment of Media Exposure of the Participants During Childhood**



Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.

Still, most of those that their family have access to media only watched mostly entertainment contents (see Figure 3). This may not produce a desired result towards igniting political socialization and participation of the citizens in politics and governance.

**Figure 3: Media Exposure and Contents Mostly Watched by The Parents of the Participants During Childhood**

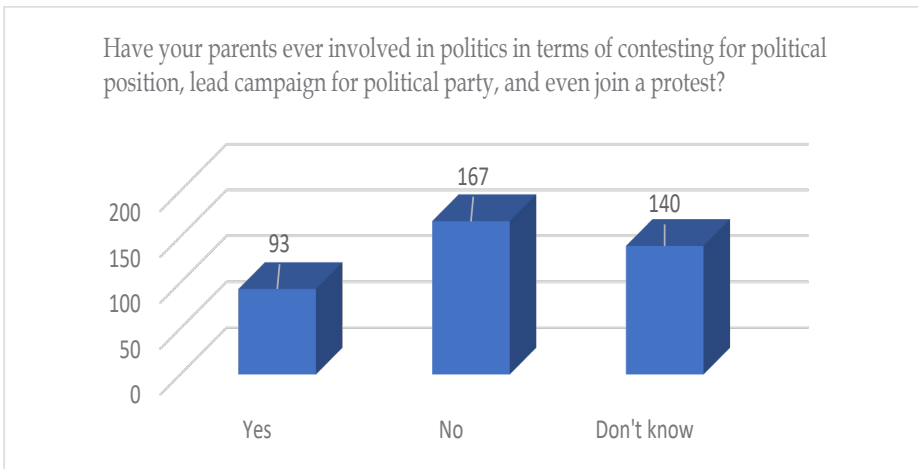


Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.



Unfortunately, parents and other family members have limited involvements in the political related activities which some others such as Roy and Giraldo-Garcia, 2018 and Turan, 1991 argued may have ignited the interest of children through the childhood in politics and governance. A sizeable number of the participants confirmed that they neither come from politically involved-family nor have any relationship with politicians (see Fable 4).

**Figure 4: Participants' Parents' Interest in Politics and Political Issues**



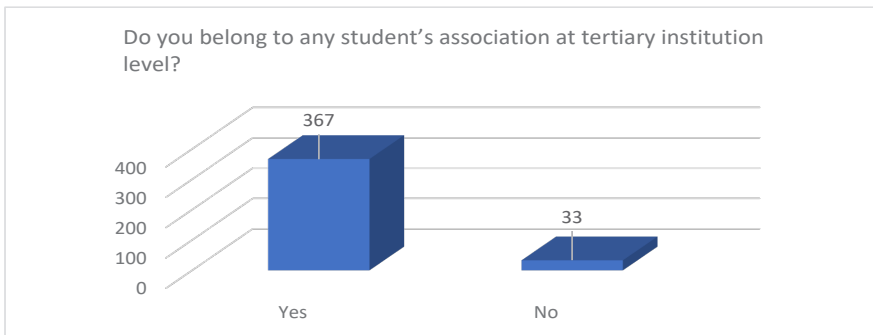
Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.

The subsequent question interrogating the reason behind not involving emphasized the argument of Norris (2004) on parents' limited exposure to socio-cultural networks complicated by issues bothering aged-long public trust in government activities and the electoral system. Some individuals stated 'My parents are not interested in politics', 'My family sees voting as suicide because of recorded violence and other electoral issues. We are always warned to stay away from politics, 'our religion doesn't encourage participation', and so on.

### Assessment of Participants' Participation and Interest in Political and Governance Issues

The study traced the origins of such interest to some level of political participation in tertiary institutions. Since the interest was argued to be docile or ignited from varying degrees of the activities from childhood, adulthood attitude is assumed to be the outcome of childhood experiences. While not fully formed at the secondary education level, tertiary institutions appeared to have helped in achieving this with a focus on individuals' participation in student associations (unions, departmental associations, leadership, or development associations). A substantial number of the participants were members with 367 marking 'Yes' while 33 marked 'No'. This is understandable as the student union and the departmental associations are considered to be compulsory for students at the beginning by institutions and association fees are paid by students with their tuition and other fees (see Figure 5). This is despite Section 1 (1) of the Students' Union Activities (Control and Regulation) Act stating that student participation in all union activities shall be voluntary.

**Figure 5: Participants' Participation in Student's Association in Tertiary Institution**

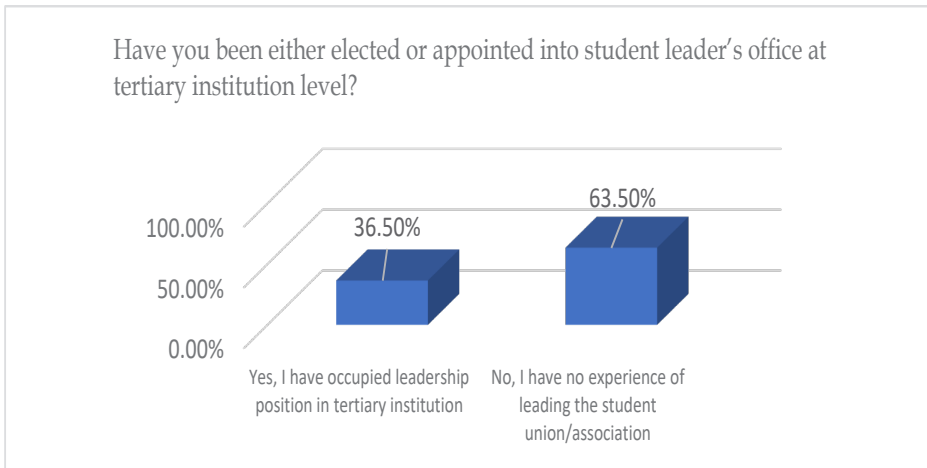


*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.*

Be as it may, what the study considered as an important attitude to demonstrate interest is the participation of the participants in the leadership of the student's union or other associations at that level. To assess this, a question was asked

thus: “Have you been either elected or appointed into student leader’s office at tertiary institution levels?” Few participants showed interest in leadership positions during their studies and were either appointed or elected into leadership positions of the students’ union and associations. Figure 6 shown that 146 participants represented 36.5% have occupied leadership positions in the tertiary institutions and 254 represented 63.5% have no experience of that.

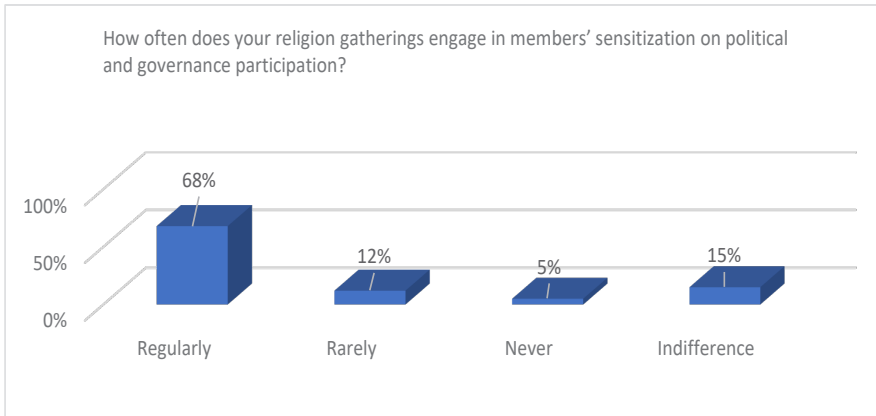
**Figure 6: Participants’ Experience as A Student Leader in Tertiary Institution**



*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.*

In the study, the place of religion was considered as important because of its peculiar impact on attitude formation during childhood years, as argued by some scholars (Aremu, 2015; Okon, 2012). Most of the participants submitted that their families attended religious gatherings and activities during their childhood (Yes: 379 representing 95%, No: 21 representing 5%), thus their religious beliefs on State, politics, and governance are entwined (89%), while others stated that their religious beliefs are distinct from their political orientations (11%). Despite this, many received regular sensitisation on political and governance participation (68%), while others marked rarely (12%), never (5%), and indifferent (15%). This indicated that religion largely contributed positively to the childhood political attitude formation of the participants.

**Figure 7: Religion and Political Attitude Formation of the Participants During Childhood**

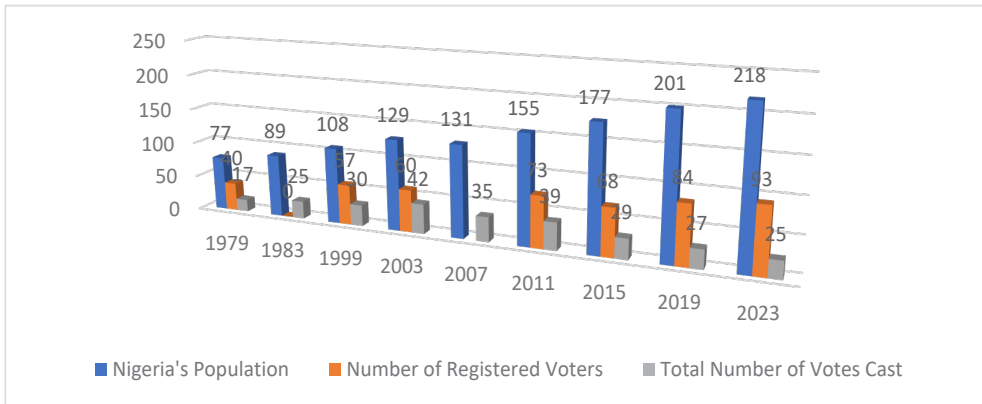


*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023*

### **Electoral Political Attitudes of Citizens in Nigeria**

The conception and design of the political attitude in this study have to do with citizens' consistent response, generally positive or generally negative, to political activities. The study considered it as a level of decision and action towards participation or non-participation in political activities, and/or circumstances, particularly in electoral politics. Despite several efforts by various agencies towards enhancing citizens' participation in the electoral process, evidence indicated already show that voters' turnout in the Nigerian general elections since 1979 continues to decline. Voter turnout in the just concluded 2023 general elections was the lowest in Nigeria's post-colonial history (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Voter Turnout of Registered Voters and Population (Vote-Reg-Pop) in Million**

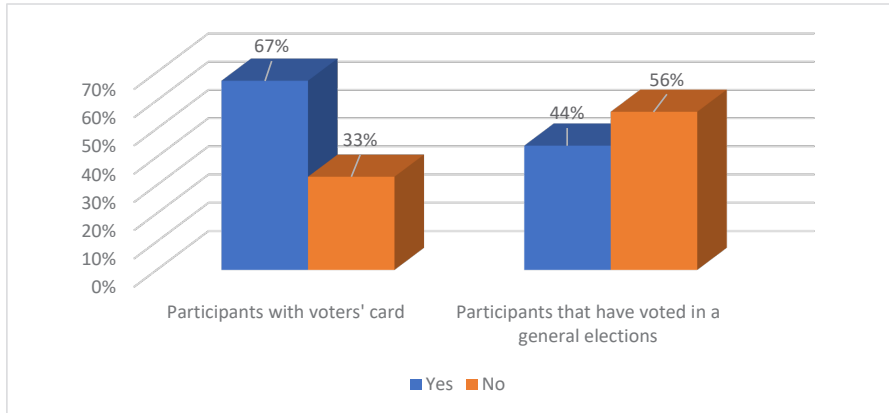


*Source: Author's compilation from FEDECO, NEC, NECON and INEC Database*

In 1979 when Nigeria's population stood at 77 million with 40 million registered voters, 17 million voted (representing 42.5%). The nation's population was 108 million in 1999 out of which 57 million Nigerians registered and 30 million voted (representing 52.6%). In 2003, there were 129 million people in Nigeria out of which 60 million registered and up to 42 million people voted, (representing 70%, the highest number ever recorded). This figure declined drastically to 53.4% in 2011 when Nigeria's population was 155 million from which 73 million registered and 39 million voted. Voter turnout in 2015, 2019, and 2013 National Assembly/Presidential elections declined to an all-time low since 1979 when only 29 million people, 27 million people, and 25 million people respectively turned out to vote out of 68 million people, 84 million people, and 25 million people that registered. This implies that, for whatever reason, as the population and registered voters increases, voters had their backs turned against polling booths. It is therefore pertinent to ask: why are the polling booths in Nigeria declining every general election? This question was very significant from the design of the study especially from the lens of political attitude. Meanwhile, the data in Figure 8 was corroborated by the outcome of this study when it was discovered that 182 representing 44% of the participants had participated in one or more of the general elections in Nigeria since when they were of voting age (18years), though there were higher percentage (67%) that claimed they

have voters' card (see Figure 9).

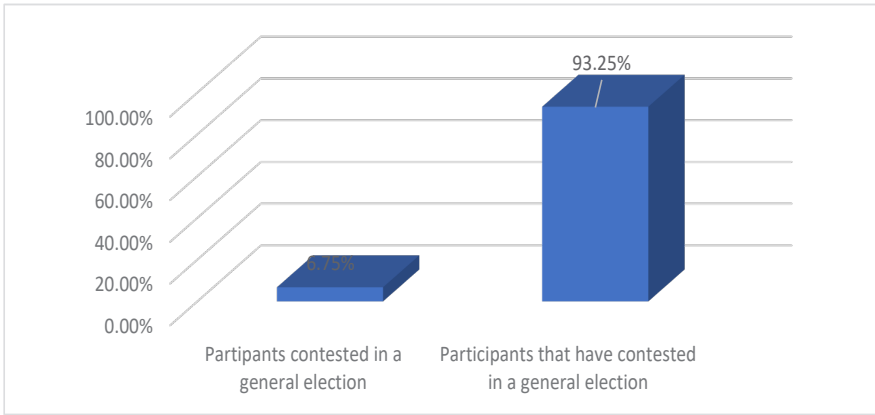
**Figure 9: Participants with Voters' Cards and Participants That Have Participated in General Elections**



Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.

Meanwhile, the assessment towards the other side of the coin also indicated lower interest as very few participants (27 representing 6.75%) have contested in an election seeking public office (Figure 10). Only few of the participants are card-carrying members of a political party (78 representing 19.5%). This buttressed an explanation around the reason behind the very low percentage of the participants (27 representing 6.75%) that have experienced participation in general elections. In Nigeria, the Electoral Act (2022) states the membership and sponsorship of a political party registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as an important prerequisite for participating as a candidate in a general election. This means that without joining a political party, one cannot stand for election and validly be elected to a political office in Nigeria (Electoral Act, 2022).

**Figure 10: Participants Indicated Interest and Contested in A General Elections**



*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023*

In assessing the involvement of the participants in either public protest, public hearings at National or State Houses of Assembly, or political campaigns, Figure 11 indicated that the majority of the respondents amounting to 233 representing 58.3 percent marked 'no' while 167 representing 41.8 percent marked 'yes'. This means that majority of the participants have not been showing keen interest in participating in political and governance issues.

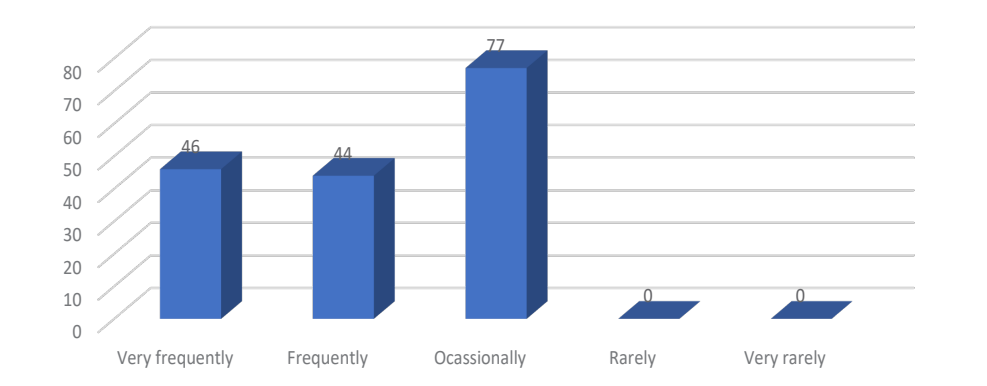
**Figure 11: Participants' Participation in Political and Governance Activities**



*Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.*

The study interrogated further to understand the frequency of participation in public protests, public hearings, voting locations, and campaign grounds. This was to understand the extent of participation of the participants (167) who claimed to have been involved in public protests, public hearings, and political campaigns. Figure 12 indicated that out of the 167 participants that have been participating in such activities, 46 marked 'very frequently', while 44 and 77 marked 'frequently' and 'occasionally' respectively.

**Figure 12: Measurements of Participants' Frequency of Participation in Political and Governance Activities**



Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.

### Significance of Childhood Experiences on the Formation of Political Attitudes

On one the study intends to see how the government could use major agents and instruments of socialisation such as family, educational institutions, social networks, media, etc. to stimulate the interest of citizens in politics and governance. Democracy throughout the world requires active participation of citizens regardless of race, tribe, nationality, religion, ethnicity, and other divisible criteria. In participatory democracy, participation of the citizens, especially, in legitimate processes and actions that change leadership at the government houses (general elections), scrutinizes actions and inactions of public officials (public hearings at the Assemblies, protests, etc.), membership of the political party, etcetera are key measurements of political attitude and

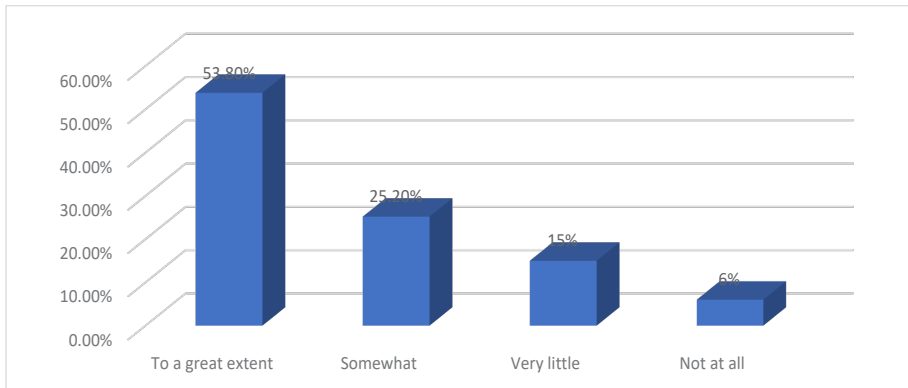


level of participation of citizens. For instance, the voter turnout rate is widely seen as an important symbol of participatory democracy. Moon et al (2006) and Ibrahim (2006) argued that voters' turnout is a measure of the credibility and legitimacy of the regime that emerges from the electoral process. That high voter turnout is evidence of inclusion and high legitimacy, and low turnout on the other hand signals diminished legitimacy and calls to question the inclusiveness of the electoral system as well as the representativeness of the regime that comes out of the process (Robert, 2009; and Thompson, 2009).

Generally speaking, citizens' participation in key sections of the political and governance components of the state empowers citizens to influence and shape governmental decision-making in a way that allows a regime to remain in office only to the extent that it reflects the wishes and aspirations of the people. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("UDHR") provides that: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures". Similarly, the Nigerian Constitution section 132(5) states that: "Every person who is registered to vote at an election of a member of a legislative house shall be entitled to vote at an election to the office of President". This was also emphasized in the Nigerian Electoral Act 2022.

Unfortunately, over the years, Nigerian's participation in political activities has been very low. The measurable variables as argued in the literature and demonstrated in Figures 8 (voters' turnout about registered voters), 9 (participants with voters card) 10 (participants who have indicated interest and have contested in a general election), and 11 (participants interested in political and governance activities) is very low. The majority of the participants alluded to the fact that their childhood experiences affected, to a great extent, their interest in political and governance issues (see Figure 13). The paper analysed and discussed the participant's experiences, access, and likely influence of the categories and nature of their exposure to the critical socialization agents might have had in the formation of political attitudes under Section 9.2 (Childhood Experiences and Political Socialisation of the Participants).

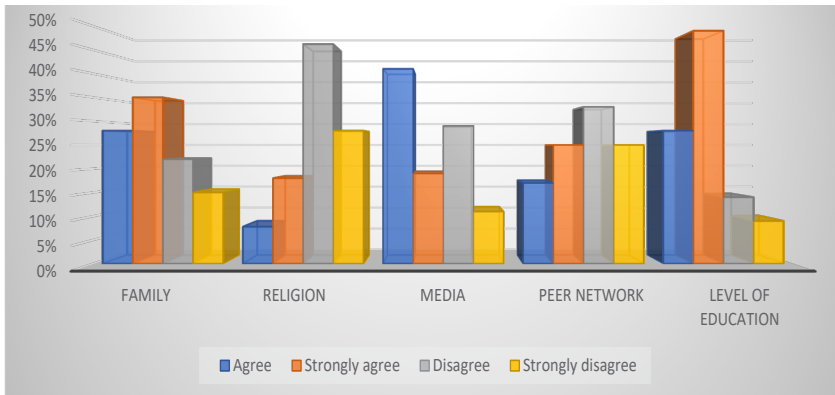
Figure 13: Extent of Influence of Childhood Experiences in the Formation of Political Attitude



Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.

In the conversation, the significant roles of family, religion, media, peer network, and level of education were pronounced (see Figure 14). Apart from religion (Agree: 7.80%, Strongly Agree: 18%, Disagree: 46.20% and Strongly Disagree: 28%) and peer network (Agree: 17%, Strongly Agree: 25%, Disagree: 33% and Strongly Disagree: 25%) that were not considered as determining factors, other socialisation agents such as family (Agree: 28%, Strongly Agree: 35%, Disagree: 22% and Strongly Disagree: 15%), media (Agree: 41%, Strongly Agree: 19%, Disagree: 29% and Strongly Disagree: 11%) and level of education (Agree: 28%, Strongly Agree: 49%, Disagree: 14% and Strongly Disagree: 9%) were considered to have greatly influenced the formation of political attitude of the participants. Thus, the data provided answer to the second research question, 'Which among the socialization agents constitutes the dominant factor that influences the political attitude of citizens in Nigeria?'. Hence, family, media, and level of education are dominant factors that influence the political attitude of citizens in Nigeria.

**Figure 14: Extent of Influence of Childhood Experiences in the Formation of Political Attitude**



Source: Field Survey Data, 2023.

### **The Role of Government Performance and Institutional Trust in Political Attitude of Citizens**

The study considered the question around the extent to which institutional ineptitude and trust deficit could explain the political attitude of citizens important since the decision to participate or not to participate is hardly fully explained by the complicated process of childhood experiences. Thus, institutional performance, transparency, and decorum were used as alternative options to explain the decision of citizens participating or not participating in political activities.

This inquiry is a specific question that this paper addresses, especially in Nigeria. Meanwhile, attitudes are not cast in stone. The rational-choice model proved varying evidence that may override other experiences of an individual when it comes to the formation of the political attitude. For instance, some of the responses the paper gathered during the survey emphasized questions that were on rationality, trust, and institutional ineptitude and negligence which compounded major findings attached to childhood experiences. Questions such as ‘What is in it for me?’ ‘Why should I waste my time?’ ‘Will my vote change outcome?’ and reactions such as: ‘Politics is expensive’, ‘politics is dirty’, ‘it is a difficult process,’ ‘I can’t cope with the stress,’ ‘I want to vote but I couldn’t register’, ‘I don’t want to die’, ‘it’s too hard!’ and so on were, some of the typical

statements derived from the participants.

For instance, 46 percent of respondents cited institutional barriers while 75 percent gave similar reason for non-voting in the previous elections. At the point of the voter registration exercise, many attempted registrations at centers close to their homes and workplaces, unfortunately, long queues, extended delays, and associated stress as a result of crowd pressure combined with inefficiency explain why institutional factors prevented many participants from registering or obtaining the permanent voter's card. A participant gave an account of his experience thus: Even me I did not collect my voters' card because of the place I am living. I'm staying at Airport Road and where I make my card is Area 11. So, you can see the distance so because of that ehh long distance that was what made some people not to vote during the election.

Even those that were able to register ended up not being able to vote because while most people registered at sites close to their respective places of business usually far away from residences, restrictions on movement during elections prevented them from reaching voting points on Election Day. Worse still, a voter's card is admissible for voting only at the point where registration was conducted. A participant describes his experience: ...in my area where I stay in Lugbe the crowd there is too much so I registered in Area 2 and I collected my card but that day I didn't have the chance to go to Area 2 and do my voting but in my area where they are voting I witnessed everything but I couldn't vote there. I thought as you have registered you can vote anywhere since you're with the card because we are in a computer world now so it's just like ATM.

Participants, especially private business owners, were emphatic about the long time it took them to queue at registration points. Leaving their shops and businesses for days was a huge sacrifice that many were not prepared to make as one participant caustically put it: "I don't have time to go and register not because of the line, not because of the stress." This accounts for why a higher percentage of participants cited reasons relating to rational choice for non-voting. A female shop owner lamented: "We stopped our businesses completely!" Another person queried more elaborately (in pidgin): How person go go collect this thing (voter's card) you go dey there one week they never give you? So, na the thing vex me I no go collect mine (meaning: How can I go for one week

to collect voter's card without getting it? That was why I didn't collect mine).

The lack of transparency and acceptable performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is responsible for developing was said to have been considered responsible for political apathy and weakened political attitude. From the total sample of 400 participants, 71 per cent agreed, and 29 per cent disagreed. In the same vein, government general performance was also considered significant in determining participation in political activities as 82 percent agreed and 18 percent disagreed.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The childhood experiences of the participants have a great impact on their political attitudes. Such factors as experimented on in the paper affected the participation of the participants in the political and governance activities. Meanwhile, the institutional ineptitude and public trust deficit of the government over time also contributed to the negative political attitude emphasized and recorded in the paper. Findings from the study have important implications for policies and practices involving legislatures at national and subnational levels, and related institutions such as media, civil society, and educational institutions at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Hence, the following are key policy recommendations to address the various contributors to the negative political attitude in Nigeria:

Firstly, the major policymaking institutions such as the National Assembly and the State Houses of Assembly should amend related Acts and Laws to encourage and institutionalise civic education at all levels of education while emphasising the need for participatory democracy and governance;

Secondly, the coordinating and implementing policy mechanisms especially the Federal and state ministries of Education, the Universal Basic Education Board (UBEC) and its state counterparts, the National University Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should work on the curriculums and various related policies to operationalize the intention of the Acts and Laws to prioritise civic education at all levels of education in Nigeria;

Furthermore, there is a need to promote necessary reforms to foster public trust through transparency and accountability is significant in the conversation of increasing citizens' participation in politics and governance in Nigeria. Thus, the National Assembly should continuously work on reforms that will stimulate efficiency and insulate government interference from critical institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigerian Police Force, Anti-Graft Agencies, etc.;

Institutional and procedural encumbrances was one of the strongest impediments to political attitudes and low interest in citizen's participation in political activities. Several participants cited the agonising stress, long delay, and palpable tension which characterized voter registration and actual voting as the reason for non-voting. Rational choice and attitudinal factors were also implicated in the low turnout. Given the foregoing, accurate mapping and allocation of sufficient registration and polling units will reduce queues, save the registrant's time, and minimize stress which serves as a disincentive and impediment to large number of willing and eligible voters participating in the electoral process.

In addition to easing the registration and voting process, there is a need to shift away from a one-size-fits-all approach to voter education and mobilisation approaches. This requires customised content in a way that appeals to the unique attributes and attitudes of the various socio-economic and intersectional clusters. Specific efforts should be made to move content differentiation beyond ethno-religious and gender diversity to hem in different sensibilities along socio-economic classes. By so doing, citizens of different categories would receive information and mobilisation content that connects directly to their unique attitude thereby boosting turnout across the board.

There is a need to encourage students from primary levels up to the university to participate in leadership activities in the school and active participation in students' unions and associations' activities.

Finally, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) needs to re-strategize its political communication and engagement with citizens by adopting local dialect-based jingles to connect to citizens to boost the political and governance

interests of the citizens. Usage of local messages to nurture political socialisation and positive political attitude among the citizenry would yield the desired outcomes.

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# Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria: A Study on Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES)

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## Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were initiated with the overall aim of eradicating poverty and improving economic development. Similarly, the Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) was established to improve the economic welfare of the people and promote sustainable development. This study assessed the adequacy of OYES in alleviating poverty in Osun State and examined the various inconsistencies encountered in the management OYES programme in promoting sustainable development in Osun State. Respondents from OYES beneficiaries and officials were selected to represent the sample size of the population. The study relied on primary sources of data through questionnaire administration and analyzed using frequency distribution counts. Findings showed that while there was awareness of the OYES programme, they are nonetheless inadequate in alleviating poverty in Osun state. Further findings revealed that lack of loans for the beneficiaries to set up small and medium-scale enterprises, inadequate funds to implement the OYES programme and corruption on the part of OYES officials are among the inconsistencies encountered in the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development in Osun State. The study concluded that the sustainability of OYES in alleviating poverty in Osun state has not been effectively realized. Among others, the study recommended for increase in government finance and allocation to alleviation programme to ensure graduate trainees have access to soft loans to start up businesses and facilitate their quick integration into the labour market.

**Keywords:** *Poverty Alleviation, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES), Nigeria*

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## **Introduction**

Improving the welfare of its population is one of a government's main goals. Therefore, the fundamental concept of poverty alleviation includes all coordinated initiatives meant to raise people's standards of life and promote economic development (Hezekiah & Agboola, 2011). The goal of poverty alleviation programmes is to enhance the well-being of individuals classified as vulnerable or impoverished. In essence, the final goal of the poverty alleviation programme must be the improvement of the impoverished people's living conditions. Thus, economic growth that does not lead to poverty alleviation and sustainable development may create more problems than it solves (Adda et al, 2014). In Nigeria, poverty is thought to be the primary source of nearly all social issues, including prostitution, unemployment, armed robberies, kidnapping, and insurgencies. (Oladejo, 2019).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in September 2000 as a response to the global community's acknowledgement of poverty as a shared denominator (United Nations 2015; Nwaobi, 2003). In Nigeria, the introduction of the MDGs essentially serves as a means of escaping the vicious cycle of poverty. To accelerate its implementation, world leaders gathered in September 2015 at the UN headquarters in New York City, where they endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as the MDGs' framework. The SDGs reflect the challenges faced in development, with an emphasis on the need to address social needs such as employment opportunities, health care, education, and social protection in addition to promoting economic growth to eradicate poverty (Ayeni, 2015; Jaiyesimi, 2016). In essence, the primary motivation behind the poverty alleviation programme has its roots in the widely acknowledged socioeconomic status of Nigerians, which indicates that 47.3% of them were multidimensionally impoverished in 2018–2019 (World Bank Group, 2022).

In Osun state, earlier and present administrations had initiated economic, social and environmental pillars of SDGs even before the global inauguration. For instance, the administration of Olagunsoye Oyinlola, 1999-2004, introduced *Oyin Corps*, a voluntary teaching scheme and Agricultural Youth Empowerment Programme (AYEP) for the training of youths to reduce unemployment with

a payment of #3,500 per month to the participants, as well as micro-credit loan scheme to small scale industrialists (Nigeria Governors' Forum, 2009). The Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) introduced by the administration of Rauf Aregbesola focused on people-based governance to reduce the dearth and impact of direct unemployment in Osun state. The first engagement witnessed about 20,000 enrollments of unemployed youths, by deploying holistic entrepreneurial and life skills into a swathe of unemployed youths, all with the strategic intention of achieving lasting empowerment for its beneficiaries (Premium Times, 2018). The *Imole* Youth Corps was established for the training of the youth to reduce unemployment and enable productive labour and sustainability in Osun state (Abdullahi, 2023). In all of these programmes initiated in the state, OYES has received greater attention because of its popularity and replication by other states.

The OYES is available to all citizens between the ages of 18 and 35. Participants in this volunteer programme receive a monthly stipend of #10,000 and are required to work a maximum of three hours each day. Before deployment, the cadets receive additional training which includes computer technology and information, artisan, as well as the agricultural value-added chain (Ufford, 2018). Some were lucky enough to be sent for more training in Nigeria and abroad, while others were taught how to create strong resumes that position them for better positions after they leave the programme (Ajibade, 2018). OYES was established in part due to the stipend's multiplier effect on the state's local economy and its assistance in reducing the typical youth restlessness that has become endemic, particularly in light of the high unemployment rate in the nation (Premium Times, 2018).

Based on this development, many states and organizations investigated the plan to determine how it may be used as a model to address the increased level of youth unemployment. For instance, in 2012 and 2013, the governors of Ondo, Oyo, Zamfara, Kwara, and Cross Rivers, among others, dispatched delegates to Osun state to research to develop a programme akin to OYES (Ufford, 2018). In a similar vein, the federal government under Presidents Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari also sought to emulate OYES, launching N-Power, the Subsidy Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P), and Youth Enterprise with

Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN) (Premium Times, 2018; Makinde, 2018). The OYES is essentially a receptive, youth-sensitive initiative designed to lessen the devastating effects of financial poverty, encourage a work ethic in young people, and help them become less sensitive to violence. However, like any other poverty reduction programme in Nigeria, OYES faced many daunting challenges as the reality of poverty in Osun state is terrifying and unsettling. Ifaturoti (2013); Badejo et al. (2015); Akinosun (2022) and Gbede (2023) revealed that poverty in Osun state is a peculiar situation where basic human needs are least satisfied leading to deprivation of economic, social, and political and environmental benefits to which people are legitimately entitled.

Numerous academics have examined Osun state's and Nigeria's poverty reduction programmes. For instance, Oluyole (2012) and Oloyede (2014) focused on the microcredit projects' impact on poverty alleviation and the programmes' effects on economic development, Abdussalam (2015) assessed the effect of Nigeria's youth empowerment programme on reducing poverty. Similarly, Badejo et al. (2015) dwelled on policy, Nigerian youth empowerment and recruitment using OYES as a case study, Akinosun (2022) focused on the OYES psychometric evaluation, while Gbede (2023) evaluated the involvement of youth in the Osun youth empowerment programme. In all of these, there aren't many empirical studies on poverty alleviation and sustainable development with specific reference to OYES. Therefore, the study's objectives are to assess the adequacy of OYES in alleviating poverty in Osun State and examine the various inconsistencies encountered in the management OYES programme in promoting sustainable development in Osun State.

This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing information on poverty alleviation and sustainable development through the provision of empowerment programme by the government. Apart from this, the study will also provide useful information to the policymakers and bureaucrats by identifying and promoting sustainable policy programme that would alleviate poverty in Osun state and Nigeria in general. Furthermore, it will help the government and policymakers to evaluate and monitor poverty alleviation programmes to bring about sustainable development. The study is divided into 6 sections. With the inclusion of the introduction, the next section focused on

conceptual clarification where concepts like poverty, poverty alleviation and SDGs are conceptualised. Subsequent sections include an empirical review of the subject matter, methodology, presentation of data, discussion of findings, followed by conclusion.

## **Poverty Alleviation**

The reduction of poverty is one of the primary objectives of modern nations in their battle against it; international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, and the European Union have emphasized this goal. Therefore, strategies and actions taken to reduce poverty in society are referred to as poverty alleviation. While poverty is the state of not having enough of the necessities that make life worthwhile., redeeming the unpleasant state of poverty or making it feasible to obtain the necessities that raise the level of living is what constitutes poverty alleviation (Innocent et al., 2014). Poverty alleviation is the joint initiative of non-governmental organisations, the government, and other institutions that are focused on enhancing the living circumstances of the impoverished. It is the establishment of general conditions that permit human worth when individuals gain the liberty to choose their paths in life, and when the impoverished get the necessary empowerment to engage in social, political, and economic decisions (Omotola, 2008).

To lessen something's discomfort or difficulty is to alleviate it. Reducing poverty is viewed as a way for the government to revive the economy that has been damaged and restore self-worth to the vast majority of the dehumanised poor (Ayoo, 2022). According to Baghebo and Emmanuel (2015), a country's government can revitalize and rebuild its economy by implementing programmes focused on reducing poverty. Empowerment is a key component of poverty reduction, encompassing a multifaceted process that includes completely changing the economic, social, psychological, political, and legal circumstances of the impoverished (Innocent et al., 2014). Asikhia (2010) states that the main goals of a project to alleviate poverty are threefold:

- i. lessen the issue of joblessness and increase the economy's effective demand;

- ii. boost economic productivity; and
- iii. significantly lower the deplorable rate of crime in the community.

Based on the backdrop, any strategy aimed at reducing poverty that does not guarantee the poor's freedom from hunger, illness, unemployment, ignorance, and destitution and does not provide social amenities will not significantly improve the lives of those who are considered to be poor. According to Oyiza (2003), the ultimate goal of poverty is to improve the poor's quality of life by giving them access to necessities, generating jobs, and lowering inequality. Achieving meaningful outcomes in decreasing poverty frequently depends on what is done, how it is done, when it is done, and who is targeting. Therefore, everyone including the government, non-governmental organisations, and the citizens must work together to contribute to the accomplishment of this crucial but difficult aim.

Todaro and Smith (2008) provide an overview of the policy choices available for alleviating poverty, including measures that impact economic development and labour demand as well as measures that affect asset accumulation and sustainability. Macroeconomic policies that affect how government spending affects the distribution of the poor are included in the former. These policies seek to address biases towards the need for low-skilled labour, rural outputs, labour market regulations for the growth of labour markets, and price incentives. To give the poor access to basic life-sustaining social services like family planning, health care, and education, as well as to encourage indigenous technological research and development, the latter set of policies aims to alter the size distribution of income and human capital development. Effective economic and social policies, resource allocation that is both creative and efficient, technological investments, sound governance, and creative leadership with the political determination to prioritize the needs of the impoverished are all important factors in the fight against poverty. Sachs (2005) goes on to say that these characteristics are vital for the provision of power, water that is safe to drink, roads, schools, clinics, and other necessities for both economic productivity and a dignified and healthy existence.



A major element of poverty alleviation according to Innocent et al. (2014) is to build socioeconomic infrastructure, including roads, water supplies, electricity, and sanitary facilities, to lessen the isolation of impoverished areas. This is required because visibly poor and inadequate infrastructure has made the dreadful level of poverty worse. To this end, nations that have not been able to achieve their targets for reducing poverty have inevitably suffered from a lack of competent governance. This is one of the barriers to sustainable development and the reduction of poverty.

### **Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Ogbeni Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola, the governor between 2010-2018, created the Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES), a two-year volunteer program, on December 17, 2010, less than a hundred days after taking office, in response to a pledge he had previously made to the people in his manifesto. 20,000 volunteers were empowered by the OYES programme in all 31 Local Government Areas of the state, although the programme's ultimate goal was to empower at least 80,000 volunteers in eight years (Badejo et al., 2015). To provide useful services in areas of socioeconomic life, the OYES volunteers were divided into various specialized cadres, such as Attitudes Re-Orientate Training (leadership skill), O'-Tech (information technology), O' Reap (agricultural programme), O' Meal (elementary school feeding), O' Tour (tourism destinations), O' Clean/O' Green Gas (safe and clean gas energy), Paramedics and O' Ambulance (rescuing accident mission), Green Gang (state security), Traffic Marshalls (traffic control), Public Works Brigade (road repair and maintenance, flood prevention and management), Sheriff Corps (road safety), and Teacher Corps (teachers).

In addition to being a purposeful initiative to breathe life into the state's stagnant economy, the empowerment project takes a bold and creative way of addressing poverty, teenage restlessness, unemployment, and possible criminal tendencies (Ajibade, 2018). The OYES continues to be the largest grassroots initiative for youth empowerment in Nigeria and the Sub-Saharan African region. As a result, the World Bank has praised the program as a worthy model of how to include the work component into the social security system in the West (Ufford,

2018). In essence, OYES is an admirable initiative aimed at empowering youth, developing their abilities, and making a positive impact on their communities with the overall aim of reducing poverty and promoting sustainable economic development.

The foundation of international economic policy is sustainable development. According to Osborn et al. (2015), it may be seen as a sustained quantitative and qualitative growth of every facet of a society, including the social, cultural, economic, political, scientific, and technical. Earlier works by Pearce et al. (1990) on sustainable development imply that no generation after this one will be poorer than the current one. Sustainable development is, at its core, development that fulfills present needs without jeopardising the ability of the next generations to meet their own needs. In support of this perspective, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2001) asserted that sustainable development is the route of development that maximises human well-being without compromising its ongoing usage for future generations. Stated differently, the welfare state ought not to deteriorate with time. Future generations will have less money to maintain current levels of consumption if society's income per capita is falling (World Bank, 2000).

After the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Millennium Declaration during the Millennium Summit in New York on September 6–8, 2000, member states of the UN, including Nigeria, have promised to accomplish the eight (8) MDGs by the year 2015. Among these is goal 1 which focused on eradication of severe hunger and poverty. Lowering poverty is closely related to other MDG targets like lowering mortality, gender inequality, access to clean water and basic education, and hunger. It's important to keep in mind that poverty seems to be steadily rising, particularly in African nations, just a year before the deadline for achieving the MDGs. As a result, in the wake of the MDGs' expiration, the SDGs have to be adopted. The SDGs, which offer a blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet both now and in the future, were accepted by all UN member states in 2015. Similarly, target 1 of SDGs focused on eradicating poverty in all forms by establishing appropriate social protection and measures according to national definitions, as well as ensuring equal rights to economic resources, access to basic services, new technology finance, and micro-finance.

About target 1, part of the OYES programme was dedicated to the aging which is called O'Elders, a programme that focused on a welfare package through the provision of free medical care and N10, 000 monthly stipend for old aged people who are poor and helpless. Similarly, virtually all programmes in OYES are designed to create jobs, improve the welfare of the people and provide the beneficiary with micro-finance to establish their small businesses where they are trained, especially in O'-Tech and O'Reap.

**Table 1:** United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals

SDGs	SDGs
1 No poverty	9 Industry, innovation, and infrastructure
2 Zero hunger	10 Reduce inequality
3 Good health and well-being	11 Sustainable cities and communities
4 Quality education	12 Responsible consumption and production
5 Gender equality	13 Climate action
6 Clean water and sanitation	14 Life underwater
7 Affordable and clean energy	15 Life on land
8 Decent work and economic growth	16 Peace, justice, and strong institutions
	17 Partnership for the goals

*Source: Adapted from the United Nations*

Target 2, achieving zero hunger, is predicated on raising the incomes and agricultural productivity of small-scale food producers, especially indigenous people, by granting them access to land, resources, and inputs necessary to produce enough food. To guarantee that hunger is eradicated through the creation of O'Reap, a specialized cadre focused on agricultural programmes intended for food production and food security, is essentially one of the main reasons OYES was founded. Priority was given to a variety of agro-allied production, such as fisheries, animal husbandry, yams, cassava and cocoa plantations, maize, beans, vegetables, honey production, and the processing of agricultural products into finished and semi-finished products for use by humans and industrial clients. Sustainable cities and communities with a significant emphasis on regional and national development planning are

target 11. Any sustainable strategy should, it is assumed, boost national and regional development planning to promote beneficial economic, social, and environmental ties between urban and rural areas. This is especially true about the OYES programme. OYES is essentially an indigenous strategy designed to improve the social and economic well-being of both urban and rural residents.

The 17 targets and 169 objectives that make up the SDGs must be achieved by all nations and stakeholders working together in cooperative partnerships. The foundation of the SDGs agenda was the belief that the most pressing global problem is the eradication of poverty in all of its manifestations, including severe poverty, and that this is a necessary condition for sustainable development. Therefore, the agenda's timeframe is that all countries must be free of poverty by 2030 (a 15-year plan) and that eradication of poverty in addition to forms of impoverishment needs to be combined with policies that address climate change, promote economic growth, enhance health and education, and lessen inequality. (United Nations, 2015). Although the major objectives of SDGs are the eradication of poverty and advancement in economic and social spheres, it also encompasses freedom from fear and arbitrary detention, as well as the liberty of speech, association, and voting (Ndubuisi-Okolo & Anekwe, 2018). Thus, development that can be sustained or continued qualifies as sustainable development. This includes paying appropriate attention to how the productive forces are changing and how the social relations of production are changing together.

The SDGs highlight the fundamental principles of sustainable development which reflects the process of achieving development. It embraced an inclusive approach, acknowledging the difficulties encountered by every country and encouraging collaboration between the government and nongovernmental sectors to accomplish the objectives (Jaiyesimi, 2016). The United Nations has classified the ways of implementing the SDGs into six categories: finance, technology, trade, capacity building, policy coherence, partnerships, and data, monitoring, and accountability. The implication of this is that the SDGs are linked with the ability to finance empowerment to reduce poverty, promote sustainable policy, as well as capacity building to enhance people's social and economic development. As maintained by the UN,

environmental projection, social development, and economic development contribute to sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). The ideal outcome of this is a society in which improving human well-being in the short term does not come at the expense of compromising long-term well-being by jeopardizing the stability and integrity of the ecosystems (Alamu, 2017).

### **Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) and Poverty Alleviation: An Empirical Review**

Studies about OYES poverty are replete in the literature. Badejo et al. (2015) examined the effect of OYES on youth capacity development, employment generation, and empowerment of young people in the state. They also identified obstacles to the program's implementation in the state. Primary sources, such as structured questionnaires and interviews with OYES coordinators and unemployed people, were used to generate the data. While content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data, univariate and bivariate analysis (chi-square test) was used to analyze quantitative data. According to the findings, 84% of the respondents thought that OYES was merely a stopgap solution that did little to empower young people in the state or create jobs. Additionally, 57% of respondents said that the OYES program's emphasis on low-skilled labour was the reason why youth capacity development had not improved. Furthermore, according to 85% of the respondents, OYES was poorly implemented due to issues like inadequate funding, a lack of legislation supporting it, beneficiaries not being certified after the program, a lack of private-government collaboration, and the excessive control of governing party members over the selection of beneficiaries on job openings.

Abefe-Balogun (2015) examined the prospects and challenges of OYES concerning its implications in the state's development through the use of structured questionnaires administered to 120 OYES cadet members in three local government areas of the state and analyzed using correlation analysis. The study's findings demonstrated the viability of OYES's overarching goals and the strong correlation between youth empowerment and state development. The N-Power and OYES teacher programs' effects on Osun State schools' efficacy were examined in the study of Faremi and Oyekunle

(2022). The study's population comprised N-Power and OYES teachers from secondary schools in Osogbo and purposive sampling was employed to choose 20 secondary schools in Olorunda local government area of Osun state, where a sample of 200 respondents was obtained. The data were analyzed descriptively using mean and ranking, while the research questions were analyzed using t-test and ANOVA inferential statistics. The study's findings showed that OYES and N-Power teachers in Osun State engage in practices that improve school efficacy, but the corp members encounter a few obstacles that prevent them from actively participating in ensuring the efficacy of the institution. Furthermore, there is a significant difference based on qualification but no statistically significant variation in their impression based on corp types.

The study of Waliu et al. (2017) examined the effectiveness and implementation of OYES on Osun State's youth rate of unemployment. In-depth interviews and the distribution of questionnaires were used as the primary sources of data gathering. Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were chosen from each of Osun State's six Senatorial Districts using a stratified random selection technique. This made a total of thirty LGAs. 577 respondents, including 504 OYES volunteers and 73 senior staff members from local government, completed the questionnaire. The respondents were chosen using a proportionate random sampling technique. Two local government directors, four OYES management team members, and six state-level OYES management team members were purposefully chosen from each local government to participate in the interview process. Chi-Square, basic regression analysis, content analysis, and simple percentages were used to analyze the data that were gathered. According to the study's findings, OYES was a palliative strategy that assisted in employment creation and youth empowerment in the state. This suggests that there is a strong correlation between the OYES programs' efficacy and the state's young unemployment and poverty rates. Findings, however, indicated that OYES's execution was flawed and fraught with difficulties, which are shown in the discrepancy between the program's accomplishments and intended results.

OYES has been evaluated as a poverty alleviation program from the beneficiaries' perspective in the Akinosun (2022) research. With the use of a questionnaire, data were gathered on a psychometric scale, with 1,350 OYES cadets sampled

using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods. The study used descriptive statistics to analyze the data gathered. According to the findings, the program was aimed at young people who are not subjected to any form of discrimination. More so, the multipartite aspect of the program, which was deemed sustainable, was partially responsible for its overall success. However, it was discovered that the program, which received funding only from the state, was lacking in funding as well as a suitable administrative structure. In addition, beneficiaries' stipends were thought to be unrelated to their academic background, and political membership was thought to unfairly affect their eligibility for and access to particular rights, benefits, and privileges.

Based on the backdrop, available studies have focused on OYES effectiveness and its challenges, OYES and youth unemployment, OYES and other empowerment generation (N-Power), OYES and development, as well as OYES and poverty alleviation. However, this study relates OYES with poverty alleviation and sustainable development goals.

## **Research Methodology**

The study used a survey methodology where a representative proportion of the whole study was drawn. The target population under this study comprised officials and beneficiaries of OYES in Osun state. The techniques for the selection of samples are purposive sampling, simple random sampling, and snowballing sampling techniques. Respondents were chosen purposely, which made it possible for the questionnaires to be administered to key respondents. 120 respondents including the OYES beneficiaries and officials were selected to represent the sample size of the population. A non-probability sampling technique called purposeful sampling is used to select individuals or groups of individuals who meet specific criteria associated with the study's objective or subject. From the 30 local governments in the state, 3 local governments comprising Ife Central, Ife East, and Ede South were selected as the study area through the use of a simple random sampling technique. A segment selected at random makes up a basic random sample, where each research subject has an identically high chance of being selected.

Furthermore, the snowballing sample was used to distribute the questionnaire in which 40 questionnaires were administered each in the 3 selected local governments. A non-probability sampling method called snowball sampling involves recruiting participants by having them recommend others. Snowball sampling works by starting with a small initial group of participants, sometimes called seeds and asking them to recommend other people they know who fit the study’s eligibility requirements. The study relied on primary sources of data to gather information which was obtained through questionnaire administration. The data collected was analyzed using frequency distribution counts.

**Data Presentation and Results**

To achieve the first objective of the study, various programme under the OYES were used to examine its adequacy in alleviating poverty in Osun state, with scales ranging from Adequate (A) and Not Adequate (NA). The second objective focused on the inconsistencies encountered in the management of OYES in promoting sustainable development in Osun state, with scales ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D) and Undecided (U).

**Table 2: Adequacy of Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) in Alleviating Poverty in Osun State**

S/N	Variables	Adequate (A) Freq.	%	Not Adequate (NA) Freq.	%	Total Freq. %
1	ICT training (Oyes-Tech)	38	31.7	82	68.3	120 100
2	Agricultural entrepreneurship programme (O’ Reap)	48	40.0	72	60.0	120 100
3	Training programmes on tourism (O’ Tour)	38	31.7	82	68.3	120 100



4	Vocational training skills (O' Shoes)	41	31.2	79	65.8	120 100
5	Teaching training skills for those with teaching qualification (Teacher Corps)	53	44.2	67	55.8	120 100
6	Skill acquisition through Bio-gas (O'Green Gas)	21	17.5	99	82.5	120 100
7	Road repair and maintenance (Public works brigade training skills)	47	39.2	73	60.8	120 100
8	State security (Green Gang)	39	32.5	81	67.5	120 100
9	Leadership training skills (Attitudes Re-Orientate Training)	41	34.2	79	65.8	120 100
10	Sanitation training programmes (Sanitation Czars)	58	48.3	62	51.7	120 100
11	Elementary school feeding and health programme (O' Meal)	48	40.0	72	60.0	120 100

*Source: (Field Survey, 2023)*

The table above displays the percentage distribution of the adequacy and sustainability of OYES in alleviating poverty among the youth in Osun State. According to the results, 31.7% of the participants believed that ICT training (Oyes-Tech) was adequate to alleviate poverty, while 68.3% of the participants claimed that the provision of ICT training (Oyes-Tech) was not adequate to alleviate poverty. On the agricultural entrepreneurship programme (O'Reap), 40.0% of the respondents claimed that the programme (O'Reap) was adequate to alleviate poverty, while 60.0% of the respondents claimed that the programme was not adequate to alleviate poverty. As regards the training programme on tourism (O' Tour), results showed that 31.7% of the respondents agreed that the programme was adequate to alleviate poverty, while 68.3% of the respondents

disagreed that the programme was adequate to alleviate poverty. Moreover, 31.2% of the respondents were of the view that the vocational training skills (O' Shoes) were adequate to alleviate poverty and 65.8% of the respondents claimed that the programme was not adequate to alleviate poverty.

Further analysis showed that 44.2% of the respondents observed that the teaching training skills for those with teaching qualifications (Teacher Corps) were adequate to alleviate poverty, while 55.8% of the respondents claimed that the programme was not adequate to alleviate poverty. As regards skill acquisition through bio-gas (O'Green Gas), results showed that 17.5% of the respondents claimed that the programme was adequate to alleviate poverty, while 82.5% of the respondents claimed that the programme was not adequate to alleviate poverty. Moreover, the result revealed that 39.2% of the respondents observed that the road repair and maintenance programme (Public works brigade training skills) was adequate to alleviate poverty. However, 60.8% of the participants felt that the program was not adequate to alleviate poverty.

More so, 32.5% of the respondents agreed that the state security (Green Gang) programme was adequate to alleviate poverty, while 67.5% of the respondents claimed that the programme was not adequate to alleviate poverty. On leadership training skills (attitudes re-orientate training), 34.2% of the respondents believed that the programme was adequate to alleviate poverty, while 65.8% of the respondents disagreed that the programme was adequate to alleviate poverty. Moreover, 48.3% of the respondents claimed that the sanitation training programme (Sanitation Czars) was adequate to alleviate poverty, while 51.7% of the respondents claimed that the programme was not adequate to alleviate poverty. Lastly, 40.0% of the respondents revealed that the rescuing accident mission (paramedics and O' ambulance) programme was adequate to alleviate poverty. However, 60.0% of those surveyed felt that the program was not adequate to alleviate poverty.

**Table 3: Inconsistencies Encountered in the Management of the OYES Programme in Promoting Sustainable Development in Osun State**

S/N	Variables	SA Freq.	%	A Freq.	%	SD Freq.	%	D Freq.	%	U Freq.	%	Total Freq. %
1	Lack of education of the beneficiaries affects their participation in the OYES policies and programme	30	25.0	25	20.8	32	26.7	31	25.8	2	1.7	120 100
2	Lack of provision of loans for the beneficiaries to set up small and medium scale enterprise	48	40.0	46	38.3	11	9.2	15	12.5	-	-	120 100
3	Lack of provision of basic amenities	51	42.5	38	31.7	13	10.8	11	9.2	7	5.8	120 100
4	Corruption on the part of the OYES officials	41	34.2	47	39.2	21	17.5	11	9.2	-	-	120 100
5	Poor monitoring of OYES policies and programme	38	31.7	44	36.7	20	16.7	13	10.8	5	4.2	120 100
6	Bureaucratic bottleneck in the implementation of OYES policies and programme	29	24.2	38	31.7	31	25.8	22	18.3	-	-	120 100

7	Inadequate funds to implement OYES policies and programme	46	38.3	33	27.5	21	17.5	16	10.8	4	3.3	120 100
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*Source: (Field Survey, 2023)*

The percentage distribution of participants to the question about the inconsistencies encountered in the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development in Osun State is displayed in the above table. 25.0% and 20.8% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the lack of education of the beneficiaries affects the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development, 26.7% and 25.8% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that lack of education of the beneficiaries affects the management of OYES programme in promoting sustainable development. The other 1.7% of the respondents were not sure about it. The lack of provision of loan for the youths to set up small and medium-scale enterprises was examined. The results indicated that, respectively, 40.0% and 38.3% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that the lack of provision of loans for the youths to set up small and medium-scale enterprises affects the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development, while 12.5% and 9.2% of participants, respectively, said they disagreed and strongly disagreed that lack of provision of loan for the youths to set up small and medium scale enterprise affect the management of OYES programme in promoting sustainable development.

Furthermore, 42.5% and 31.7% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that lack of provision of basic amenities affects the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development, 10.8% and 9.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that lack of provision of basic amenities affect the management of OYES programme in promoting sustainable development. The other 5.8% of the respondents were indifferent about the issue. Corruption on the part of the OYES officials was also assessed. The result revealed that 34.2% and 39.2% of the participants

strongly agreed and agreed respectively that corruption on the part of the OYES officials was a major bane in the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development, while 17.5% and 9.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that corruption on the part of the OYES officials was a major bane in the management of OYES programme in promoting sustainable development.

The monitoring of the OYES programme was examined. The result revealed that 31.7% and 36.7% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively that poor monitoring was one of the inconsistencies encountered in the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development, 16.7% and 10.8% of the participants strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that poor monitoring was one of the inconsistencies encountered in the management of OYES programme in promoting sustainable development. The remaining 4.2% of the participants were indifferent about the issue. The extent of bureaucratic bottleneck in the implementation of the OYES programme was also assessed. The result showed that 24.2% and 31.7% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that bureaucratic bottleneck constraints the implementation of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development, while 25.8% and 18.3% of the participants strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that bureaucratic bottleneck constraints the implementation of OYES programme in promoting sustainable development.

Last but not least, the respondents' opinions on the matter of inadequate funding indicated that 17.5% and 10.8% strongly disagreed and disagreed, respectively, that inadequate funding was a major hindrance to OYES sustainable development, while 38.3% and 27.5% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that inadequate funding was one of the major banes to OYES sustainable development. The remaining 3.3% of respondents expressed no opinion.

## **Discussion of Findings**

Having analyzed the objectives of the study, it is essential to discuss about the results. Considering the very first objective, it was found that the ICT

training (Oyes-Tech) and agricultural entrepreneurship programme (O'Reap) are inadequate in alleviating poverty. It was observed that vocational training skills (O'Shoes) and road repair and maintenance (public works brigade training skills) are not adequate in alleviating poverty. More so, sanitation training programme (Sanitation Czars) and elementary school feeding and health programme (O' Meal) are inadequate in alleviating poverty (see table 2). Based on these findings, it could be argued that though there was awareness of the various OYES programme, they are not adequate enough to alleviate poverty in Osun state. Studies like Adelani (2014) and Abefe-Balogun (2015) affirmed the findings that the programme lacks adequacy in alleviating poverty in the area of managing corps members' transfer into career employment and that it does not focus on an inclusive approach in the sense that the government could not reach out to more people as it was strictly based on geographical and political affiliation. More so, Badejo et al. (2015) revealed that the scheme was not backed up with legislation so a new administration wouldn't stop it from continuing to promote sustainable development.

From the second objective, several inconsistencies encountered in the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development in Osun state were revealed. Findings showed that the lack of education of the beneficiaries, lack of provision of loans for the beneficiaries to set up small and medium scale enterprises and lack of provision of basic amenities are inconsistencies encountered in the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development. Furthermore, corruption on the part of the OYES officials, poor monitoring of the OYES programme and inadequate funds to implement the OYES programme are challenges militating against the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development (see Table 3). Based on these findings, it could be deduced that the management of the OYES programme in promoting sustainable development has not been effectively realized. These findings are consistent with the studies of Akinosun (2022) and Abefe-Balogun (2015) that poor monitoring of the OYES programme reflected in enormous logistical problems in overseeing 20,000 youth who applied for the programme, Moreover, Faremi and Oyekunle (2022) revealed that while the creation and execution of OYES has given some recipients new skills, this does not always translate into an increase in their capacity or sustainable

development. The lack of employment exit routes that allow beneficiaries to solidify their gained skills is the cause of their inadequate capacity building. For example, following the two years of the OYES programme that are required, cadets who do not get placed in a job are rendered jobless. Hence, lack of access to sufficient capacity-building resources causes their skills to progressively deteriorate which impede the sustainable development of the programme.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the adequacy of OYES in alleviating poverty in Osun State, and the various inconsistencies encountered in the management OYES programme in promoting sustainable development in Osun State. Poverty drives restiveness, and social vices and impedes development in a society. To solve these problems, the Osun state government, led by Ogbeni Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola, launched the OYES poverty alleviation initiative. The World Bank, the Nigerian federal government, and a few of the federation's states have praised the programme as a genuine initiative that might support sustainable development.

Findings from the study revealed that though beneficiaries were aware of the various OYES programmes, they were not adequate to alleviate poverty in Osun state. Even though successive governments have developed and implemented several policies aimed at reducing poverty, these efforts have not yielded the expected results because of a lack of an inclusive approach, an inability to move recipients into career employment, and a lack of long-term legislation to support the program. The study's findings also revealed several irregularities in the way the OYES programme was managed to support sustainable development in Osun State. These irregularities included the denial of loans to young people wishing to start small or medium-sized businesses, the denial of basic amenities necessary to involve beneficiaries in development initiatives, official corruption within the OYES organization, subpar programme monitoring, and insufficient funding for programme implementation. For instance, government employees embezzle funds intended for empowerment programme for their benefit, making poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria unsustainable. Additionally, inadequate social amenities impede the attainment of sustainable development

goals.

In light of these findings, this study recommended the provision of adequate social infrastructures such as transportation, electricity, and boreholes to have a progressive effect on the poverty alleviation programme. Increasing government finance on poverty alleviation programme like would help beneficiaries have access to soft loans to start-up businesses and facilitate their quick integration into the labour market which will in turn promote sustainable development. There should be formation of proper scrutinizing and supervisory body which ensures poverty alleviation programme is well implemented. More so, non-governmental and community-based organizations should be encouraged to support poverty alleviation programmes to promote sustainable development.



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# Impact of Nigeria's Foreign Policy on Foreign Direct Investment (2015-2023)

Paul Nwala<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This study examined the relationship between Nigeria's foreign policy initiatives and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow from 2015 to 2023. Against the backdrop of Nigeria's position as Africa's largest economy and its strategic importance in the global economic landscape, the analysis delved into the nuanced interplay of diplomatic engagements, trade agreements, regulatory frameworks, geopolitical considerations, sectoral priorities, and external economic factors in shaping FDI inflows. Drawing on a comprehensive review of literature, policy documents, economic indicators, and geopolitical events, the study identified key trends, opportunities, and challenges that influenced Nigeria's attractiveness to foreign investors during the specified period. Diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties with key economic partners, participation in regional and international trade agreements, and reforms to enhance the ease of business emerge as significant drivers of FDI inflows. However, the study also highlights persistent challenges such as regulatory uncertainty, corruption, security concerns, and socio-political instability that have at times undermined investor confidence and deterred FDI. The impact of global economic trends and external factors, including fluctuations in oil prices and shifts in investor sentiment towards emerging markets, underscores the need for adaptive and proactive foreign policy strategies. By providing a nuanced understanding of the dynamics shaping the relationship between Nigeria's foreign policy and FDI, this study contributes to informed policymaking and strategic decision-making by policymakers, investors, and other stakeholders. It underscores the importance of holistic methods that address domestic reforms and international engagement in fostering a conducive environment for sustainable FDI and economic growth in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Foreign Direct Investment, Foreign Policy, Nigeria, Impact.*

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## **Introduction**

The impact of Nigeria's foreign policy on Foreign Direct Investment from 2015 to 2023 is a multifaceted and dynamic subject that focuses on the intersection of diplomatic strategies and economic development. Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy, has played a significant role in shaping its foreign policy landscape during this period, with implications for both domestic and international investors. It has been asserted that Foreign Direct Investment has been the dominant and most reliable source of deficit financing to nations mostly developing and emerging countries with low or average investible funds since the early 80s (Mustapha et al, 2020). This is against the view that investible funds generated from high savings are a necessary condition for economic growth. However, the all-encompassing determinant of FDI in emerging countries such as Nigeria is the consistency in its foreign policy especially in the sphere of economics. This is because FDI, which is a long-term phenomenon requires policies and government action plans that would survive the test of time. This will afford the investors enough time to maximize the expected long-run economy-of-scale benefits.

Nigeria is the third host economy for FDI in Africa, behind Egypt and Ethiopia. The country is among the most promising poles of growth in the continent and attracts numerous investors in the sectors of hydrocarbon, energy, construction, etc. Most of the studies on FDI in Nigeria are centered on examining the effect of economic determinants like Market size, Openness of the economy, available Natural resources, and Infrastructure, Interest rate, and Macroeconomic stability. Others were a political risk, national assets, domestic credits, legal system, population health, and governance (Omowomi, et al 2014). This exploration aims to dissect Nigeria's diplomatic initiatives, trade agreements, regulatory frameworks, and geopolitical positioning to understand their influence on the inflow of direct foreign investment over the past eight years. By analyzing key events, policies, and economic indicators, we can gain insights into the evolving relationship between Nigeria's foreign policy agenda and its attractiveness to foreign investors, shedding light on both opportunities and challenges for sustainable economic growth.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

**Foreign Policy:** Foreign policy refers to a government's strategy, principles, and actions designed to manage its relations with other countries and international actors. It encompasses a range of diplomatic, economic, military, and cultural activities aimed at advancing the state's interests, preserving its security, and promoting its values on the global stage. Foreign policy decisions are influenced by factors such as national interests, geopolitical considerations, historical context, and domestic politics, and they are implemented through various channels including diplomacy, trade, defense, and international cooperation. Foreign policy reflects a nation's approach to engaging with the international community and navigating the complexities of the global landscape. Key components of foreign policy include Diplomacy, Economic Relations, Security and Defense, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Global Governance and Multilateralism, and Cultural and Public Diplomacy. Thus, the concept of foreign policy reflects the dynamic and interconnected nature of international relations, wherein states navigate a complex landscape of opportunities and challenges to pursue their objectives in an increasingly interdependent world. (University of York, 2017).

However, Scholars have offered various interpretations of foreign policy, reflecting different perspectives, here are a few definitions from prominent scholars. Hans J. Morgenthau, a leading figure in the field of international relations, defined foreign policy as "the external behavior of states as they seek to pursue their interests in the international arena". He emphasized the importance of power and the pursuit of national interests in shaping foreign policy decisions (Robert, 2012). Kenneth Waltz, Waltz, known for his structural realism theory, viewed foreign policy as "the actions that states take in the international system to survive." He focused on the anarchic nature of the international system and how states interact strategically to ensure their security and survival (Munro, 2024). Joseph S. Jr Nye, a prominent scholar of international relations, emphasized the concept of soft power in defining foreign policy. He described foreign policy as "the art of managing the behavior of foreign governments" and highlighted the importance of persuasion, attraction, and cultural influence in shaping international relations (Joseph, 2019). Robert Keohane, known for

his work on neoliberal institutionalism, viewed foreign policy as “the strategies that states pursue to achieve their goals in the international system.” He emphasized the role of institutions, norms, and cooperation in shaping state behavior and achieving collective outcomes. Alexander Wendt, a proponent of constructivism in international relations, defined foreign policy as “the product of social processes and interactions among states”. He focused on the role of ideas, identities, and social structures in shaping state behavior and international outcomes. These definitions highlight the diverse approaches and perspectives within the field of international relations, ranging from a realist emphasis on power and national interests to a constructivist focus on norms, ideas, and social dynamics (Munro, 2023).

**Foreign Direct Investment:** Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) refers to the investment made by a company or individual based in one country into business interests located in another country. Unlike portfolio investment, which involves buying securities such as stocks and bonds, FDI entails establishing ownership or significant control over assets in a foreign country. FDI can take various forms, including the establishment of new facilities (greenfield investment), mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, and the expansion of existing operations. FDI plays a crucial role in the global economy by facilitating cross-border investment flows, technology transfer, job creation, and economic development (Adam, et al 2024). Foreign direct investments consist of external resources, including technology, managerial and marketing expertise, and capital all of which generate a considerable impact on the host nation’s production capabilities. For Kumar (2007), FDI involves parent enterprises injecting equity capital by purchasing shares in foreign affiliates. According to the World Trade Organization New (WTON, 2001) foreign direct investment occurs when an investor based in one country, home country, acquires an asset in another country the host country with the intent to manage the asset. Foreign direct investment is an investment made to acquire a lasting interest and acquire at least 10% of equity share in an enterprise operating in a country other than the home country of investors (Mwilima 2003). According to (Ayanwale 2007), ownership of at least 10% of the ordinary shares or voting stock is the criterion for the existence of a direct investment relationship. The United Nations defined FDI as an investment in an enterprise located in one country but effectively

controlled by residents of another country. This definition not only considers foreign direct investment from an investment point of view but also defines the status of corporate control.

### **Historical Background of Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

Nigeria's foreign policy has evolved in response to changing domestic circumstances, regional dynamics, and global trends. Before gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria's foreign relations were largely shaped by its status as a colony within the British Empire. During this period, Nigeria's interactions with other countries were limited, and its foreign policy priorities were largely determined by the colonial administration in London. After gaining independence, Nigeria pursued a foreign policy of non-alignment, seeking to maintain neutrality and independence in the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Nigeria played a prominent role in the Non-Aligned Movement, advocating for the interests of newly independent African and Asian countries. Nigeria emerged as a leading voice in African affairs, promoting regional integration, unity, and solidarity. It played a key role in the establishment of regional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Nigeria's foreign policy during this period emphasized pan-Africanism, decolonization, and support for liberation movements in Southern Africa. With the discovery of oil in the 1970s, Nigeria's foreign policy became increasingly focused on economic diplomacy, leveraging its oil wealth to pursue strategic partnerships and investments abroad. Nigeria became a key player in international energy markets and sought to diversify its diplomatic engagements beyond Africa to include countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. During periods of military rule in Nigeria, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, foreign policy priorities were often influenced by domestic instability and regional conflicts. Nigeria intervened in neighboring countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone to restore peace and stability, reflecting its role as a regional power and peacekeeper. Since the transition to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has pursued a foreign policy characterized by diplomatic engagement, respect for



human rights, and economic reform. It has sought to strengthen relations with traditional partners such as the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union, while also deepening ties with emerging powers such as China, India, and Brazil. In recent years, Nigeria's foreign policy has faced challenges such as terrorism, insurgency, maritime security threats, and economic diversification. However, the country continues to play a proactive role in regional and global affairs, advocating for peace, security, sustainable development, and the rights of developing countries within international forums. Thus, Nigeria's foreign policy has been shaped by its historical experiences, regional leadership aspirations, economic interests, and commitment to promoting peace, stability, and development both at home and abroad (Joseph, 2019).

The origin of Nigeria's foreign policy principles can be traced back to its early years of independence in the 1960s and the subsequent development of its diplomatic framework. Several factors have influenced the formulation of Nigeria's foreign policy principles:

**Colonial Legacy:** Nigeria inherited certain aspects of its foreign policy orientation from its colonial past under British rule. The principles of diplomacy, international engagement, and respect for sovereignty were already ingrained within the administrative structures established by the colonial administration.

**Non-Aligned Movement:** Nigeria's foreign policy principles were shaped by its commitment to the principles of non-alignment during the Cold War era. As one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement, Nigeria advocated for neutrality, independence, and solidarity among newly independent nations, particularly in Africa and Asia.

**Pan-Africanism and Regional Leadership:** Nigeria's foreign policy principles were heavily influenced by the ideals of pan-Africanism and the vision of regional leadership within Africa. Leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria promoted the idea of African unity, integration, and cooperation, which became central to Nigeria's foreign policy objectives.

**Economic Diplomacy and Oil Wealth:** The discovery of oil in Nigeria in the 1970s transformed the country's economic landscape and influenced its foreign policy priorities. Nigeria leveraged its oil wealth to pursue economic diplomacy,

seeking strategic partnerships and investments abroad to support its economic development goals.

**Regional Integration and Conflict Resolution:** Nigeria's commitment to regional integration and conflict resolution within West Africa has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy principles. Nigeria played a leading role in the establishment of regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and has been actively involved in mediating conflicts and promoting peace and stability in the region.

**Democratic Governance and Human Rights:** Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has emphasized the principles of democracy, good governance, and respect for human rights in its foreign policy. Nigeria has advocated for these principles both domestically and internationally, aligning its foreign policy objectives with the promotion of democracy and human rights within the global community. The origin of Nigeria's foreign policy principles can be traced to a combination of historical legacies, regional aspirations, economic interests, and evolving global dynamics. These principles have evolved in response to changing domestic and international circumstances but continue to reflect Nigeria's commitment to promoting peace, stability, and development within Africa and beyond (Joseph, 2019).

### **Principles of Nigeria Foreign Policy from 2015-2023**

Nigeria's foreign policy principles from 2015 to 2023 were guided by a combination of continuity and adaptation to evolving global dynamics. While the core principles remained consistent with Nigeria's historical foreign policy objectives, there were notable shifts and emphases during this period. Some of the key principles include:

**Promotion of National Interest:** Nigeria continued to prioritize the promotion and protection of its national interests in its foreign relations. This included economic development, regional stability, security, and the enhancement of Nigeria's global standing. **African Unity and Leadership:** Nigeria reaffirmed its commitment to African unity, integration, and leadership within the continent. This principle was evident in Nigeria's active participation in regional

organizations such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD).

***Diplomatic Multilateralism:*** Nigeria continued to engage actively in multilateral diplomacy, emphasizing the importance of collective action and cooperation to address global challenges such as climate change, terrorism, and pandemics. Nigeria advocated for reform of international institutions to better reflect the interests of developing countries.

***Economic Diplomacy:*** With a focus on diversifying the economy and attracting foreign investment, Nigeria prioritized economic diplomacy to promote trade, investment, and technology transfer. Efforts were made to strengthen economic ties with traditional partners as well as emerging economies, particularly in Asia.

***Peace and Security:*** Nigeria remained committed to promoting peace and security within the West African region and beyond. This involved active participation in peacekeeping missions, counterterrorism efforts, and conflict resolution initiatives, particularly in countries such as Mali, Libya, and the Lake Chad Basin region.

***Good Governance and Human Rights:*** Nigeria continued to advocate for good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights both domestically and internationally. This included support for electoral processes, anti-corruption measures, and the promotion of democratic norms and institutions.

***South-South Cooperation:*** Nigeria strengthened its engagement with other developing countries through South-South cooperation initiatives. This involved sharing expertise, technology, and resources with other countries in Africa and beyond, particularly in the areas of agriculture, education, and healthcare. Hence, the principles of Nigeria's foreign policy from 2015 to 2023 reflected a commitment to advancing Nigeria's national interests, fostering regional integration and leadership, promoting peace and security, enhancing economic development, and upholding democratic values and human rights on the global stage (Abimbola et al, 2023).

## **Advantages of Foreign Direct Investment in Nigeria**

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) offers numerous advantages for Nigeria, contributing to economic growth, job creation, technology transfer, and infrastructure development.

**Economic Growth:** FDI inflows stimulate economic growth by increasing capital investment, productivity, and output in key sectors of the economy. For example, in the telecommunications sector, the entry of foreign investors such as MTN, Airtel, and Glo has led to significant expansion of network infrastructure, increased mobile phone penetration, and improved access to communication services across Nigeria, contributing to overall economic development. In most developing countries, Foreign Direct Investment serves as a means of earning foreign reserves via investments, businesses, and foreign aid from advanced countries. FDI is considered a valuable source of finance and capital formation, Technology, and know-how, as well as a viable medium for trade among countries. The Spillover effect also allows for the transfer of innovations and inventions to the receiving countries, to Nigeria is not an exception. For economies to witness sustainable and inclusive growth, cross-border trade is paramount (Oyegoke et al, 2021). Presently, Nigeria is the first host economy of FDI in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the third in the continent.

**Job Creation:** FDI projects create employment opportunities for Nigerians, both directly and indirectly, by generating demand for local goods and services and fostering entrepreneurship. For instance, the establishment of multinational manufacturing plants, such as Nestlé's food processing facilities and Unilever's consumer goods factories, has created thousands of jobs in Nigeria's industrial sector, boosting household incomes and reducing unemployment. Studies have revealed that a 1 unit increase in the inflow of FDI to the Nigerian economy is capable of increasing the level of employment by about 0.97 units (Romanus et al, 2020).

**Technology Transfer and Innovation:** Foreign investors bring advanced technologies, know-how, and best practices to Nigeria, promoting innovation, skill development, and capacity building. For example, in the oil and gas sector, international oil companies (IOCs) like Shell, ExxonMobil, and Chevron have

introduced cutting-edge technologies for oil exploration, production, and refining, improving operational efficiency and environmental sustainability in the industry.

**Infrastructure Development:** FDI contributes to infrastructure development through investments in energy, transportation, telecommunications, and other critical sectors. One notable example is the Chinese-funded construction of the Abuja-Kaduna railway line, which has enhanced connectivity, facilitated trade, and stimulated economic activity in the northern region of Nigeria, demonstrating the role of foreign investment in addressing infrastructure gaps.

**Market Access and Export Opportunities:** FDI facilitates market access for Nigerian products and creates opportunities for export-oriented industries to expand into international markets. For instance, the establishment of export processing zones (EPZs) and industrial parks by foreign investors, such as the Dangote Group's refinery and petrochemical complex in the Lekki Free Zone, has boosted Nigeria's capacity to produce and export value-added products, contributing to foreign exchange earnings and trade diversification. Furthermore, FDI contributes to the development of the stock market in Nigeria and impacts the total domestic savings. FDI has positively affected security indices and the Nigerian Stock Market (Danja, 2012).

**Financial Inflows and Balance of Payments:** FDI inflows provide stable and long-term sources of financing for Nigeria's economy, helping to strengthen the country's balance of payments position and reduce dependence on volatile sources of capital. Instances such as major infrastructure projects funded by foreign investors, including the expansion of seaports and airports by multinational corporations like AP Moller-Maersk and China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), have demonstrated the role of FDI in financing large-scale development projects.

**Enhanced Productivity and Competitiveness:** FDI can enhance productivity and competitiveness in Nigerian industries through the introduction of new technologies, management practices, and quality standards. For example, the entry of multinational fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies like Procter & Gamble and Coca-Cola has raised production efficiency and product

quality standards in the Nigerian consumer goods sector, fostering competition and consumer choice.

**Diversification of the Economy:** FDI contributes to diversifying Nigeria's economy by promoting the development of non-oil sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and services. Instances include the establishment of textile and garment manufacturing plants by companies like Dangote Group and Flour Mills of Nigeria, which reduce the country's reliance on oil revenues and create opportunities for value addition and export diversification.

**Access to Capital and Expertise:** FDI provides access to capital, expertise, and global networks that may not be readily available domestically. For instance, strategic partnerships between Nigerian banks and international financial institutions have facilitated access to foreign capital for infrastructure projects, such as the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway reconstruction project financed by a consortium of Nigerian and international banks, including Standard Chartered and African Development Bank.

**Spillover Effects and Cluster Development:** FDI can generate spillover effects that benefit domestic firms and industries through knowledge spillovers, skills transfer, and backward and forward linkages. For example, the establishment of industrial clusters by foreign investors, such as the Dangote Group's cement manufacturing plants in various states across Nigeria, has stimulated the growth of ancillary industries and suppliers, creating opportunities for local entrepreneurs and fostering industrial development.

**Improved Governance and Regulatory Environment:** FDI inflows can incentivize improvements in governance, transparency, and the regulatory environment, as governments seek to attract and retain foreign investors. Instances include reforms in the business environment, such as the ease of doing business reforms initiated by the Nigerian government in collaboration with international organizations like the World Bank, which have streamlined bureaucratic processes, reduced red tape, and enhanced investor confidence.

**Social and Environmental Responsibility:** FDI often brings corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that benefit local communities and contribute to sustainable development. For example, multinational oil companies operating

in Nigeria, such as Total, ExxonMobil, and Chevron, have implemented community development projects in areas of health, education, infrastructure, and environmental conservation, demonstrating their commitment to social and environmental responsibility. Meanwhile, FDI plays a crucial role in driving economic development and transformation in Nigeria, leveraging foreign capital, expertise, and market access to address key challenges, unlock opportunities for sustainable growth, and illustrate the multifaceted benefits that foreign investment can bring to the country's economy, society, and sustainable development goals (Ibrahim, 2017).

### **Disadvantages of Foreign Direct Investment in Nigeria**

Langley (1968) posited that FDI has both benefits and costs or repercussions in the context of Nigeria's economic growth and development. While Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) brings numerous benefits to Nigeria, it also poses certain disadvantages and challenges. Some of these include:

**Dependency on Foreign Investors:** Over-reliance on FDI can create a dependency on foreign investors, leading to concerns about loss of economic sovereignty and control over key sectors. For example, in the telecommunications sector, the dominance of foreign-owned companies like MTN and Airtel has raised concerns about Nigeria's ability to regulate the industry and safeguard national interests in telecommunications infrastructure and services.

**Repatriation of Profits:** Foreign investors may repatriate profits and dividends back to their home countries, leading to capital flight and reduced reinvestment of earnings in the Nigerian economy. Instances include instances where multinational corporations operating in Nigeria repatriate significant portions of their profits abroad, thereby reducing the availability of capital for local investment and economic development.

**Unequal Distribution of Benefits:** FDI inflows may exacerbate income inequality and regional disparities if the benefits of foreign investment are not equitably distributed across the country. For example, large-scale infrastructure projects financed by foreign investors may primarily benefit urban areas and neglect rural communities, widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

and exacerbating social tensions.

**Environmental Degradation:** Some FDI projects in Nigeria, particularly those in extractive industries such as oil and mining, may result in environmental degradation, pollution, and depletion of natural resources. Instances include instances where multinational oil companies have been accused of environmental pollution, oil spills, and deforestation, leading to adverse impacts on local ecosystems, livelihoods, and public health.

**Crowding Out of Local Businesses:** The entry of foreign investors into certain sectors may crowd out local businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), by creating barriers to entry, such as high capital requirements and competition from multinational corporations. Instances include instances where foreign-owned retail chains and supermarkets have displaced local markets and traditional businesses, leading to job losses and economic dislocation in certain communities.

**Volatility and Dependency on Global Markets:** FDI inflows can expose Nigeria's economy to volatility and external shocks, as it becomes increasingly integrated into global markets. Instances include instances where fluctuations in global commodity prices or changes in investor sentiment lead to capital outflows, currency depreciation, and economic instability, affecting the country's macroeconomic stability and growth prospects.

**Social and Cultural Disruptions:** FDI projects may lead to social and cultural disruptions, including displacement of communities, loss of traditional livelihoods, and erosion of local cultures and identities. Instances include instances where large-scale infrastructure projects, such as dams and industrial complexes, have displaced indigenous populations and disrupted their way of life, leading to social unrest and conflicts over land and resources.

**Labor Exploitation:** Some foreign investors may engage in labor exploitation practices, including low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of labor rights protections. Instances include instances where multinational corporations in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors have been accused of employing cheap labor, including child labor and forced labor, to cut costs and maximize profits, leading to social injustice and human rights abuses.



**Resource Depletion and Dutch Disease:** FDI inflows concentrated in resource-intensive sectors such as oil and gas can exacerbate the phenomenon known as the “resource curse” or “Dutch disease,” where the over-reliance on resource extraction leads to neglect of other sectors, loss of competitiveness, and macroeconomic imbalances. Instances include instances where Nigeria’s dependence on oil revenues has led to neglect of other sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing, hindering economic diversification and long-term development.

**Regulatory Capture and Corruption:** Foreign investors may exert undue influence on government policies and regulations, leading to regulatory capture and corruption. Instances include instances where multinational corporations use their financial resources and political connections to influence regulatory decisions, secure preferential treatment, and evade taxes or regulatory compliance, undermining the rule of law and accountability.

**Erosion of Local Culture and Identity:** FDI projects, particularly those in the tourism and entertainment sectors, may contribute to the erosion of local culture, traditions, and identities through the promotion of Westernized or homogenized cultural products and values. Instances include instances where foreign-owned hotel chains, theme parks, and entertainment franchises promote Western lifestyles and consumerism at the expense of indigenous cultures and traditions, leading to cultural homogenization and loss of diversity. foreign direct investment contributes positively to economic growth in Nigeria. However, the relationships with the different sectors are different. Whereas FDI is positively related to the oil sector, it is negatively related to agriculture and manufacturing. Has FDI had a stimulating, displacing, or no effect on domestic capital formation in Nigeria (Nwanna, 1986)?

**Financial Instability and Debt Burden:** Excessive reliance on FDI inflows to finance infrastructure projects or budget deficits can expose Nigeria to financial instability and debt burden, particularly if investments fail to yield expected returns or if debt-financed projects do not generate sufficient revenues to service debts. Instances include instances where large-scale infrastructure projects funded by foreign loans or investments result in cost overruns, delays, and debt distress, putting pressure on public finances and future generations.

**Technology Dependency and Intellectual Property Rights:** FDI projects may lead to technology dependency and loss of intellectual property rights if foreign investors retain ownership and control over proprietary technologies and innovations. Instances include instances where multinational corporations transfer outdated or inferior technologies to Nigerian subsidiaries, limiting the country's capacity for technological innovation and self-reliant development. These disadvantages of FDI in Nigeria highlight the importance of carefully managing foreign investment to maximize its benefits while minimizing its adverse impacts on the economy, society, and environment. Effective regulation, oversight, and stakeholder engagement are essential to ensuring that FDI contributes to sustainable development and inclusive growth in Nigeria (Onuoha & Okoth, 2018).

### **Impact of Nigeria's Foreign Policy on Direct Foreign Investment in Nigeria.**

Nigeria's foreign policy plays a significant role in shaping the investment climate and attracting Direct Foreign Investment (FDI) into the country thereby causing impacts in various areas of the country.

**Political Stability and Security:** Nigeria's foreign policy initiatives aimed at promoting peace, stability, and security in the region can have a positive impact on FDI inflows. Political stability and security are essential factors considered by foreign investors when deciding to invest in a country. Instances where Nigeria has actively participated in regional peacekeeping efforts or diplomatic initiatives to resolve conflicts, such as in the Niger Delta or the Lake Chad Basin region, can enhance investor confidence and reduce perceived risks associated with investing in Nigeria.

**Diplomatic Relations and Bilateral Agreements:** Nigeria's foreign policy engagements and diplomatic relations with other countries can influence FDI inflows through bilateral investment agreements, trade agreements, and diplomatic assurances. For example, diplomatic visits, trade missions, and negotiations aimed at strengthening economic ties with strategic partners can facilitate FDI by providing a conducive environment for investment and reducing barriers to entry for foreign investors.

**Economic Diplomacy and Investment Promotion:** Nigeria's foreign policy efforts to promote economic diplomacy and attract investment can directly impact FDI inflows. Diplomatic engagements, investment forums, and trade exhibitions organized by Nigerian embassies and trade promotion agencies abroad can showcase investment opportunities and attract foreign investors to key sectors of the Nigerian economy, such as oil and gas, telecommunications, agriculture, and infrastructure development.

**Regional Integration and Trade Agreements:** Nigeria's participation in regional integration initiatives and trade agreements can influence FDI inflows by enhancing market access, reducing trade barriers, and promoting cross-border investment within the region. Instances include Nigeria's membership in regional economic communities such as ECOWAS and its participation in trade agreements such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which can facilitate FDI by providing access to larger markets and harmonized trade regulations.

**Investment Protection and Legal Framework:** Nigeria's foreign policy initiatives aimed at protecting the rights and interests of foreign investors and improving the legal and regulatory framework for investment can have a positive impact on FDI inflows. Instances include efforts to strengthen investor protection laws, streamline administrative procedures, and enhance the rule of law, which can increase investor confidence and reduce the perceived risks associated with investing in Nigeria.

**Economic Reforms and Investor Confidence:** Nigeria's foreign policy initiatives aimed at implementing economic reforms and improving the business environment have bolstered investor confidence and attracted FDI. For example, Nigeria's participation in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business reforms, including streamlining business registration processes, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and improving access to credit, has enhanced Nigeria's attractiveness as an investment destination. Instances include Nigeria's improvement in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings, which have resulted in increased FDI inflows from investors seeking to capitalize on the country's business-friendly environment.

**Sector-Specific Policies and Incentives:** Nigeria's foreign policy objectives targeting specific sectors of the economy have led to increased FDI inflows in those sectors. For instance, Nigeria's policy initiatives to diversify the economy away from oil dependence have included incentives and tax breaks for investments in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and renewable energy. Instances include the establishment of special economic zones and industrial parks to attract foreign investment in manufacturing and export-oriented industries, such as the Lekki Free Trade Zone in Lagos State, which has attracted investments from multinational corporations like Dangote Group and Unilever.

**Technology Transfer and Innovation:** Nigeria's engagement with foreign partners through trade agreements, research collaborations, and technology exchange programs has facilitated technology transfer and innovation, attracting FDI in high-tech industries. For example, partnerships between Nigerian universities, research institutions, and multinational corporations have led to technology transfer agreements and joint research projects in sectors such as telecommunications, biotechnology, and renewable energy. Instances include collaborations between Nigerian telecom companies and international technology firms to deploy 4G and 5G networks, develop mobile applications, and promote digital innovation in Nigeria's telecommunications sector.

**Human Capital Development and Skills Enhancement:** Nigeria's foreign policy initiatives aimed at human capital development and skills enhancement have contributed to attracting FDI by creating a skilled workforce and talent pool. For instance, Nigeria's collaboration with foreign governments and international organizations to provide scholarships, training programs, and capacity-building initiatives has improved the quality of education and skills training in Nigeria, making the country more attractive to foreign investors seeking skilled labor. Instances include initiatives such as the Nigeria-South Korea Joint Commission on Technical Cooperation, which provides training and capacity-building programs for Nigerian professionals in sectors such as engineering, ICT, and healthcare.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Alignment:** Nigeria's foreign policy alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

has attracted FDI from socially responsible investors and impacted investment funds seeking to support sustainable development initiatives in the country. For example, Nigeria's commitment to achieving the SDGs through policies and programs targeting poverty reduction, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and inclusive economic growth has attracted investments in sectors such as renewable energy, healthcare, education, and infrastructure development. Instances include investments in renewable energy projects, such as solar power plants and wind farms, by international renewable energy companies and impact investors aiming to address energy poverty and promote clean energy access in Nigeria (Oyinlola & Oye, 2020).

### **How has Foreign Direct Investment improved the standard of living for Nigerians?**

**Job Creation and Employment Opportunities:** FDI projects in Nigeria have created thousands of jobs across various sectors, contributing to poverty reduction and improving living standards. For example, multinational corporations such as Nestlé and Unilever have established manufacturing facilities in Nigeria, employing local workers in production, distribution, and sales roles. These job opportunities provide steady incomes for individuals and their families, enabling them to afford necessities and improve their quality of life.

**Infrastructure Development:** FDI has contributed to infrastructure development in Nigeria, enhancing access to essential services and improving living conditions. One notable example is the construction of the Lekki-Epe Expressway and the Lekki Free Trade Zone in Lagos State, funded by foreign investors. This infrastructure project has improved transportation connectivity, facilitated trade, and attracted businesses to the area, creating employment opportunities and raising the standard of living for residents.

**Technology Transfer and Innovation:** FDI has facilitated technology transfer and innovation in Nigeria, empowering local businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive in the global marketplace. For instance, telecommunications companies such as MTN and Airtel have invested in advanced telecommunications

infrastructure and mobile technology solutions, bringing affordable and reliable communication services to millions of Nigerians. This technological advancement has opened up new opportunities for e-commerce, digital entrepreneurship, and online education, enhancing economic productivity and improving access to information and services.

**Access to Goods and Services:** FDI has expanded access to a wide range of goods and services for Nigerians, improving their quality of life and well-being. International retail chains such as Shoprite and Spar have entered the Nigerian market, offering a diverse selection of products at competitive prices. This increased availability of consumer goods has enhanced convenience and choice for consumers, allowing them to access higher-quality products and improve their standard of living.

**Income Generation and Wealth Distribution:** FDI has generated income and wealth for Nigerians through employment, business opportunities, and investment returns. For example, the development of shopping malls and commercial centers by foreign investors has created opportunities for local entrepreneurs to establish businesses and provide goods and services to residents. This income generation has enabled individuals to invest in education, healthcare, housing, and other essential needs, leading to improved living standards and social mobility.

**Access to Healthcare Services:** FDI in Nigeria's healthcare sector has improved access to quality healthcare services, leading to better health outcomes and an improved standard of living. For example, investments by multinational pharmaceutical companies such as GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Pfizer have led to the establishment of manufacturing plants and distribution networks for essential medicines and vaccines. This has increased the availability and affordability of healthcare products, reducing disease burden and improving overall well-being.

**Education and Skills Development:** FDI has contributed to education and skills development in Nigeria, empowering individuals to access better job opportunities and improve their standard of living. For instance, multinational companies such as Microsoft, IBM, and Google have established training

centers, coding academies, and educational programs to develop digital skills and IT expertise among Nigerian youth. This has equipped individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in the digital economy, leading to higher incomes and improved living standards.

**Housing and Real Estate Development:** FDI has spurred housing and real estate development in Nigeria, providing affordable housing options and improving living conditions for many Nigerians. For example, foreign real estate developers and investors have financed the construction of residential estates, apartment complexes, and affordable housing projects across major cities such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. This has increased access to decent housing, reduced overcrowding, and enhanced the quality of life for residents.

**Financial Inclusion and Access to Banking Services:** FDI in Nigeria's banking and financial sector has expanded access to banking services, promoting financial inclusion and empowering individuals to manage their finances more effectively. For example, investments by foreign banks such as Standard Chartered, Citibank, and Access Bank have led to the expansion of branch networks, ATM coverage, and digital banking platforms, reaching previously underserved communities. This has enabled individuals to save, borrow, and invest in their future, leading to improved financial security and living standards.

**Environmental Conservation and Sustainability:** FDI has promoted environmental conservation and sustainability initiatives in Nigeria, protecting natural resources and preserving ecosystems for future generations. For instance, investments by multinational corporations in renewable energy projects such as solar power plants and wind farms have reduced reliance on fossil fuels, mitigate climate change impacts, and promoted clean energy access. This has improved environmental quality, public health, and overall well-being for Nigerians (Adeleye & Aremu, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the period from 2015 to 2023 witnessed significant developments in Nigeria's foreign policy landscape and their impact on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the country. Nigeria's foreign policy during this period played a pivotal role in shaping the investment climate, attracting foreign investors, and influencing the flow of FDI into the country. Throughout this period, Nigeria's foreign policy initiatives were characterized by a strategic focus on promoting economic diplomacy, regional integration, investment promotion, and bilateral cooperation with key trading partners and investor countries. Diplomatic engagements, trade agreements, investment promotion efforts, and sector-specific policies were instrumental in attracting FDI inflows and driving economic growth and development. Nigeria fostered an environment conducive to FDI, leading to increased capital inflows, infrastructure development, and job creation. Sector-specific policies, investment incentives, and trade agreements contributed to economic diversification, industrialization, and sustainable development. Foreign investments in critical infrastructure projects, such as transportation, energy, telecommunications, and real estate, enhanced Nigeria's infrastructure base, improved connectivity, and facilitated trade and investment.

These investments not only addressed infrastructure deficits but also created employment opportunities, boosted productivity, and enhanced the overall quality of life for Nigerians. Foreign investors brought advanced technologies, expertise, and best practices to Nigeria, promoting innovation, skills development, and technology transfer across various sectors. Partnerships between Nigerian institutions and multinational corporations facilitated knowledge exchange, research collaboration, and capacity building, driving technological advancements and increasing competitiveness in the global marketplace. In light of these observations, it is evident that Nigeria's foreign policy during the period from 2015 to 2023 had a positive impact on Foreign Direct Investment, driving economic growth, job creation, infrastructure development, technology transfer, and regional integration.



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# Reimagining Nigeria's Democracy: An Inclusive Path for the South East Geopolitical Zone

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## Abstract

Democracy is predicated on the rule of citizenship, with abundant constitutional intersections and provisions in sorting and settling societal differences, through either accommodation or compromise. However, the Nigerian democratization effort has been challenging to the extent that despite its persistence, it has yet to address the residues of sectional differences. This study explores the challenges of Nigeria's democracy with a focus on the South East geopolitical zone, which has long expressed grievances of marginalization and exclusion. Utilizing qualitative data drawn from secondary sources, the study examined the secessionist movements and violence in the region, to understand their demands and potential negotiation possibilities. This study highlighted the need for dialogue and compromise, particularly in terms of enhancing political representation and adopting a presidential system that accommodates power rotation based on the 6 geopolitical zones. The paper also discussed the inadequacies of Nigeria's democracy in addressing issues of marginalization and exclusion, dwelling on the Social Identity theory to explain the perpetuation of ethnic divisions and the neglect of certain groups' aspirations. It further proposed a power-sharing model, specifically a rotational presidency, as a potential solution to address the marginalization felt by the Southeast region. The paper argued that by implementing a rotational system that includes all six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, the issues of marginalization and secessionist agitation can be effectively addressed, leading to a more inclusive system. The paper concluded that democracy is important in providing a platform for social order engineering, and as such, an equitable power-sharing model remains appropriate to ensure stability and inclusivity in Nigeria's political system.

**Keywords:** *Nigeria, Democracy, Southeast, Power, Secessionist Movements*

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## **Introduction**

Since Nigeria transitioned to democracy in 1999, a recurring issue has been the inability to settle the grievances of the various sections of the country, predicated on the allegations of marginalization with regards to the distribution of high-stakes politics. The overarching import of such is one culminating in secessionist movements and agitations and typified by very high tendencies to resort to violence. While it is important to reiterate that the challenges do not have their roots in Nigeria's recent history, the country has faced challenges of representation and leadership since its inception (Ejor et al, 2023), and independence, post-1960. Nonetheless, the year, 1999, became significant as the takeoff point of Nigeria's second chance at democratization. It remarkably marked the longest and most sustained era of Nigeria's democratization experience (Ogbonna, 2020), and was defined by seven uninterrupted electoral cycles –1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. This to an extent depicts a radical deviation from the culture of coups and distorted electoral calendar to a system supportive of the rule of citizenship. Democracy provides for participation and inclusivity. Participation and inclusivity, on its own, provide the most civil routes to governance and possible settlement of the dilemmas of governance that has persisted in Nigeria since independence.

“Periodic free and fair elections constitute one of the most significant institutions of liberal and participatory democracy” (Odogwu, 2023, p.46), which involves the process of choosing who governs a polity. However, democracy, often commonly, described as the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, has not adequately addressed the concerns of all ethnic groups, leading to dissatisfaction and calls for secession. Nigeria's democracy is structured in a three-tier federal system of government, with power constitutionally divided between the federal, state, and local levels of government. Nigeria's adoption of a federal structure was to ensure that her over 250 ethnic groups had the autonomy to grow at their rate (Ibhade & Mukoro, 2023), as the federal system was to bring government closer to the people, principally at the local level (Nwafor, 2019). However, the “Nigerian federation is not a product of consensus or voluntary union of several formerly independent states as the American or Swiss federations. Rather, it emerged out of the aggregation of

different communities by the British colonial authorities” (Orji, 2021, p.2).

It is important to acknowledge that a widespread fear of domination has always existed among the ethnic groups in Nigeria, a sentiment that has persisted from the colonial era through the First Republic and into the present day. According to Nwankpa (2022, p.32), “the British colonial government, through its politicized system of indirect rule, sowed the seed of discord among the different ethnic groups and regions such that even before gaining independence in 1960, both the majority and minority ethnic groups were skeptical of the capacity of an independent Nigeria in protecting their interests and rights.” The unfolding crisis left by the colonial masters had not only deepened the differences among groups but further created discontent and hatred among various ethnic nationalities (Usman & Abdullahi, 2021). The Southeast region of Nigeria, predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group, has been particularly vocal about feeling marginalized and excluded from key political positions in the distribution of political power, especially the presidency. The Igbo ethnic group makes up 16% of the population of Nigeria, making them the third largest ethnic group after the Hausa-Fulani (28%) and Yoruba (18%) (Agbiboa, 2017). This besides millions of other Igbos scattered all over the other regions of Nigeria. Aboriginally, the Igbos are majorly found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States, which form the Southeast geopolitical zone in Nigeria. A sizable population of Igbos are also found in Delta and Rivers States while a smaller population of them are in Akwa Ibom, Benue, Cross River, Edo, and Kogi states. Outside the shores of Nigeria, large ethnic Igbo populations are found in Cameroon, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea, as well as outside Africa (Ogbuefi, 2022).

The marginalization of the Igbo people can be attributed to the events that led to the Nigerian Civil War, from 1967 and 1970. This conflict arose from political, ethnic, and economic tensions between the central government and the former Eastern region, who felt marginalized and oppressed. In the aftermath of the war, the Igbo people faced continued marginalization, with their infrastructure ravaged, their leadership decimated, and their voices suppressed in the reconfigured political landscape. “Among the Igbos today, there continues to exist a feeling of alienation within the political structure called Nigeria.

Recurrent attacks on them as an ethnic group in the post-civil war environment have not abated. They continue to be targets of attacks even for flimsy reasons like religious riots and protests that they have not initiated" (Oyeleye, 2010, p.100). Despite the emergence of democracy and efforts towards national unity, the Igbo people continue to be underrepresented in Nigeria's highest political offices, including the presidency.

### **Unpacking the Secessionist Movements in Southeast Nigeria: Demands and Negotiation Possibilities**

The desire for self-determination and a sense of marginalization in Nigeria's Southeast geopolitical zone has fueled and sustained the rise of secessionist movements. The Biafran secessionist movement, led by Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu in 1967 laid the foundation for these movements when he declared the independence of the then Eastern region of Nigeria (Adesanya, 2023a). After the Nigerian Civil War ended in 1970, the country witnessed several military regimes which ended with the transition to democracy in 1999. "The advent of a democratic regime in Nigeria coupled with its principles of freedom of speech, expression, and association, sparked up the rebirth of the Biafra secessionist movements in the southeast geopolitical zone" (Onyemaobi, 2023, p.77). Secessionist groups like the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have since then gained prominence. MASSOB, founded in 1999 by Ralph Uwazuruike, attempted to re-establish the sovereign state of Biafra using peaceful means. They argued that the region had been marginalized and neglected since the Nigerian Civil War ended in 1970 (Chiluwa, 2018). "However, MASSOB was alleged of violence which resulted in a massive arrest and alleged killings of its members to clamp down on the agitators by the federal government of Nigeria." (Adesanya, 2023a, p.32).

The failure of MASSOB to achieve their objectives through peaceful means, including the unresolved and persisting residue of the Nigerian Civil War led to the emergence of IPOB in 2012, led by Nnamdi Kanu. IPOB thrived on the weakness of MASSOB to continue the agitation for Biafra (Ibeanu et al., 2016; Ekpo & Agorye, 2019). According to Nwangwu (2022), IPOB aimed to achieve

its objectives through armed secession, civil disobedience, and referendum. Before the creation of IPOB, Kanu initiated Radio Biafra in 2009, which became a powerful platform for disseminating pro-Biafra sentiments. According to Omilusi et al., (2020), the radio was used as an instrument to address national injustice against the Igbos and spread deep secessionist messages for Biafra. IPOB advocated for self-determination, the restoration of Biafran territories, and addressing human rights violations. They gained support through protests, demonstrations, and “sit-at-home”, which implied that every Monday, as well as any other slated dates, became days of zero economic activities and typified by curfew-like movement-free days in the Southeast. IPOB also lobbies international organizations for support (Onuoha, 2014; Adesanya, 2023b).

The growing influence of IPOB and Kanu’s activities led to a government crackdown. These protests generated tensions and heightened insecurity, with the security forces often applying excessive force to suppress the protests. One such protest in March 2016 turned violent, resulting in the deaths of two policemen and many IPOB members while several others were arrested. The persistence of protests and the consequent increasing crackdown on IPOB members by security forces remained a major challenge to Nigeria’s democracy and national unity (ICG, 2015). Amnesty International in the same year accused the federal government of extrajudicial execution and violence against the pro-Biafra groups, resulting in the killing of over 150 Biafra protesters (Amnesty International, 2016). These clashes persisted, and in turn gave birth to the formation of a paramilitary arm of the group in December 2020 known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN) (Onyemaobi, 2023). According to IPOB, ESN was created as a response to the failure of the southeast governors to provide security to protect the people of the region from extrajudicial killings, external aggression, and hegemonic tendencies of the encroaching killer Fulani herdsmen (Adesanya, 2023a). Over time, IPOB and ESN have been accused of carrying out deadly attacks on security formations. These attacks which IPOB most times deny have led to the loss of lives of security personnel and the destruction of security equipment and infrastructure. IPOB sit-at-home orders also use coercion to compel the people of the Southeast to remain indoors on dates announced by them.

The Nigerian government has also taken various measures to address the activities of IPOB. In September 2017, the government declared IPOB a terrorist organization following clashes with security forces in Abia State, resulting in casualties on both sides. This led to a crackdown on IPOB and ESN members, with arrests, detentions, and prosecutions, resulting in the deaths of many supporters. Military operations such as Operation Python Dance 1&2, were launched in 2017 and 2018 respectively to combat the violent secessionist groups in the Southeast region. The current military operation in the region "Operation Udo Ka", just like the previous ones involves heavy military presence, numerous roadblocks/checkpoints, raids on suspected hideouts, destruction of camps, and halting of attacks on security forces, with accusations of human rights violations including extrajudicial killings and torture.

Amid ongoing unrest and calls for secession, it is imperative to explore avenues of political inclusion as a potential remedy. Despite the steadfast insistence of these groups on a referendum and absolute independence from Nigeria, there exists the potential for dialogue and compromise, particularly about enhancing political representation and elevating a candidate from the region to the presidency, an area aligned with their aspirations and interests. For instance, during the 2023 presidential elections, the Labour Party candidate, Mr. Obi, emerged victorious in all five states in the Southeast region. The former Anambra governor garnered an impressive 1.9 million votes out of 2.2 million, accounting for 89% of the total votes cast in the region (Yusuf, 2023). Mr. Obi's success can be attributed not only to his popularity among the Nigerian youths and on social media but also to his promising manifesto and exemplary track record as a governor. In the eyes of the people of the southeast, Mr. Obi, one of their sons, represented a beacon of hope for the realization of their aspirations and interests. If he had emerged as president, he would have been the first Igbo man, and from the Southeast region to ever become the president of Nigeria since the end of the Civil War. It would have been a worthwhile route in compromise to assuage the persisting marginalization allegation by the region.



**Table 1. Profile of Nigeria's Leadership since the End of the Civil War in 1967**

S/No	Name	Period	Geopolitical Zone	Ethnicity
1	Gen. Yakubu Gowon	1966-1975	North Central	Lantang
2	Gen. Murtala Mohammed	1975-1976	North West	Hausa/ Fulani
3	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo	1976-1979	South West	Yoruba
4	Alh. Shehu Shagari	1979-1983	North West	Fulani
5	Gen. Muhammadu Buhari	1983-1985	North West	Fulani
6	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	1985-1993	North Central	Hausa/ Fulani
7	Chief Ernest Shonekan	1993-1993	South West	Yoruba
8	Gen. Sani Abacha	1993-1998	North West	Hausa/ Fulani
9	Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar	1998-1999	North Central	Hausa/ Fulani
10	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	1999-2007	South West	Yoruba
11	Alh. Musa Umoru Yar'Adua	2007-2010	North West	Fulani
12	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	2010-2015	South South	Ijaw
13	Alh. Muhammadu Buhari	2015-2023	North West	Fulani
14	Alh. Bola Tinubu	2023-	South West	Yoruba

*Source: Author's Compilation.*

### **Federal Character and Political Appointments**

To institute fairness and equity in public service, Nigeria initiated the Federal Character Principle, centered on the fair distribution of elected and appointed political offices, quota systems for admission, and a preference for fiscal federalism. The federal Character principle as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, also provides for the equitable distribution of positions in the military, police, paramilitary, public service, parastatals, and publicly owned companies (Constitution of the Federal Republic, 1999). "The application of Federal Character, which was fully adopted in 1979, has been the subject of numerous political disputes and is currently a hot topic in political as well as administrative discourse" (Ibhade & Mukoro, 2023, p.65), as "the Federal Character Principle,

which aims to foster national loyalty, promotes unity among Nigerians, and gives all citizens a sense of belonging to the country regardless of differences in ancestry, culture, language, or religion, has not been able to achieve this goal” (Ibhade & Mukoro, 2023, p.65). Past administrations did not fully implement the principle according to the dictates of the constitution, primarily, when it comes to placing the Igbo people in certain positions (Nsoedo, 2019). For instance, former President Muhammadu Buhari was accused of his insensitivity to other ethnic groups when making appointments in his administration, especially willfully exemption the Southeast zone in the National Defence Council and the National Security Council (Busari, 2018).

### **Social Identity Theory and the Inadequacies of Democracy in Nigeria.**

The Social Identity theory, propounded by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979 aims to underscore how individuals develop and maintain their social identity. The theory posits that individuals define themselves based on their membership in various social groups and derive their self-esteem from this group membership, such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, or gender. According to Osmond & Anaukwu (2024), the theory is based on three arguments:

***Social Categorization:*** individuals tend to categorize themselves and others into different social groups based on shared characteristics such as ethnicity. This categorization leads to a distinction between the “in-group” (group to which the individual belongs) and the “out-group” (group to which the individual does not belong).

***Social Identification:*** once individuals categorize themselves as part of a particular social group, they tend to identify with that group. This identification becomes an important aspect of their self-concept and contributes to a sense of self-esteem and social identity.

***Social Comparison:*** individuals engage in social comparison between their in-group and out-group to enhance their self-esteem. They may perceive their in-group more positively and out-group more negatively, leading to in-group favouritism and potentially leading to discrimination or prejudice toward the

out-group (Osmond & Anaukwu, 2024, p. 35).

Studies have shown that strong group identities within a country result in a diminished sense of patriotism, with an increased sense of perceived need for group solidarity, which in turn creates greater antagonism toward outgroups, increasing the perception that such groups pose a threat, thereby promoting intolerance. These, in turn, shape the political attitudes and behavior of members of such groups (Sidanius et al, 1997; Gibson & Gouws, 1998; Conover, 1988; Miller et al, 1981). “African elites often manipulate ethnic, religious, and social cleavages to win elections, thereby showing the influence of identity politics in election results in African countries” (Odogwu, 2023, p.46). In the case of Nigeria, the country is characterized by ethno-religious fragmentation and pluralism, which have become a prominent factor in its political landscape since its independence. “A country with multiple groupings, cleavages, sentiments, and faultiness, as expected is invariably plagued with fears of domination and hegemonies by dominant groups and elites” (Ejor et al, 2023, p.2), and to a large extent, votes during Nigerian elections are cast with an ethnic and religious undertone.

Ethnic groups in Nigeria function as a distinct polity, advocating for their candidates during elections. This ethnocentric behavior often results in the neglect of the aspirations of other ethnicities for inclusivity, particularly during presidential elections. The elections which end in winner-takes-it-all scenarios, have not been able to address grievances of marginalization and exclusion, particularly in Southeast Nigeria. This perpetuates a cycle of marginalization and exclusion; as certain groups dominate the political landscape at the expense of others. Politicians and members of other ethnicities, to their advantage, have exploited and manipulated voters against the Igbo presidency, citing the Nigerian Civil War from 1967-1970, and more recently the activities of violent secessionist groups as their alibi. This has only exacerbated the agitations for the independence of the Southeast region of Nigeria, with severe consequences for the country’s national unity and social cohesion.

## **Rotational Presidency: A Power Sharing Model**

Political scientists widely agree that power-sharing agreements have the potential to effectively mitigate, if not completely prevent violent ethnic conflicts. This is largely because democracies, where power is shared, tend to exhibit lower levels of violence compared to majoritarian democracies. By various measures and pitched on its disposition to inclusivity, power-sharing systems are found to be more successful in managing conflicts and promoting stability than winner-takes-all systems (Mehler, 2009; McGarry & O'Leary, 2015). The workability of democracy in deeply divided societies like Nigeria is possible only when power is shared, as the practice of majoritarian democracy has remained unsuitable and unable to address the plights of aggrieved populations. In democracies like Nigeria, the "winner-takes-all character and concentration of power allow a dominant group or coalition of groups to capture state power, relegating the minority into permanent opposition" (Bogaards, 2006, p.119). This is because in "multi-national states" like Nigeria, the democracy will always produce an election outcome with a yes/no vote, in the favour of dominant groups, with minority groups as losers (Reilly, 2003). Rotational representation is, therefore, necessary to eliminate the monopolization of power by certain groups and also the fear of domination from groups perceived to be underrepresented.

Over the years, there have been calls and agitations from different groups for rotational presidency in Nigeria. This isn't surprising as these calls and agitations are typical of plural societies (Ejor et al, 2023). It must however be noted that rotational representation is not a new concept in Nigeria. The tradition of office rotation in Nigeria has been deeply rooted in the country's cultural and historical heritage long before the influences of Islam and colonialism. This tradition grew from the desire for a more inclusive political system, driven by the autonomist aspirations of local communities seeking a say in the governance of their affairs. It reflects a commitment to ensuring that different individuals and groups have opportunities to participate in leadership roles, thereby promoting fairness and accountability in the political process (Orji, 2021). Rotational representation is not also alien to Nigeria's democracy, as it has been a criterion for electing presidential candidates at the primaries of some political parties. The adoption of rotational representation by the All Progressives Congress (APC) led to the

election of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu at the party's primaries. Another example is the rotation of representation and leadership amongst the different segments of Ethiope West Constituency in Delta State. This rotation has been in place since the creation of the constituency through the partnership agreement between Oghara and Jesse towns. This rotational arrangement did not just bring peace and stability to the constituency but also created a sense of belongingness (Ejor et al, 2023).

There also exists, since the return to democracy, an unconstitutional sharing of the Nigerian Presidency between the North and South, known as the Rotational Presidency. This shows that there is a consensus amongst the Nigerian elites on the importance of rotational representation. However, this arrangement has not addressed the grievances of the Southeastern region of Nigeria. The North and the South are further divided into six geo-political zones; North West, North Central, North East, South West, South-South, and South East. These zones comprise different ethnicities with different aspirations, which actualization defines their commitments to the unity of Nigeria. The marginalization felt by most parts of the Southeast geopolitical zone can only be addressed when the rotation of the presidency between the North and the South is reconsidered and constitutionally restructured to ensure fair representation for all ethnicities in Nigeria. This can be achieved by implementing a rotation system that includes all six geopolitical zones, as well as a further division of the rotation within each zone to allow smaller ethnic groups to have a voice and feel included in the country's decision-making process. By doing so, the issues of marginalization secessionist agitation, and violence would to a large extent be effectively addressed, with a more inclusive system put in place.

There is a need for Nigeria to employ more non-kinetic measures, while moderately applying military force to limit the activities of criminal elements, most of who disguise as separatist groups while committing heinous acts like kidnapping, human rituals, attacks on security formations, coercing and intimidating the civilian populace to do their biddings. The importance of dialogue and negotiation can never be overemphasized as effective tools in addressing the grievances in the Southeast, as non-violence approaches will by far bring more significant settlement than the use of force (Usman & Abdullahi,

2021). This is because findings have shown that state repression to a great extent contributes to the increased militarization of secessionist agitations in southeast Nigeria (Onyemaobi, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

Democracy by its tenets provides a veritable platform for social order engineering through structured routes. It is a preferred system of government, not because it promises the best to the society, but remains better than every other tested system as it offers the generally acceptable route for social inclusion, fairness, equity, and rule of citizens. Aside, from providing a platform to determine whether one would want to govern, and/or the right to determine who governs, it also goes a long way to put the quality of governance in the hands of the citizens to determine. At best, it is structured on both people's power and institutional ingredients to actualize the same.

In the Nigerian case, the challenge of how her divided political system can be made stable and democratic at the same time prompted scholars of comparative politics to recommend utilitarian theories amenable to specific environments on how to share power to bring stability through inclusiveness (Ogbonna, 2020). Power-sharing provides ripe options for badly divided and post-conflict societies to address the challenges of democratization. A more practicable Federal Character Principle in Nigeria has a constitutional role to play in ensuring stability through an efficient power-sharing model. As permissible by democratic praxis, issues of marginalization and proclivity to resort to violence must be properly debated and sorted through implementable institutional routes. To this extent, power-sharing is achievable on the already existing 6 geopolitical zone template, while strict adherence to the Principle of Federal Character will go a long way in ensuring stability through equity and fairness in public service as well as peaceful distribution of the high-stakes of politics. Anywhere and at all times in Nigeria, grievances of the "misgovernance" are at the heart of insurgency and terrorist acts (Ogbonna, 2024), addressing governance, structurally and policy-wise remains a stitch in time.

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# Political Development and Conflict in Dr Congo: Implications for Nigeria's Foreign Policy and Democracy in Africa

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## Abstract

Nigeria has been playing the lead role in driving African's unity, peace and collective prosperity which is also enshrined in her Constitution. Millions of dollars have been expended by the Nigerian government to maintain its status as the giant of Africa. One of the disturbing issues affecting Africa is the prolonged conflict and political development in DR Congo which has far-reaching implications on Africa's Democracy and Nigeria's foreign policy. The tension in DRC has plagued the country into a prolonged conflict spanning several decades now, with complex historical, political, and economic roots. The implications of this conflict on Africa's democracy and Nigeria's foreign policy are multifaceted and significant for regional stability, economic cooperation, and diplomatic relations. Adopting the analytical research methodology, this paper examines the historical and recent political trends, progress, and persistent challenges in DRC. It concluded that Nigeria has a critical role to play in ensuring peace, stability, democracy, growth, and development of the African region in line with her foreign policy. Several policy recommendations were also made including the advancement of credible and dependable electioneering process in DRC by promoting free, fair, and credible elections as well as true democratic values.

**Keywords:** *Conflicts, Politics, Development, democracy, foreign policy, Africa.*

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## **Introduction**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) also known as Congo-Kinshasa, DRC, DR Congo, or the Congo, is located in the Sub-Saharan region of Central Africa. The country ranked second-largest in Africa and 11th-largest in the world with a population of 93.89 million as of 2021. The country is highly blessed with large deposits of natural resources like cobalt, copper, diamond, hydropower potential, good biodiversity, etc. (World Bank, 2023).

The root cause of the conflict in the DRC can be traced back to its colonial legacy, which was however exacerbated by fierce post-independence power struggles, regional interventions, and the exploitation of its vast mineral wealth. This equally led to the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the country's first democratically elected Prime Minister, in 1961, which gave birth to the obvious political turbulence the country is suffering today, characterized by internal strife and external interference (Tunamsifu, 2022). Notable among the political trajectory of the DR Congo is the rise of Mobutu Sese Seko, whose decades-long dictatorship further entrenched the country's political woes. He was accused of anti-democratic practices including leading a brutal campaign of terror to eliminate his perceived opponents to remain in power. The aftermath of Mobutu's rule saw the devastating civil war in the DR Congo late 1990s, drawing in neighboring countries and spawning a multitude of armed groups vying for control over territory and resources (Bailey, 2024).

Hitherto, the majority of the Congolese people have not benefited from her commonwealth due to a prolonged history of conflict as a result of power tussle and control of her rich natural resources, resulting in political instability, armed conflict, and poor governance. This tense situation has continued unabated, plunging the country into a terrible and unimaginable humanitarian crisis (World Bank, 2023). Statistics from the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2023) show that there are over 120 armed groups believed to be operating in DR Congo. These groups range from small criminal enterprises to well-organised, armed, and trained military organisations striving to overthrow local and provincial governments, hence causing severe hardship, displacement, loss of lives, and increased political tension in the country. Despite the official end of the conflict in 2003, violence and instability persist in

various parts of the country, fueled by deep-seated grievances, ethnic tensions, and the proliferation of illicit trade networks.

As observed by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2015), DRC is yet to fully recover from the conflicts since the cessation of the decade long Congo War. The aftermath of the war remains a serious concern. Despite improvements in a few areas, the country is hitherto confronted with notable structural problems at various levels such as poverty, high rate of unemployment especially among the youth, and inadequate access to basic amenities, especially among people living in the rural part of the country. This poses a multi-dimensional challenge and threat to economic and human development in the country and the region. The crisis in DRC has also contributed to regional instability as it has affected neighbouring countries like Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi, etc. It is worthy of mention that this instability can undermine democratic processes in these countries, as leaders may prioritize security over democratic principles, leading to authoritarian tendencies.

Despite several attempts to reconstruct and reform the country by state actors and regional powers after the political transition in 2018 from an 18-year rule of Joseph Kabila, the country continues to face serious political instability that keeps undermining the security, and economy and hindering sustainable development of the country. Unfortunately, the political landscape of the country hitherto remains a complex system marked by endemic corruption and struggles for power (Moshonas, 2018). This however constitutes a threat to the country's democracy and that of Africa at large. The political development of any State and its human rights records are legitimate concerns of the international community generally, this is because there exists a great influence on international relations and domestic politics. It also defines the level of a country's engagement with the world in terms of politics, trade, diplomacy, and peaceful co-existence (Beasley, et al., 2013).

The political trajectory of the DRC may hold significant implications for Nigeria's foreign policy, hence the need for a situational analysis of the current trends and dynamics of the situation in DRC. This paper therefore delves into the intricate dynamics of political developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and its consequential impact on Nigeria's foreign policy. As

such, investigating the crisis in the DRC will help a reminder of the urgent need to confront the complexities of conflict and political development in Africa. It is believed that DRC's crisis may have far-reaching implications for Africa's democracy and Nigeria's foreign policy.

### **Brief History of the Democratic Republic of Congo**

The history of the DR Congo is a fascinating one, marked by the coming together of some powerful kingdoms, brutal colonialism, a tumultuous fight for independence, and ongoing struggles for stability and prosperity. Notable among these kingdoms during the Pre-colonial Era (i.e before 1885) were the Kongo, Kuba, Luba, and Lunda, who came together to form the modern-day DR Congo (Tunamsifu, 2022; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2023). As noted in Lumen Candela (2023), in 1885 King Leopold II of Belgium created the Congo Free State, a private domain where he exploited rubber and ivory through forced labour and brutal violence. This period is marked by atrocities and immense suffering for the Congolese people. In 1908, the Congo Free State became a Belgian colony, but exploitation and oppression continued under a more bureaucratic regime. The Belgians focused on extracting minerals and developing export-oriented agriculture, neglecting infrastructure and education for the Congolese population. Congolese children and wives whose fathers or husbands failed to meet rubber collection quotas were often punished by having their hands cut off on the order of the King.

Belgian occupied the Colony for over 70 years. This colonial legacy left its mark on the country's infrastructure, language (French is the official language), and political system. The DRC has faced decades of political instability, civil wars, and resource exploitation, impacting its development and leaving many people in poverty. Ironically, DRC is counted among the five poorest nations in the world with about one in every six persons living in abject poverty (World Bank, 2023). Despite the immense hardship and poverty faced by the Congolese people, they are known for their resilience, warmth spirit, and hospitality which can be noticed in their melodious music, art, culture, and everyday life. The country is made up of over 250 ethnic groups, each with its unique traditions, languages, and customs. This obvious diversity contributes to the

country's uniqueness and rich cultural tapestry (Expeditions Ducret, 2023).

## **Origin of The Conflict in Dr Congo**

The conflict in DR Congo is complex and multifaceted, with multiple interwoven causes dating back to the pre-colonial era. Being a country with multiple ethnic groups, issues of marginalization and conflict over access to resources like land and minerals were prominent. The slave trade and subsequent brutal rule of King Leopold II created deep social and economic inequalities, leaving lasting scars on the country's history.

As reported by the Centre for Preventive Action (2023), at least 6 million persons have been killed as a result of the conflict in Eastern DRC since 1996. The First Congo War (1996–1997) began in the wake of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, during which ethnic Hutu extremists killed an estimated one million minority ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda (DRC's neighbor to the east).

According to the US Department of Commerce (2023), the crisis in DRC has its origin in several socio-political and economic events, including "the massive refugee crisis and spillover from the 1994 Rwandan genocide, tribalism, the illicit trade of minerals, and the failure of the country's leadership to prepare and proceed with elections in 2016 as required by the Congolese Constitution." Hitherto armed groups, bouts of civil unrest, and ethnic and political violence have been on the rise in DRC particularly the eastern part of the country resulting in hundreds of thousands of people losing their lives, large-scale rape, and mass displacements.

## **Political Developments in Dr Congo**

Historically, the political landscape of DR Congo is marred by years of colonialism, authoritarian grip, the Second Congo War's devastating bloodshed, and subsequent waves of armed conflict. These enduring scars have crippled governance, eroded trust in institutions, and hindered the socio-political development of DR Congo. Nantulya (2017) noted that the suspension of the Country's Constitution by President Joseph Kabila to elongate his tenure

above the constitutionally allowed years which ought to have terminated in December 2016 was largely responsible for the revival of many of the estimated 70 armed groups currently active in the country, making the nexus between political and sectarian violence by armed militias a key feature of the DRC's political instability.

The DRC has experienced a series of elections, however before 2018 when President Felix Tshisekedi was first elected, the country had an 18-year rule by President Joseph Kabila which caused severe agitations and opposition due to his long stay in office. That transition of power marked a historic moment in the country's political landscape. The most recent Presidential Election of DRC was on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023. *Africanews* (December 2023) lamented that despite the already tense political climate of the country, the electoral campaign was poisoned by the security situation in the east of the DRC, which has seen a peak in tension over the past two years with the resurgence of the M23 militia who are alleged to be supported by neighbouring Rwanda.

The National Election was conducted and President Tshisekedi was re-elected for a second term in office. The said election results were widely opposed due to several complaints of alleged irregularities such as logistical setbacks and opaque vote count which fueled a dispute that threatened to further destabilize the country. Despite some progress in the restoration of democracy in the country, there are hitherto significant challenges bedeviling the country's political stability. Some armed militia groups have continued to operate in the eastern DRC, threatening lives, and property and hindering resource exploitation. Rampant corruption undermines economic growth and fuels public discontent. Weak institutions struggle to uphold the rule of law, further jeopardizing stability.

### **Contemporary Drivers of Political Instability in the DRC**

Competition for Resources/ Control: The DRC is incredibly rich in minerals like gold, diamonds, and cobalt, attracting both legitimate and illegal actors who exploit these resources for personal gain, often at the expense of local communities and fueling violence.

**Foreign Intervention and Proxy Wars:** Regional powers like Rwanda and Uganda have been accused of supporting armed groups within the DRC, further fuelling political instability and complicating the conflict by pursuing their interests.

**Weak Governance and Corruption:** Endemic corruption and weak institutions hinder economic development, limit access to basic services, and aggravate animosity against the government by the people. People in rural areas often lament the neglect of government. Labda and Maybe (2011) identified the causes of weak institutions to include: the absence of basic services, erratic payment of salaries, and poor infrastructure, especially at the rural levels.

**Land/Communal Clashes:** Frequent land conflicts are traced to land grabbing and conflict between customary and modern law.

**Human Rights Abuses:** Widespread cases of human rights abuses, including massacres, sexual violence, and displacement of civilians, further exacerbate the socio-political development of the people.

**December 2023 National Elections:** The recently concluded election in DRC brought an upsurge in violence cases culminating in the December 2023 National Elections (Centre for Preventive Action, 2023).

### **The Role of International and Regional Organisations in the Crisis in DRC**

The crisis in DR Congo attracted the attention of regional and international superpowers due to its strategic importance, vast natural resources, and implications for regional stability. This foreign interference is as a result of vested interest among the regional blocs and world super powers. Several Regional and International Organizations like the United Nations, African Union (AU), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) have played crucial roles in mitigating the conflict, supporting peace, stability, and development in the DRC. Some of these interventions took the form of contributions to conflict resolution efforts, peacekeeping missions, humanitarian assistance, and the promotion of good governance.



An evaluation of the International development funding in DRC shows that an average of US\$1.5 billion is expended annually. These interventions were targeted at key events in the political development of the country, like the Sun City Agreement of 2002, national elections in 2006, and the 2008 Goma peace negotiations between the DRC government and the armed rebel groups (Labda & Maybe, 2011). However, despite interventions by foreign organisations, violence, and instability persist in DRC. The International Organisation on Migration (2024) observed that “the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has continued to deteriorate with the intensification of fighting” between armed groups and the Congolese armed forces. This questions the effectiveness of regional interventions and their ability to address the root causes of conflict in DRC. Labda and Maybe (2011) argued that most donors are often not attentive to the accelerators of peace and conflict in the East of the country, and their strategies are blurred and compartmentalized.

The activities of these regional blocs are often viewed with serious suspicion and concern due to allegations of promoting hidden agendas and are influenced by the political agendas of their member states, leading to biased interventions. Critics argued that some regional interventions might unintentionally reinforce existing power structures and inequalities within the DRC. Like Rwanda, it is believed that their involvement in the DRC’s conflict was due to historical tensions and security concerns. As pointed out by Lezhnev & Prendergast (2013), the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda spilled over to Congo in the mid-1990s, plummeting preexisting inter-communal tensions and conflict in the region. Rwanda’s direct intervention in Congo at times and its periodic support for armed groups in eastern Congo have been central drivers of continuing conflict. During the First and Second Congo Wars, Rwanda was accused of supporting some rebel groups, including the M23, which destabilized Eastern Congo. Rwanda’s involvement has been driven by its own security interests, including combating Hutu militias operating in eastern Congo, as well as economic interests in exploiting Congo’s resources.

Uganda on the other hand has equally played a significant role in the conflict due to perceived desire of maintaining influence in the region. According to

Human Rights Watch (2001), "Uganda has played the role of both arsonist and fireman with disastrous consequences for the local population. In their involvement in continuing political feuds among Congolese party leaders, in local ethnic conflicts, and in extracting wealth, Ugandan actors have furthered their interests at the expense of Congolese whose territory they are occupying" (n.p). Uganda was also accused of supporting militancy in the eastern region as a nexus to exploit the resources of DR Congo. Hence, Uganda has also been implicated in resource exploitation and illicit trade, benefiting from the chaos and instability.

Generally, the activities of regional and international superpowers in response to the crisis in the DRC reflect a complex interplay of geopolitical interests, security concerns, and humanitarian considerations. While these interventions have aimed to mitigate the impact of the conflict and promote peace and stability in the region, challenges persist in addressing the root causes of the crisis and achieving lasting peace and development in the DRC.

### **Conflict in Dr Congo and its Implication on Africa's Democracy**

The prolonged conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has profound implications on democracy, not only for the country itself but also for the entire region and the broader international community. The conflict in DRC has fueled political instability within the DRC, hindering the country's ability to establish effective governance structures and uphold the rule of law. This has equally led to weak institutions, corruption, and lack of accountability in the country. The cycle of violence and unrest in DRC is making it difficult to achieve sustainable peace and development in the region.

Again, the ongoing conflict has devastated the DRC's economy, despite the country's abundant natural resources. Infrastructure has been destroyed, investment has dwindled, and economic development has been stunted. This has contributed to widespread poverty and unemployment, exacerbating social inequalities and further fueling grievances that perpetuate the conflict which propels instability. The conflict in the DRC has spilled over into neighboring countries, contributing to regional destabilization. Armed groups often operate

across porous borders, exacerbating tensions and conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa. This regional instability has implications for peace and security throughout Central Africa, affecting neighboring countries such as Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Tanzania. Hence the UN calls for improved diplomatic efforts and lasting political solutions to the current conflict through inclusive dialogues among the key parties (United Nations, 2024).

The prolonged conflict in the DRC has far-reaching implications for democracy in the country, the region, and beyond. Addressing the root causes of the conflict, promoting good governance, fostering economic development, and strengthening institutions are crucial steps toward achieving lasting peace and prosperity in the DRC and the African region.

### **Political Development in Dr Congo and Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomatic relations have been characterized by a commitment to Afrocentrism. The former Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, in his addresses of August and October 1, 1960, declared Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, due to the country's stance in the promotion of African unity, cooperation, and development. This approach is rooted in the Pan-African ideals that emerged during Nigeria's struggle for independence, even though some persons criticize it for not promoting national interest (Mbara & Gopal, 2020).

One key aspect of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy is the emphasis on regional integration and collaboration within the African continent. Nigeria has actively participated in regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) whose Chairperson is currently President Bola Tinubu of Nigeria and also the African Union (AU), working towards the establishment of a united and economically vibrant Africa. Nigeria's Afrocentrism is also evident in its commitment to conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts across the continent. The country has been involved in mediating conflicts and promoting diplomatic solutions to disputes, exemplifying its commitment to maintaining peace and harmony among African nations.

In the case of DRC, Nigeria has been providing support in various forms

since the inception of their diplomatic relations. Millions of dollars have so far been expended by Nigeria in providing humanitarian assistance and military support to DRC. Nigeria has equally contributed troops that have been part of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to help maintain peace and stability in the region. In line with President Tinubu 4D's foreign policy, priority should be given to strengthening Nigeria's diplomatic ties with both DRCs by way of engaging in constructive dialogue, conflict resolution, and cooperation. This involves a diplomatic approach targeted at achieving mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration to address shared challenges. Nigeria can leverage on her regional strength and leadership role to provide support to DRC that can actualize political stability and a prosperous future in line with her foreign policy of promoting peace and unity in Africa. In doing so, both nations can advance mutually beneficial diplomatic relationships that can bring about regional stability, and economic and developmental growth.

### **Nigeria's Stake in the Political Future of Dr Congo**

**Promoting Regional Stability:** As a regional power, Nigeria has a vested interest in the political stability of DRC. This is because instability in the DRC can spill over into neighboring countries, jeopardizing regional security and economic prosperity. Nigeria's foreign policy must prioritize collaborative efforts toward peace-building and conflict resolution in the DRC. **Unlocking Economic Opportunities:** The DRC's immense natural resources present a win-win scenario for both nations. Collaboration on infrastructure development, trade, and investment can unlock significant economic benefits for both, fostering shared prosperity and regional integration.

**Security Concerns:** The activities of armed groups in the DRC pose a direct threat to both countries. If the security threads are ignored, the danger of a possible escalation of these groups to other parts of the continent puts Nigeria at risk.

**Sustenance of Democratic values:** Poor governance and corruption is a threat to democracy. If Nigeria ignores the same may lead to the fall of democracy in

DRC which has a boomerang effect on leadership in Africa.

### **Challenges Preventing the Effective Resolution of The Crises in Dr Congo**

There are seeming challenges militating against the effective resolution of the prolonged political crisis in DR Congo. These challenges are deeply rooted in the country's complex history, political dynamics, and socio-economic realities. These are discussed as follows:

#### ***Deep-Rooted Ethnic and Regional Divisions in DRC:***

DR Congo is a deeply divided country, characterized by the existence of over 200 ethnic groups who have not been able to effectively manage their diversity, and hence do not go along. Most of them hold their loyalty to their ethnic and regional interests, as such causing tensions. The political elites have also exploited the situation to consolidate power and maintain control. Ethnic rivalries and competition for resources exacerbate social divisions, making it difficult to foster national unity and genuine reconciliation among the people (Young African Leaders Initiative, 2017).

#### ***Poor Governance and Institutional Capacity:***

Due to several decades of authoritarian rule, corruption, and gross mismanagement, governance structures and institutions in DR Congo have only grown weaker. State institutions lack the needed capacity, transparency, and accountability to effectively deliver services, uphold the rule of law, and address the needs of the population. The BTI Transformation Index of Bertelsmann Stiftung (2024) reported that the struggles for power and control of the natural riches of the country with near absence of a reliable system of leadership alternation as well as the continued pervasive culture of corruption among Congolese leaders were responsible for the country's inability to effectively embark on the process of devising and implementing good policy reforms needed for sustainable development.

#### ***Proliferation of Autonomous Armed Groups and Militias:***

The presence of numerous armed groups and militias, particularly in the eastern provinces of DR Congo poses a serious threat to the effective conflict resolution process. This is because each group claims to be autonomous. These

groups are taking advantage of the conflict to engage in violence, extortion, and resource exploitation, perpetuating a cycle of conflict and insecurity that undermines efforts toward resolution. Vlassenroot (2008) observed that some of these armed groups “only aimed at claiming a monopoly of violence to get their share in the distribution of local resources. Others, however, increasingly attempted to forge local and transborder alliances to increase their local control and to consolidate political and social power” to the detriment of peace.

***Regional Interference and Proxy Warfare:***

The unfortunate involvement of neighbouring countries, such as Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi, in DR Congo’s conflict has further complicated and frustrated the resolution efforts. Regional actors are indicted to be in support of the proxy militias and rebel groups operating in the country, either to pursue their security interests or to exploit DR Congo’s resources, hence exacerbating tensions and undermining the peacebuilding and resolution process. The International Crisis Group (2020) had equally noted that the neighbouring countries have historically used militias operating there against one another, which may result in a full-blown regional security crisis. Hence, the United Nations (2024) lamented that the strained relations between these neighbouring countries sharing borders in Congo were compromising the progress made since 2020 to restore peace in the country.

***Lack of Trust among Political Actors:***

The political instability and a lack of trust between political actors have equally undermined efforts to reach a consensus and negotiate peaceful resolutions to the crises in DR Congo. The absence of inclusive political dialogue and a culture of not keeping to promises or agreed terms have further eroded public trust in the political process. According to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2017), the actions and inactions of African and international actors are central to the peace-building process. Parties must show commitment to implementing peace agreements, especially in an environment of deep suspicion among the parties

## **Conclusion**

The protracted conflict in the DRC presents formidable challenges to Africa's democratic aspirations. At its core, democracy hinges on principles of accountability, transparency, and respect for human rights, all of which are being undermined in the context of ongoing violence and political instability in DR Congo. The DRC's struggle to establish effective governance structures and uphold the rule of law serves as a sobering reminder of the fragility of democratic institutions in the face of entrenched conflict. Moreover, the spillover effects of the DRC's instability on neighbouring countries exacerbate regional tensions and pose significant obstacles to the consolidation of democratic norms and institutions across Africa.

The conflict and political development in the DR Congo have far-reaching implications for Africa's democracy and Nigeria's foreign policy. The relationship between these two African nations holds significant implications for regional stability, economic cooperation, and diplomatic relations. Nigeria can navigate the complexities of its relationship with the DRC and foster a partnership that benefits both nations. This can contribute to a more stable and prosperous West Africa, with enhanced regional security, economic opportunities, and respect for human rights. By leveraging its regional influence and economic potential, Nigeria can play a crucial role in supporting the DRC's development and contributing to a brighter future for both nations.

As we reflect on the implications of the prolonged conflict and political development in the DRC, it becomes imperative that concerted, collaborative efforts are urgently needed to address the root causes of the crisis and pave the way for fruitful dialogue and sustainable peace as well as development in DRC. This necessitates a holistic approach that prioritizes conflict resolution, institution-building, and inclusive governance, while also addressing underlying socio-economic grievances and promoting regional cooperation. This will help in promoting democratic values in Africa.

## **Recommendations**

**Advancement of credible and dependable electioneering process in DRC:** Nigeria can promote a free, fair, and credible electioneering process as well as true democratic values in DRC. Nigeria can advocate for electoral reforms in DRC aimed at advancing inclusive governance, credible elections, and participation by the major power blocs in the country.

**Promote peace-building initiatives that can advance regional peace and Stability:** As the giant of Africa and in line with her foreign policy, Nigeria can maintain her lead role by actively engaging in regional frameworks that can improve peace-building efforts among different stakeholders in the DR Congo, particularly in Eastern part of the country. IPCR being the leading government agency with a mandate covering the entire Africa can be empowered to hold conferences, regional dialogue programmes, peace-building symposia, seminars, etc to bring all stakeholders together to pursue peace.

**Provide Mediation and Conflict Resolution Mechanism:** Nigeria has advanced in her conflict management approach than the DRC, as such our expertise and experiences can be exported to identify core lingering issues and mediate peace between the various armed groups and the DRC government. This can be done by helping the DRC to collectively come together to identify the problem and find a lasting solution to them, instead of imposing foreign solutions. IPCR other related government agencies, and non-governmental organizations can collaboratively drive this process by way of fostering peaceful solutions to the conflict.

**Offering Security Support and Intelligence Sharing Mechanism:** Inter-State intelligence gathering and sharing can go a long way to combating terrorism and its escalation to other neighboring countries. There is a need for an efficient intelligence-sharing mechanism and capacity-building training for DRC security forces that can help address armed group activities cum threats and other cross-border crimes like movement of arms, contraband items, etc. This can be handled by our security agencies in collaboration with the DRC government.

**Promote good governance, and respect for the rule of law and human rights:** Poor governance, lack of respect for the rule of law, endemic corruption and human rights abuses are some of the major drivers of the conflicts in DRC.



Engaging in collaborative efforts to promote good governance, fight corruption and protect human rights can further help build strong institution, bring about reforms and encourage transparency as well as accountability in the management of the country's rich resources for a more even distribution of her commonwealth. The IPCR, National Human Rights Commission, ICPC, and EFCC can partner to make a formidable team for this purpose.

**Build Economic ties and diplomatic engagement:** Nigeria can take advantage of the rich natural resources in DRC and engage in bilateral trades that can prosper the economy of both countries. Nigeria can invest in key sectors like agriculture, mining, and manufacturing in the DRC which will in-turn create more job opportunities and economic growth for both nations. Maintaining regular high-level dialogues and exchanges between Nigerian and Congolese officials can foster good diplomatic relations, build trust, and strengthen bonds between the two countries.

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# Should we Tread the Oputa Path Again? Interrogating Post-Transition Reconciliation in Nigeria

Mojeed Adekunle Animashaun<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have increasingly become a soothing balm to assuage aggrieved groups in countries emerging from authoritarianism, protracted conflicts, and fiercely contested elections; even as TRCs produce varying consequences in different contexts. While Nigeria has consolidated its democratic rule through the 2023 elections, the outcome of the elections in significant manner negatively amplified the fault lines of the Nigerian nation as a pluralist formation in a manner that has thrown up, in the aftermath of the election, a categorization of groups/identities into 'winners' and 'losers'. This presents a formidable challenge for the new administration to adopt inclusive, integrative, and accommodationist policies and programmes for national re-building. This paper argues that a good point of departure for any effort at national reconciliation by the Tinubu presidency is the constitution of a TRC. The paper contends that while this may be a good path to national cohesion, the path is dotted with challenges including the values and the adversarial behaviour of the elite class who may seek to appropriate TRC as a tool for regime legitimation.

**Keywords:** *Oputa Panel, Post-transition, Truth and Reconciliation, Commission, Nigeria*

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## **Introduction**

Conflict is a permanent feature of human societies. In every society, indigenous and modern, formal and informal mechanisms of managing and resolving conflicts are put in place. These societies' designed and executed mechanisms are aimed at achieving tranquility, orderliness, and stability. In the modern world, humanity has witnessed conflicts of high proportions and large scale that manifest in internal insurrection, intra-state civil wars, and inter-state wars or aggression. Starting from World War 1, these large-scale wars are characterized by wanton killings, monumental destructions, and egregious human rights violations or abuse including sex slavery, abductions, and genocide. This ugly trend violated global human rights laws and threatened democratic rule (Cuevas et al., 2012).

Traditionally, criminal prosecution by war tribunals as demonstrated by the post-World War 2 Nuremberg and Tokyo War Tribunals was the preferred approach of imposing sanctions on perpetrators of rights violations; and dispensing justice to victims of rights abuse. There has however been a change of method in recent decades as countries transiting from authoritarianism and deep-seated conflicts now adopt a more rewarding and reconciliatory approach that emphasizes 'forgetting' and 'forgiving'. The change is a sort of thought shift from criminal investigation and punitive sanction to reconciliation and compensation (DeMinck, 2007). This transition thus has seen the emergence of 'truth-telling' as the new preferred model of reconciliation and restorative justice through the instrumentality of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Truth Commissions are touted as significant agents of peacebuilding to the extent that they offer solutions that promote transitional justice and institutional reforms that dissuade future conflicts and rights abuse (Martin et al., 2022).

The fundamental motive of TRCs in all jurisdictions is to establish the truth and reconcile the feuding parties. Truth represents a critical component in efforts at achieving post-conflict peace-building (Wietekamp et al, 2006). Though difficult to establish partly because of the competing narratives of the warring parties, deliberate efforts must however be made to unveil the truth. Reconciliation on the other hand aims at building mutual trust and mending fractured

relationships between hitherto feuding parties (Tade, 2024). The literature is replete with a plethora of conceptual definitions of TRCs. This paper however adopts Daan Bronkhorst's (2004, p.36) definition of TRCs as "a temporary body, set up by an official authority ... to investigate a pattern gross human rights violation committed over some time in the past, to issue a public report, which includes victims' data and recommendations for justice and reconciliation."

The proliferation of TRCs across global regions has been attributed in the literature to a perception shift about the potential and legitimacy of TRCs which occurred in the post-South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission period. The TRCs came to be credited with certain democratizing effects that were capable of facilitating democratic deepening (Hirsch, Mackenzie & Sesay, 2012). Thus, the increasing adoption of TRCs across regions of the world in the last four decades in a way demonstrates its perceived capacity as a tool of national healing and social justice. While TRCs have produced varying consequences, intended and unintended, across adopting countries, their utility as an instrument of cohesion and restoration in hitherto divided and conflict-ridden societies cannot be denied. Following their proliferation across global continents, the scope, objectives, and operations of TRCs have since witnessed phenomenal expansion (Wilson, 2001).

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions represent just one approach open to a country to address its unenviable or ugly past. Huyse (1995) identifies other approaches as including amnesty, lustration, and criminal prosecution. The truth approach draws strength from Hamber (1995) who contends that when countries seek to overcome a dirty past, the task is better executed "through truth recovery, justice, and support for victims and survivors..." Hayner (2011) has identified five defining elements of truth commissions namely, they are targeted at past happenings; they engage matters that happened over a specific time range; they interface with victim populations; they are usually ad hoc in nature; and they are sanctioned and resourced by existing state authorities (Hayner, 2011).

The mandate assigned to truth and reconciliation commissions varies across political contexts. In some countries, truth commissions only seek to identify aggressors and victims, meet out punishment to perpetrators, and award

reparations to victims. In other contexts, truth and reconciliation panels attempt to broker peace and reconciliation between the perpetrators of atrocities and victims of such atrocities (Wilson, 2001). While the cases of Chile, El Salvador, South Africa, and Nigeria in a way typify the former, the Rwandan and Sierra Leonean cases approximate the latter.

Nigeria had its first and, so far, only experience of TRC in the period after the restoration of constitutional democracy in 1999. The leadership of the new democratic state, apparently motivated by the need to give justice to victims of human rights violations perpetrated by the Nigerian state and its armed services during the prolonged years of military dictatorship and authoritarianism in the country, instituted an 8-member Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission. The primary mandate of the Commission, popularly called the Oputa Panel, was to establish the causes and nature of human rights violations that occurred during military rule in the country; as well as identify the perpetrators. The processes, methods of operation, and outcome of the Commission will be discussed later in this paper.

### **Review of Related Literature: Pluralist Formations, Discontents, Implosion and Containment Measures**

Plural societies have been conceptualized in diverse ways in the literature with the ideological and intellectual orientations of scholars influencing their perspectives. John Furnivall in his 1939 seminal work defined plural societies as “comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit” (Furnivall, 1939). According to Furnivall, an economist by training, each communal or ethnic identity professes values that are different from other groups’ thereby setting forth a society that lacks value consensus or “common social demand.” For Parekh (1997), plural societies represent a public sphere where diverse cultural, religious, and other primordial identities interact and negotiate their differences in mutual respect and cordial accommodation.

It is well acknowledged in the literature that discontent is a permanent feature of multicultural formations. According to Florida (2021), growing discontent

is a 'quintessentially geographic phenomenon- a fundamental product of distinctive economic and cultural geographies and of deepening differences in the day-to-day lives of different class and racist groups.'" Indeed, De Ruyter, Martin & Tyler (2021) have shown that culturally diverse societies marked by economic marginalization and political exclusion are susceptible to discontent. Research has shown that the tensions and discontent generated within federal policies not only weaken human potential, they also hinder development (Nnorum, 2023).

In pluralist societies, ethnicity heavily influences civil politics thereby triggering the political saliency of primordialism. As amply demonstrated by Rabushka & Shepsle, (2009), extreme primordiality undermines efforts at managing conflicts in plural contexts. Against the backdrop of value conflict and the zero-sum character of inter-group competition for state access, inter-group conflicts become inevitable in plural societies. These conflicts birth polarization which deepens mutual distrust and accelerates inter-group animosity and resentment. In many cases, the conflicts are accompanied by wanton killings, egregious use of violence, brazen rights violations, and, in some cases, targeted ethnic attacks and genocide which in turn breeds separatist sentiments. The cases of Nigeria, Bosnia, and Rwanda typify this tendency.

Berry (2016) identifies two defining features of pluralist societies (diversity and equity) and establishes the complex relationship between the two. He describes diversity as including ethnic, sectarian, and cultural differences; while equity connotes inclusivity and access to the public sphere. He contends that diversity without inclusive participation will arouse separatist feelings while equity without diversity may engender cultural assimilation. All culturally diverse societies, whether in the emergent economies of the global South or the industrially advanced countries of the North, are faced with the onerous challenge of subjecting or subordinating primordialism to the demands of democratic politics (Geertz, 1967; Nyiayaana, 2021). In many cases particularly in transiting societies, primordial identities tend to challenge state legitimacy.

While recent decades have seen a dramatic increase in the adoption of truth commissions as a tool of national healing and reconciliation, the adoption has produced different consequences in varying contexts. Martin et al. (2022)



have noted that implementation of recommendations by TRCs tends to be more quickly and vigorously pursued when the commissions are brought into existence through executive authority or when the commissions are empaneled after transition.

### Mapping the TRC Zone

Available evidence suggests that virtually every continent of the world has known the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Hoecker, 2018). TRCs are set up to achieve purposes that vary across contexts; even as their sizes and adopted *modus operandi* also vary according to the biases of the constituting authorities. Although the contemporary TRCs are fashioned after the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals of the post-World War 2 era, TRCs have become in the contemporary time “a transiting tool” (Campbell, 2000) aimed at delivering restorative justice and strengthening societal cohesion. The Nuremberg trials were primarily instituted to prosecute Nazi officials for the atrocities (egregious human rights violations against Jews) they perpetrated in Germany between 1941 and 1945. On its own, the lesser-known Tokyo Tribunal was set up to prosecute war criminals in the Far East (Japan).

Whereas there was some semblance of a truth commission in several countries before 1983, the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons created in Argentina in 1983 by President Raul Alfonsin was the first effective TRC that the world knew (Liebenberg, 1996). For the present paper, five country cases are discussed namely, Chile, El Salvador, Argentina, South Africa, and Nigeria.

*Chile:* Chile’s TRC which was birthed through ‘executive decree’ was a response to general demand by the civil society for state action on the absolutism and despotism that characterized the regime of Chilean dictator, General Augusto Pinochet (Ensalaco, 1994). President Patricio Aylwin who succeeded General Pinochet, instituted the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation otherwise known as the Rettig Commission on April 25, 1990, to document and investigate human rights abuses in Chile during the years of military dictatorship from 1973 to 1990. The Commission submitted its report in February 1991 after 10 months of sitting. In its report, the commission established 3,428 cases of

rights abuse including killings, torture, abduction, and disappearance. As part of its recommendations, the commission suggested the creation of a state agency for reparation and reconciliation which could provide psychological, emotional, and material assistance to victims of rights abuse. The commission also recommended that reparation should be paid to the victims (see Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, Volume iii).

*El Salvador:* One striking feature of the El Salvadorian case is that the process was externally funded as the United Nations assumed responsibility for staffing and financing the truth panel (Campbell, 2000). This represents a radical departure from the practice in most countries where TRCs are usually funded from the public treasury. The Commission on the Truth for El Salvador was inaugurated in July 1992 and wound up its sittings with the submission of its report on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1993. The commission had three members under the chairmanship of former President of Columbia, Belisario Betancur. The primary mandate of the Bentacur panel was to investigate the nature and effects of the acts of violence and the accompanying rights violations that occurred in the North American country in the decade between 1980 and 1990 (USIP, 1992). In its report titled 'From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador', the panel recommended that material reparation be paid to victims of rights abuse and their families (Campbell, 2000).

*Argentina:* The TRC in Argentina was instituted to unearth the truth about the spate of killings and disappearances that followed Argentina's defeat in the war against Britain. Named the National Commission on the Disappeared, the main mandate of the commission was to discover the truth about the sad developments and to bring perpetrators to justice. Against public expectations, Argentina's post-war President, Carlos Menem, granted amnesty to military officers who were implicated in the massive rights violations. Though the commission recommended reparations to victims of the rights abuse, access to necessary documents to file for reparation was difficult for most victims due to the non-cooperation of the military authorities (Campbell, 2000).

*South Africa:* The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a constitutional creation. Chaired by renowned cleric and Nobel Laureate,

Bishop Desmond Tutu, the commission was tasked with the responsibility of investigating cases of gross human rights abuse and violations in South Africa from March 1960 to May 1994. Three ancillary committees were also constituted to support the operations of the TRC. These were the Human Rights Violation Committee (HRVC), the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee (R&R), and the Amnesty Committee (AC). While the HRVC was mandated to investigate rights violations and their victims in the period under review, the R&R had the mandate of offering support to victims of rights abuse. The AC on the other hand was to ensure the procedural correctness of amnesty applications (Campbell, 2000). The Chairperson of the commission, Bishop Tutu submitted its report on October 20, 1998, to President Nelson Mandela. Quite expectedly, the report generated mixed reactions from critical stakeholders in South African politics. While many elements within the White-dominated former ruling party, the National Party (NP) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) described the commission and its outcome as a “witch hunt”, many victims of the abuses of the apartheid state were practically disappointed that the report granted amnesty to key players in the apartheid regime but failed to recommend payment of reparation to victims of rights violations. Yet, Bishop Tutu believed the TRC was “both healing and necessary for the future of South Africa...” (Campbell, 2000).

Other countries in Africa that have taken the path of TRC include Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Gambia. In Rwanda, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) was set up in March 1999 to coordinate integrated efforts at achieving unity and reconciliation in a country experiencing genocide and ethnic-based civil war (Sentama, 2022). In Sierra Leone, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was inaugurated in July 2002 to create a historical account of the causes of, and motivation for, the human rights abuse and violations that characterized a decade-long civil war characterized by wanton killings, destruction, kidnapping, sexual slavery, child soldiering and cannibalism (Sheriff & Bobson-Kamara, 2005). The Commission of Inquiry into Violation of Human Rights (CIVHR) was inaugurated in Uganda in 1986 by President Yoweri Museveni. In the Gambia, the Truth Reconciliation and Reparation Commission was established in 2017 to investigate human rights violations under the ousted President Yahya

Jammeh; while in Ghana, the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) was established in January 2002 by the government of President John Kuffour to investigate rights violations in the country under past military administrations

### **Nigeria's First Time Out at TRC**

Once the second republic of Nigeria collapsed in December 1983 following the military coup that ousted the elected government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and produced Major General Buhari as the new Head of State, the country was sentenced into a prolonged dictatorship which lasted one and a half decade and eventually terminated in May 1999 with the inauguration of the fourth republic. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who had won the February 1999 presidential election was sworn in on 29 May as the second executive president of Nigeria. Research has shown that economic mismanagement and human rights violations represent two prominent features of military rule in Nigeria (Adeakin, 2016). It was therefore not surprising when President Obasanjo promised to reform the country's criminal justice system and pursue the process of national healing. This the president did by setting up THE Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (HRVIC) under the chairmanship of Justice Chukwudifu Oputa, a retired Justice of the Supreme Court.

The Oputa panel, borne out of the efforts of the newly inaugurated democratic regime to set off a truth and reconciliation process, provided a veritable outlet for diverse groups to render competing narratives of rights abuse, marginalization, and ethnic injustice (HRVIC, 2002). The HRVIC was constituted and formally inaugurated on 14 June 1999. It had 8 members (6 men and two women). Established by the Statutory Instrument No. 8 of 1999, the specific mandate of the commission included (i) to ascertain the causes, nature, and extent of all gross violations of human rights committed in the country between 1966 and 1999; (ii) identify persons, institutions and organizations responsible for such violations; (iii) to establish if such abuses were deliberate state policy or they were committed by state officials as an act of abuse of office; and (iv) recommend measures that can be taken to correct past injustice and prevent future re-occurrence (Yusuf, 2007).

The adopted *modus operandi* of the commission was a public hearing. During its sittings, the commission received about 10, 000 public testimonies of rights violations. In June 2002, the commission submitted its report to President Olusegun Obasanjo. Among other findings, the panel found that the Nigerian military was strongly implicated in numerous human rights violations that occurred under successive authoritarian governments. The panel recommended, among others, payment of reparation to victims of rights abuse. However, the report of the commission was neither formally released by the government nor were its recommendations implemented (USIP, 1999). This was due to a litigation initiated by two former military rulers who declined to appear before the panel. Thus, the Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission went down in history as a public project that raised so much hope but delivered little gain despite massive public resources invested in the project. Thus, rather than leading to transitional justice, democratic strengthening, and greater respect for constitutionalism, a combination of factors including low commitment to the rule of law by the political incumbents compromised the potential of the panel to make a significant contribution to democratization in Nigeria. Jefferey (2021) has resorted similar experience in Nepal where the capacity of the truth commission was politically compromised by a complex legislative process and weak commitment to constitutionalism by the state elite.

### **Patterns of Inter-Group Relations Before 2023 Polls**

The character of the contestation for the 2023 presidential election, and indeed all the previous elections in the history of Nigeria, is better situated within the context of the thorny nationality question in the multi-cultural Nigerian society. The central thrust of the nationality question is the inter-group competition for access to the state and its allocating powers which grants opportunities/benefits to some groups while simultaneously denying other groups these public goods (Alubo, 2006). In the build-up to the elections, ethnic identity became a target of verbal attack and negative profiling leading to an unfortunate situation where groups that hitherto enjoyed healthy relations suddenly became political adversaries.

In a very disturbing manner, the build-up to the 2003 presidential election was

marked by an egregious negative campaign characterized by hate speech, biases, and prejudices (Okolo & Atiye, 2022). A faith-based civil society organization, Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC), before the 2023 general elections issued a statement making a case for a Yoruba Muslim as the president after the election. In the statement signed by its Executive Director, Professor Ishaq Akintola, MURIC said: “We believe that Yoruba Muslims need federal might to eliminate or at least scale down the tornado of oppression and the Tsunami of anti-Muslim sentiments.” MURIC further noted that “only a Yoruba Muslim president who knows what has been happening can do this effectively...” MURIC’s position generated some disquiet within the polity. However, there were also unconfirmed reports of churches across the country mobilizing Christian voters in support of the candidate of the Labour Party, Mr. Peter Obi.

It is instructive to stress the fact that this pattern of hostile inter-group relations continued in the post-election period. One matter that showed inter-ethnic rivalry between Yoruba and Igbo people was of the alleged forgery of the result of the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board examination involving Miss Mmesoma Ejikeme. While the Twitter posts of former Education Minister, Mrs Oby Ezekwesili, provided the immediate context for the ethnicization of the matter, interventions by some Igbo elements on the issue gave the matter the character of disputation of the 2023 elections by other means.

### **2023 Presidential Vote: The Contest, Context, and Disturbing Aftermath**

Three things are significant about the 2023 presidential election. First, for the first time since the restoration of constitutional rule in 1999, there were no retired officers on the presidential ballot. Second, the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the ruling All Progressives Congress are of the same Islamic religious faith (a sort of a misnomer in a secular and multi-cultural Nigerian state), are both former state governors and are also former national parliamentarians. Tinubu’s choice of a vice presidential candidate of his faith was perceived in many quarters as a slap on the face of Nigeria’s religious dynamics (Olaopa, 2023). Third, for the first time since 1999, three presidential candidates that approximated Nigeria’s three major ethnic identities contested the 2023 presidential vote.

To be sure, the contestation for the 2023 presidency had a regional character at the beginning. The Lagos Declaration of the Southern Governors' Forum, an umbrella body of the governors of the southern region of Nigeria, provided the context for this regionalist character of the presidential contest. At the Lagos meeting held on July 5, 2021, the Forum unanimously agreed that the southern region should produce a Nigerian president by 2023. The Forum arising from its resolution expected that the two largest political parties of the current republic, the All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic Party, unarguably the only two party labels that have real prospects of capturing federal powers, would field candidates of southern extraction. However, as it turned out only the APC nominated a southern candidate. The contestation was to assume an ethnic character following the entry of Mr. Peter Obi into the race as presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP). Mr. Obi had collected the nomination form of PDP, the platform under which he contested the 2019 presidential election as vice presidential candidate. He defected from PDP on May 22, 2022, to join the Labour Party.

The ethno-religious pattern of voting as reflected in the outcome of the presidential election considerably deepened ethnic mistrust and religious division within the Nigerian polity. According to Pastor Tunde Bakare, presiding Pastor of Citadel Global Community Church, this pattern of electoral behaviour demonstrates that Nigerians were "yet to solve the cracks of the regional and ethnic fault lines in their political history". While ethno-religious considerations have been key features of Nigeria's electoral politics since the first republic (Babalola, 2020; Alabi, Jamiu & Lawal, 2023), this tendency was taken to a disturbing level during the 2023 elections, particularly presidential. Kukah (2022) contends that mobilisation of identity for political/electoral gain will continue in Nigeria as long as the political elite regard it as a "political capital."

In its Editorial of Wednesday, July 5, 2023, titled '2023 Elections, Divisive Politics, and National Reconciliation', the Premium Times newspaper described the 2023 elections as "the most divisive electoral contests ever held in the country since the advent of self-governance. They were ethnically charged and deeply polarizing along religious lines. The political elite, their "influencers" as well

a section of the religious elite pushed Nigeria close to the brink of collapse... through their actions and utterances.” Research has however shown that while identity mobilization offers temporal electoral gains to its users, it negates inclusivity and diversity which are core principles of democratic governance in multicultural societies like Nigeria (Alabi et. al, 2023).

The danger that identity-based voting posed to democratization in Nigeria was not lost on the Arewa Consultative Forum, a prominent ethnic-based civil society organization. In a post-election Statement released by the Secretary General of the Forum, Alhaji Muntali Aliyu, the cultural organization condemned the role religion and ethnicity played in the outcome of the 2023 presidential election. According to the Forum: “In Lagos where the problem created by ethnic and religious politics has continued to fester, acrimony and bad blood between Yorubas and Igbos have become a matter of concern to the security agencies. In the wake of the ethnic crisis, Yoruba and Igbo partisans freely profile one another and accuse themselves of criminal conduct...”

Concerning the focus of this paper, the context of the 2023 presidential vote was characterized by six key elements. The first was the growing visibility of the LP candidate, Mr Peter Obi as amply demonstrated by his endorsement by former President Obasanjo and the international media. Pre-election opinion polls conducted by many organizations most of which largely favoured the LP candidate in a very manner bolstered the chances of Mr. Obi ahead of the fiercely contested election. The leaked audio telephone conversation between the Founder of Living Faith Church Worldwide, Bishop David Oyedepo, and the LP candidate introduced a disturbing dimension to the growing tension in the land. In the video, Mr. Obi was heard not only soliciting the support of the cleric and his church organization for his presidential ambition; he also described the 2023 election as a “religious war”. The social media war and its contradictions of negative profiling and stereotyping were also a defining element of the 2023 presidential election. The support group of Mr. Obi, popularly known as the ‘Obidient Movement’ was the most vociferous in this respect. The last but not the least of the elements was the ‘Lagos is no man’s land’ controversy.

The controversy of ‘Lagos as no man’s land’ was rooted in politicized competing claims of nativity and indigeneity of the cosmopolitan state. This controversy



was to become a heated campaign issue during the gubernatorial election of March 18, 2023. Two issues acted as catalysts to the 'no man's land' debate. The first was the rising profile of the Labour Party in Lagos state occasioned by the aggressive mobilization of Igbo people, and to a lesser degree, Christians to vote LP. The second was the controversy generated by the indigeneity of the LP governorship candidate, Mr. Gbadebo Chinedu Rhodes-Vivour. Gbadebo has a Yoruba father and an Igbo mother. A faction of Afenifere, the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group led by Pa Ayo Adebajo waded into the controversy. The group not only insisted that Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour is a Yoruba man, but the organization urged the people of Lagos State to vote for the LP candidate.

The contestation over the native status of Lagos state drew bad blood between Yoruba and Igbo people resident in the state. Arising from ethnic mistrust between the two groups, routine governmental actions were tarred with ethnic motivation brush. For instance, the demolition of distressed structures at Alaba International Market (dominated by Igbo traders) by the Lagos State Building Control Agency (LASBCA) was perceived in some quarters as a punitive action targeted at Igbo people for not voting APC in the presidential election. Indeed, former Minister of Education, Mrs Oby Ezekwesili in a Twitter post challenged the Lagos State Government to prove that the demolition exercise was not a vengeful act against the Igbo traders in the popular market. Frankly speaking, it could be difficult to dismiss the suspicion of vindictiveness and vengeance if one considers the fact that the demolition exercise came less than two weeks after the Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Mudasiru Obasa told the world that the state legislature would do all within its legislative powers to protect the indigenes of the state.

There was however another perspective to the Lagos status controversy. A certain Pelumi Olugbenga suggested that the controversy may have been orchestrated by some unscrupulous politicians loyal to the political establishment in Lagos state to discredit the Igbo community in the former federal capital. He noted that the rhetoric of Lagos as no man's land is promoted every election year in Lagos to earn political advantage. One telling fact about the ethno-religious dynamics of the 2023 presidential election is that while the sectarian dimension of the contestation is national in scope, its ethnic dimension is restricted to

the southern half of the Nigerian federation. That is, the ethnic hostility that marred the 2023 presidential poll was simply between the Yoruba and the Igbo who occupy the South West and the South East regions of the federation respectively. For the first time, the Hausa-Fulani-dominated core North was not manifestly drawn into the ethnic schism that defined the 2023 presidential election; even when a Muslim northerner, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, was on the presidential ballot. This explains why most of the post-election altercations, hot exchanges, deployment of hate speeches, and prejudices have been between the Yoruba and Igbo elements.

The pervading mood across the country at the end of the 2023 elections approximated that of a nation at war. The outcome of the election has practically created sharp divisions within the federal polity throwing up certain group identities as winners and others as losers. This has in a very strong manner strained national cohesion. There were sincere deep concerns about the health of the national society. From all geo-political zones of the Nigerian federation, political leaders, religious leaders, and other important public personalities were concerned that the nation has never been this ethnically and religiously divided in its post-colonial history. The president-elect alluded to the disunity in the land in his acceptance speech after the official declaration of the result of the presidential election. He said: "...there are divisions amongst us that should not exist. Many people are uncertain, angry, and hurt..." He then made a plea to Nigerians: "Let us begin to heal and bring calm to our nation."

This paper is not under any illusion that the TRC option is the only approach to achieve unity and national cohesion in the face of the current uncertainties that Nigeria is currently contending with. Of course, there are certainly many approaches that can be adopted to address the current challenges facing Africa's largest electoral democracy. This paper however argues that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission approach, if sincerely initiated and creatively managed, remains the best and the most effective instrument of national healing in the current circumstances of the Nigerian nation. Justifying the imperative of a national forum to address the current state of the Nigerian nation, the Premium Times, a prominent national daily in Nigeria, wrote in its March 27, 2023 Editorial titled '2023 Elections, Divisive Politics, and National

Reconciliation' noted that: "The recent elections have...exacerbated latent and unresolved national issues, including those from as far back as the Nigerian civil war of 1969-1970. The country has failed to fully reflect on the war and robustly invest in enduring protocols of national unity..."

### **Returning to the Oputa Path: Will the Story be Different this time Around?**

In returning to the path of truth and reconciliation commission, it would be naïve to think that the journey would be smooth and easy. While the idea of TRCs as an enduring and efficacious tool of peacebuilding is growing across the world, the extent to which they can meaningfully contribute to democratic advancement and restorative justice is premised on certain "preconditions for success" (El-Masri et al., 2020). One of these preconditions is the existence of core democratic values including respect for human rights and total commitment to justice and the rule of law. Against the backdrop of the not-too-pleasant experience of Nigerians with the Obasanjo-initiated Oputa panel, deciding to follow the path again more than two decades after the first trial may not elicit optimism from many Nigerians.

It is apposite to identify possible constraints or impediments to any effort at genuine reconciliation under the current realities in the country. Insincerity or lack of political will on the part of current holders of state power may constitute a huge impediment to the achievement of true national reconciliation in Nigeria. Experience in some countries demonstrates that political incumbents may want to appropriate TRC as an instrument of regime legitimation rather than a tool for national healing. The continued retention of old prejudices by ethnic or regional leaders is another constraint against successful and enduring reconciliation. The age-long prejudices and perceptions particularly among the major ethnic groups which were formed in the pre-independence era have continued to endure in the post-colonial politics of Nigeria. This breeds mistrust and animosity among ethnic identities. The abysmal failure of the Oputa panel may kill the enthusiasm of certain elements and groups within the polity about the utilitarian value of the TRC. Also, the fear of potential post-TRC backlash may discourage ordinary Nigerians from making an appearance before a truth and reconciliation panel. However, despite these potential challenges, the story

could still be different from our experience because of the following enabling factors.

The context in which the Oputa panel operated was different from the present realities of our nation. The HRVIC operated in a context of nascent democracy with a real spectre of democratic reversal. There were credible concerns within the polity that the need to guard the new constitutional rule was greater than digging up old wounds and events that were capable of endangering democratic rule. Today, 24 years after the inauguration of the fourth republic, Nigerian democracy has achieved modest gains including the alternation of party in power and less fear of relapsing into authoritarianism. Also, the reason for a truth and reconciliation commission is different in the two periods. The primary reason for instituting the Oputa panel was the investigation of human rights abuse that defined prolonged military rule in Nigeria. Outcomes of such investigations may involve conviction, sanction, and reparation which may jeopardize post-TRC cohabitation. In the present circumstances however, the key reason for a truth and reconciliation panel is to mend fractured inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations; as well as moderate inter-group competition for power and access. Outcomes of such initiatives are usually psychological restitution rather than material reparation even as little premium is placed on conviction and sanction. Furthermore, the current period has the advantage of the existence of regional, and cultural groups and faith-based organizations that can facilitate quick national healing and cohesion. Such groups include South East Consultative Forum, South-South Consultative Assembly, Afenifere group, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Middle Belt Forum, Ijaw National Congress, Arewa Consultative Forum, and the Nigeria Inter-Religion Council (NIREC) co-chaired by the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Also, the successful implementation of the Amnesty programme in the Niger Delta by the federal government is a pointer that despite its limitations, the Nigerian state can manage ethnic or group agitations. Lastly, the general perception of President Bola Tinubu as a nationalist without the blemish of tribalism or religious bigotry is a huge social capital that can drive genuine reconciliation in our present circumstances as a nation. These personal attributes of the president will go a long way in building the confidence of critical stakeholders in the reconciliation project.

## **Concluding Remarks**

There is no denying the fact that the aftermath of the 2023 elections has significantly strained inter-group relations in Nigeria. The elections were fiercely contested along identity lines and the mistrust and animosity that the elections generated have continued to endure, this reality poses a challenge to the Tinubu presidency to initiate the process of national healing and trust restoration among diverse identities within the Nigerian nation. This paper has argued that whereas the current situation in the country is disconcerting, the situation can be redeemed if the political leadership addresses the problem with the right approach and utmost sincerity. The paper argues that a truth and reconciliation commission approach represents a good option for Nigeria in confronting the current situation. While achieving the confidence of the feuding parties in a conflict may be herculean, genuine and sincere reconciliation has proved to be an effective tool of peace management and inter-group cohesion (Olaopa, 2023). As a point of emphasis, the proposed truth and reconciliation commission will not aim to seek out perpetrators of atrocities and impose sanctions. Rather, it seeks to promote the spirit of 'forgetting' and 'forgiving.' Thus, the central character of the reconciliation project will be reconciliatory rather than restorative. Therein lies the hope of national cohesion in Nigeria.

In the case of the African continent, deliberate efforts must be made by both the state and non-state actors to sustain democratic rule that recognizes and promotes cultural diversity. Young (2000) observed more than two decades ago that widespread disorder and generalized conflict posed a potent threat to African progress; insisting that only a democratic and constitutional governance framework could guarantee the requisite political order for economic progress as well as cultural diversity that defined African states.

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