Chapter Seventeen

Leadership and Development in Nigeria: Analysis of Twenty-Five Years of Democratic Governance

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Introduction

Since Nigeria became independent in 1960, leadership has been the most important concern of not only the ruling class but of the ordinary Nigerian. Very often, our leaders have come up with many books describing the problems of leadership and its challenges in Nigeria. Apart from politicians, ordinary Nigerians also write on the issue of leadership in Nigeria, mourn the lack of proper leadership, and identify leadership problems as the single most important obstacle to the country's development. The concern with the issue of leadership in Nigeria is that, in spite of these problems, the gap between the Nigerian state and society has been widening. This has resulted in increasing discussion on problems of legitimacy -, scholars, students, and politicians are gearing up for an eventual legitimating crisis. Over the past twenty-five years, the trajectory of leadership and development in Nigeria has undergone a complex evolution, reflecting both the promise and the challenges of democratic governance in one of Africa's most populous and economically significant nations.

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has navigated a tumultuous political landscape characterized by efforts to institutionalize democratic principles, stimulate economic development, and address a plethora of social issues. This period, spanning from 1999 to 2024, offers a rich tapestry of experiences that illuminate the dynamic interplay between leadership and development within the context of Nigerian democracy. Consequently, a new era led by Olusegun Obasanjo, who was preceded by a succession of democratically elected presidents, began in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, when military rule came to an end. The prospect of stable governance and progress was promised by this transition, but it also revealed serious obstacles to development and governance. The time under examination is significant because it captures Nigeria's democratic governance goals and challenges. Nigeria is a nation known for its diversity, wealth of natural resources, and glaring socio-economic inequality.

However, one of the main concerns that have emerged during this time is how well leadership promotes sustainable development. The ability of Nigeria's leadership to realize the country's potential while addressing problems like socioeconomic inequality, infrastructure deterioration, and corruption has come

under close examination. Since the effectiveness of governance has a significant impact on both the implementation of policies and the country's overall developmental trajectory, the leadership question is inextricably related to developmental results (Feyisetan, 2020; Olusola, 2021). Moreover, Nigeria's 25-year democratic journey has been characterized by both advancements and regressions. On the one hand, there have been noteworthy developments in fields like institutional reform and democratic involvement. However, obstacles including political unrest, electoral fraud, and regional disputes have made it more difficult to advance development (Ojo, 2019; Adebanwi, 2023). This contradiction draws attention to the necessity of a thorough examination of how governance frameworks and leadership styles have shaped developmental results.

Arising from the above, the central problem of this chapter is to examine how leadership practices and developmental strategies have influenced Nigeria's socio-economic and political trajectories from 1999 to 2024; to critically examine whether the democratic leadership has effectively addressed Nigeria's development needs or if it has merely perpetuated existing issues; and to establish how several Nigerian administrations have handled the challenging issues of growth and governance, as well as how their approaches have affected the course of the nation.

Literature Review

The chapter is anchored on three interrelated concepts, namely, leadership, development and democratic governance. The nexus between leadership, development, and democratic governance is crucial for fostering sustainable progress in any society. Effective leadership drives development by setting strategic goals, mobilizing resources, and inspiring innovation. Good leaders create environments that promote economic growth, social equity, and institutional resilience. Democratic governance plays a key role by ensuring that leadership is accountable, transparent, and responsive to the needs of citizens. It provides a framework where policies are debated, implemented, and adjusted based on public feedback and collective interests. In turn, this democratic process supports more inclusive and equitable development, as diverse voices contribute to decision-making.In summary, strong leadership accelerates development, while democratic governance ensures that this development is inclusive, accountable, and aligned with the public good. It is, therefore, pertinent to define and explain these concepts within the context of the study.

Traditionally, leadership is often defined as the ability to influence and guide individuals or groups towards achieving common goals. This perspective highlights the role of leaders in shaping the direction and fostering the development of their teams (Northouse, 2018). The transformational perspective emphasizes

inspiring and motivating followers to exceed their self-interests for the sake of the organization or a collective cause. Thus, leaders are seen as change agents who drive significant change through vision, enthusiasm, and personal example (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Some situational leadership theorists argue that effective leadership depends on the situation and the needs of the followers. Therefore, leaders must adapt their style to fit the maturity level and competence of their team members (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2013). The servant leadership focuses on the leader's role as a servant first. This approach emphasizes empathy, stewardship, and the prioritization of the nation's development and growth (Greenleaf, 1977).

Governance challenges in Nigeria highlight the need for transformational leadership to reform institutions and improve service delivery. Studies show that leadership effectiveness is closely linked to governance quality and public trust (Ogunyemi, 2014). Leadership in Nigeria presents unique challenges and opportunities. The country's diverse socio-political landscape and economic conditions significantly impact leadership and development. As Ezeani (2015) has noted, effective leadership is crucial for economic development in Nigeria. Leaders need to address issues like corruption, infrastructural deficits, and policy inconsistencies to foster sustainable growth.

Similarly, development is generally understood as the process of improving the quality of life and well-being of individuals through the enhancement of their capabilities and freedoms. Governance in this context involves creating and implementing policies that enable people to achieve their potential (UNDP, 1990). From an economic perspective, the World Bank (1992) defines development as the process of economic growth and the improvement of living standards through economic policies, infrastructure, and institutions. This definition underscores the fact that effective governance is crucial for creating a stable environment conducive to economic development. Therefore, development is viewed as the improvement of governance structures and processes to ensure transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness. Good governance facilitates equitable development and the effective implementation of policies. In the view of Narayan (1995), development involves empowering communities through participatory governance structures that allow local populations to engage in decision-making processes. This approach emphasizes local ownership and self-reliance in the development process.

From a sustainable development perspective, development is defined as a process that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Commission, 1987), Governance in this context focuses on integrating environmental, economic, and social policies to promote long-term sustainability. Development is seen as the enhancement of institutional capacities and governance frameworks that facilitate

effective policy implementation, legal reforms, and the rule of law (North, 1990). Strong institutions such as the executive and legislative arms of government are necessary for sustainable and inclusive development. Of note, challenges in development, particularly in the realm of political instability and socio-economic have led to the nation's progression from a state-controlled political system. This system has been influenced by governance structures, which have been further complicated by the expectations of political leaders and groups who sought to utilize state resources to benefit their interests.

In a related development, democratic governance refers to a system of governance that emphasizes the participation of the public in the decision-making processes of government. This system is characterized by principles such as popular sovereignty, political equality, and accountability. Democratic governance seeks to ensure that the power to make decisions is derived from the will of the people and that such decisions are made in a transparent and accountable manner. At the heart of democratic governance is the principle that ultimate authority rests with the people. This means that government officials are elected by the populace and must act in the interests of their constituents (Dahl, 1989). Secondly, in a democracy, all citizens have equal rights to participate in the political process. This includes the right to vote, run for office, and express opinions freely (Rawls, 1971). Thirdly, elected officials are accountable to the public. This accountability is enforced through mechanisms such as regular elections, where citizens can vote to retain or remove officials from office based on their performance (Schedler, 1999). Fourthly, democratic governance requires that government actions and decisions be made openly and transparently. This allows citizens to be informed about governmental processes and to hold officials accountable for their actions (UNDP, 2014).

Scholars and practitioners have argued that corruption undermines democratic governance by eroding trust in public institutions and skewing decision-making processes (Kaufmann et al., 2009). The rise of populist leaders and movements can challenge democratic norms and institutions. These leaders may undermine democratic processes and concentrate power, posing risks to democratic stability (Mounk, 2018). Moreover, political and economic inequality can limit effective participation and representation in democratic governance. In this context, citizens do not have an equal voice and access to opportunities (Piketty, 2014). On the whole, democratic governance represents a system where power is derived from the people and is exercised with a commitment to principles such as political equality, accountability, andtransparency.

In recent years, democratic governance in Nigeria has been marked by both progress and setbacks. This section on empirical evidence provides insights into the effectiveness of democratic institutions and processes. For instance, Ojo (2022)

evaluates the impact of electoral reforms on democratic governance. The study reveals that while reforms have improved electoral integrity, challenges such as electoral fraud and violence remain pervasive. The rule of law is essential for democratic governance. Thus, Oladipo and Akintoye (2020) discuss how adherence to legal frameworks affects governance in Nigeria. They argue that strengthening the rule of law is crucial for ensuring fair and transparent governance practices. The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in promoting democratic governance is also significant. Ajayi and Fagbenro (2021) analyze the impact of CSOs on policy-making and governance. Their findings suggest that active civil society engagement contributes to greater accountability and citizen participation. The empirical literature on leadership, development, and democratic governance in Nigeria underscores the multifaceted nature of these and other issues.

Theoretical Framework

Although there are several theories of legislative leadership, development and governance, the most suitable adopted to guide this study are the transformational leadership theory and participatory democracy.

The transformational leadership theory

Originally espoused by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bernard M. Bass (1985), the theory emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating followers to exceed their self-interests for the good of society. The theory emerged from extensive study of political and organizational leadership, and it represented a significant shift from the traditional focus on transactional leadership, which emphasized exchanges and agreements between leaders and followers. Generally, the theory provides a framework for identifying and developing leaders who influence the performance, growth, and well-being of their followers. It is based on several fundamental principles and assumptions.One of the core assumptions of transformational leadership theory is that leaders, that is, those at the helm of affairs in governance and the citizens engage in a reciprocal relationship where both can inspire and elevate each other. This relationship is characterized by mutual respect and the capacity for both parties to influence and motivate one another beyond mere transactional exchanges (Bass, 1985).

The assumption underscores the importance of emotional and intellectual stimulation in the leadership process. Transformational leadership posits that leadership is not a one-way influence but rather an interactive process where leaders actively engage with followers. Leaders are expected to create a shared vision and foster an environment where followers are motivated to align their personal goals with society's objectives (Burns, 1978). This assumption highlights the dynamic and relational nature of leadership.Therefore, transformational leaders are seen as

agents of change who inspire followers to transcend their self-interests for the sake of societal development. They are expected to challenge the status quo, encourage innovation, and inspire a sense of purpose and commitment to change (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This suggests that transformational leaders are proactive and visionary, focusing on long-term goals and developmental change.

Furthermore, transformational leadership assumes that effective leaders can enhance followers' intrinsic motivation and foster personal growth. Leaders are expected to provide intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation, which collectively contribute to followers' development and commitment (Northouse, 2018). This assumption emphasizes the leader's role in facilitating followers' personal and professional growth. An underlying assumption of transformational leadership theory is that effective transformational leaders exhibit charismatic qualities that inspire and attract followers. Charisma in this context is not merely about personal charm but involves the ability to articulate a compelling vision and foster emotional connections with followers (Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

The assumption points to the importance of leaders' attributes in the transformational process. The theory assumes that transformational leadership is effective when there is congruence between the leader's values and the values of the followers. This alignment helps in creating a shared vision and motivates followers to work towards common goals with a sense of unity and purpose (Bass, 1990). This assumption highlights the role of value congruence in achieving transformational outcomes. Transformational leadership assumes that leaders focus on long-term outcomes rather than short-term gains. Leaders are expected to foster a vision that extends beyond immediate objectives, aiming to achieve significant and enduring impacts on the organization and its members (Avolio & Bass, 2004). This assumption reflects the theory's orientation towards long-term state effectiveness and growth.

Participatory democracy theory

The theory emphasizes the role of citizens in direct involvement in the political decision-making process. It advocates for a more active role for the general populace. This approach fosters greater engagement and direct influence over political processes and outcomes. Several key theorists and activists have been instrumental in shaping and promoting the theory of participatory democracy. These include Carole Pateman, and Benjamin Barber, among others. Pateman, (1970) argues that participatory democracy is essential for achieving genuine democracy. She emphasizes that participatory practices can lead to more equitable social relations and a more informed and engaged citizenry, which would translate to societal development. Similarly, Barber (1984) posits that participatory

democracy can revitalize political engagement and create more responsive governance structures. He argues that citizens should have a direct role in decision-making to strengthen democratic institutions.

Drawing from the above, participatory democracy rests on several core assumptions: First, citizens are not only interested in politics but also capable of contributing meaningfully to decision-making processes. This involves a belief in the competency and willingness of individuals to engage actively in political life. Second, all citizens should have equal opportunities to participate in political processes, without barriers such as socioeconomic status, education, or geographic location. Third, it advocates for direct engagement rather than indirect representation, believing that people should have a say in decisions that affect their lives rather than relying solely on elected representatives. Fourth, participatory democracy assumes that policies and decisions made through broad citizen engagement are more legitimate and reflective of the public will, leading to increased trust in governance.

In applying the theory to this paper, it is pertinent to state that Nigeria transitioned to democratic governance in 1999 after a prolonged period of military rule. This period of democratic governance has seen various leaders and administrations grapple with issues of development, governance, and leadership. Therefore, the theory suggests that greater citizen engagement could lead to more responsive and accountable governance. In Nigeria, initiatives such as town hall meetings, citizen forums, and participatory budgeting have been implemented to involve citizens in the decision-making process. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives has been inconsistent.

Leadership trajectory in Nigeria since independence

Historically, the leadership trajectory in Nigeria from independence reflects a tumultuous period marked by shifts between civilian and military rule, coups, and political instability. The nation gained independence from Britain in 1960, with Sir Nnamdi Azikiwe serving as the first President and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as Prime Minister. This era, characterized by a fragile democracy and regional rivalries, saw escalating tensions between the major ethnic groups: the Igbo, Hausa-Fulani, and Yoruba. In January 1966, a coup led by Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi overthrew the civilian government. His brief tenure was followed by another coup in July 1966, leading to General Yakubu Gowon's leadership. This period witnessed the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also known as the Biafra War, which was rooted in ethnic and regional conflicts (Akinyemi, 2019). Post-war, Gowon's government continued until 1975, when a coup led by General Murtala Mohammed brought a new military regime. Mohammed's tenure, although brief, was noted for attempts at political reform and anti-corruption measures. He was

succeeded by General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976, who oversaw a transition to civilian rule, leading to the return of democracy in 1979 with the election of Shehu Shagari as President (Osaghae, 1998).

The Second Republic under Shagari was marked by political instability and allegations of corruption. The military intervened again in December 1983 through a coup led by General Muhammadu Buhari, who then implemented policies aimed at combating corruption and economic mismanagement. However, Buhari's regime was also characterized by human rights abuses and economic difficulties (Iroanusi, 2021). Buhari was overthrown in August 1985 by General Ibrahim Babangida, who introduced significant economic reforms and attempted to transition to civilian rule. His tenure saw the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, which was widely regarded as the freest and fairest election in Nigeria's history, leading to political crisis and unrest (Adeleke, 2010). However, Babangida's policies and his eventual stepping down in 1993, following intense pressure, set the stage for a new era of political reform. Following Babangida's resignation, Chief Ernest Shonekan briefly led an interim government before General Sani Abacha took power in a 1993 coup. Abacha's rule was marked by authoritarianism and widespread human rights abuses. His death in 1998 led to a transition towards civilian rule under General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who managed the handover to the democratically elected President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999, marking the beginning of the Fourth Republic and a new era of democratic governance (Ademola, 2016).

From 1999 to date, a period classified as the Fourth Republic, leadership has been marked by a series of transformative and often contentious periods. This era, starting from the end of military rule and the transition to democratic governance, has been characterized by diverse leadership styles, varying degrees of political stability, and significant socio-economic challenges. Table 1 shows the development challenges for successive administration from the beginning of the Fourth Republic.

Table 17.1: Leadership focus and development issues in the Fourth Republic

Period	Leader	Leadership Role	Key Leadership Focus	Development Issues
1999-2007	Olusegun Obasanjo	President	- Transition from military to civilian rule. - Economic reforms (Privatization, Debt relief). - Strengthening democratic institutions.	- Infrastructure development (roads, power, telecoms). - Economic growth, but corruption remained an issue. - Health (HIV/AIDS). - Education reform (university autonomy). - Oil sector mismanagement.

2007-2010	Umaru Musa Yar'Adua	President	- Consolidation of democracy. - Advocacy for rule of law and due process. - Niger Delta peace efforts.	- Niger Delta crisis and militancy. - Power sector reform initiatives. - Addressing poverty and unemployment. - Health challenges (especially Malaria, Polio). - Weakness in governance due to illness.
2010-2015	Goodluck Jonathan	President	Continuation of Yar'Adua's policies. Emphasis on reforms in ed_ health, and agriculture. Transformation Agenda.	- Boko Haram insurgency and national security. - Corruption scandals (e.g., oil theft, fuel subsidy fraud). - Power sector privatization. - Infrastructure deficits. - Youth unemployment and poverty.
2015-2023	Muhammadu Buhari	President	- Anti-corruption fight. - Reorientation of Nigerian leadership. - Focus on security (Boko Haram, Fulani herders' conflicts). - Economic diversification (Agriculture, Mining).	- Economic recession, rising debt. - Insecurity (Boko Haram, banditry, kidnapping). - Job creation and youth empowerment. - Infrastructure projects (rail, roads). - Poor healthcare and education.

Source: Authors compilation 2025

Table 17.1 above identifies the period, leader, leadership role key leadership focus and developmental issues associated with each administration within the period. For instance, Obasanjo's presidency was characterized by efforts to consolidate democracy, economic reforms, and a focus on anti-corruption. Consequently, Obasanjo's leadership was instrumental in reintroducing democratic norms and institutions. His administration initiated economic reforms aimed at stabilizing the economy and reducing debt. The government implemented the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), which sought to address poverty and enhance economic growth (Olukotun, 2002). However, Obasanjo's presidency was also marked by criticisms of corruption and the erosion of democratic principles. His attempts to amend the constitution to extend his tenure were met with widespread opposition and were ultimately unsuccessful (Balarabe, 2006). Following Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua assumed the presidency in 2007. Yar'Adua's administration faced significant challenges, including ill health

and political instability. Despite promising reforms and a commitment to tackling corruption, Yar'Adua's tenure was marred by health issues, which led to prolonged periods of incapacitation and eventually his death in 2010 (Adekanye, 2010).

Interestingly, Goodluck Jonathan, who succeeded Yar'Adua through the doctrine of necessity, continued as President after winning the 2011 elections. Jonathan's tenure was notable for its focus on infrastructural development and education. His administration launched the transformation agenda, aimed at modernizing various sectors of the economy (Duru, 2014). However, Jonathan's presidency faced severe criticism due to widespread corruption, particularly concerning the management of the oil sector, and the inability to effectively address the growing insurgency of Boko Haram (Okoro, 2013). In May 2015, Muhammadu Buhari, a retired Major General and former military ruler, was elected President. His campaign focused on anti-corruption and security, resonating with voters disillusioned by the previous administration's handling of these issues (Ezeani, 2016). Buhari's leadership brought a renewed emphasis on fighting corruption through various initiatives, including the establishment of the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) and increased scrutiny of government expenditures (Akanbi, 2018). Buhari's tenure also witnessed significant challenges. The fight against Boko Haram continued, with mixed results.

Although there were notable military successes against the insurgents, the group remained a significant threat in the northeastern region of Nigeria (Chothia, 2019). Economic management was another contentious issue. Buhari's administration faced criticisms over handling economic downturns and fluctuating oil prices, which impacted Nigeria's economy (Oluwole, 2020). Moreover, Buhari's presidency was criticized for alleged human rights abuses, particularly concerning the treatment of protestors and dissenting voices. The #EndSARS protests of 2020, which called for police reform and an end to police brutality, highlighted significant issues within the security apparatus (Akinmoladun, 2021). Of note, the period covered by this study has been a complex and evolving narrative of leadership. Each administration faced unique challenges and left a distinct mark on the nation's socio-political and economic landscape.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of leadership and development questions in Nigeria over the past twenty-five years of democratic governance reveals a complex interplay of achievements and challenges. This period, beginning with the transition from military to civilian rule under President Olusegun Obasanjo has been marked by significant political, economic, and social changes. This section synthesizes the key findings from the study, highlighting trends, successes, and ongoing issues within

Nigeria's democratic framework.The transition to democracy in 1999 was a pivotal moment for Nigeria. The return to civilian rule under the leadership of President Obasanjo marked the end of prolonged military regimes and set the stage for democratic consolidation (Ikejiani-Clarke, 2007). Since then, Nigeria has held multiple elections, demonstrating a degree of political stability that was previously elusive. However, this stability has been uneven, with notable instances of electoral violence and allegations of electoral fraud (Akinola & Akinola, 2019). The effectiveness of leadership in Nigeria has varied significantly across different administrations. President Obasanjo's tenure was marked by efforts to address corruption and infrastructure deficits, but his presidency also faced criticism for inefficiency and nepotism (Fukuyama, 2014).

Successive leaders, including Presidents Umaru Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, and the incumbent President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, have faced both commendation and criticism for their governance styles and achievements. Buhari's anti-corruption campaign, for instance, was lauded but also criticized for its selective enforcement and perceived ineffectiveness (Okunoye, 2021).

As noted by Akinyemi (2020) and Nwankwo (2021), Nigeria's leadership landscape has evolved significantly from the military-backed civilian transition of 1999 under President Olusegun Obasanjo to the present administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Over the years, leadership styles have ranged from Obasanjo's reformist approach to Goodluck Jonathan's more conciliatory style, and Muhammadu Buhari's focus on anti-corruption and security. However, the nation's economic trajectory since 1999 has been characterized by both growth and significant challenges. The country experienced periods of robust economic growth, driven by high oil prices and increased foreign investment. For instance, Nigeria's GDP grew at an average rate of about 7% annually from 2000 to 2008 (World Bank, 2023). However, this growth was uneven and accompanied by high levels of poverty and inequality. The economic downturns, particularly from 2014 onwards due to falling oil prices and global economic slowdowns, highlighted the vulnerability of Nigeria's economy to external shocks (IMF, 2023). Infrastructure development has been a critical area of focus for Nigerian leaders. Investments in road networks, energy, and telecommunications have been significant.

The pace of infrastructure development has often lagged behind the needs of a rapidly growing population. The power sector, in particular, remains a bottleneck, with frequent electricity shortages impacting both businesses and households (Adams, 2022). Efforts to privatize the power sector and attract private investment have met with mixed results. In the realm of social development, education and

healthcare have seen both progress and setbacks. The introduction of policies aimed at improving access to education, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, has had varying degrees of success. While enrollment rates have improved, the quality of education remains a concern, with issues such as inadequate facilities and low teacher quality (Ogunyemi & Adeyemo, 2020). Healthcare improvements have been notable, particularly in the fight against diseases like polio and malaria. However, Nigeria continues to face significant health challenges, including high maternal and child mortality rates and inadequate healthcare infrastructure (World Health Organization, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further strained the healthcare system and highlighted existing vulnerabilities.

Corruption remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, significantly affecting governance and development outcomes. Efforts to combat corruption have been a central theme of various administrations. During the period under review, corruption had profound implications for Nigeria's development. The siphoning of public funds meant that essential services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, were inadequately funded. For instance, the misappropriation of funds earmarked for the power sector and infrastructure projects hindered economic growth and contributed to Nigeria's persistent electricity problems (Oluwaniyi, 2004). The diversion of resources also had a detrimental effect on poverty alleviation efforts. Despite significant oil revenues, which should have bolstered economic development, the benefits did not reach the majority of Nigerians. Instead, a significant portion of these revenues was lost to corrupt practices, exacerbating the gap between the wealthy elite and the general population (Ake, 2004).

Several high-profile cases of corruption during Obasanjo's administration illustrate the scale of the problem. For example, the investigation into the "missing" $12.4 billion in oil revenues from the 1990s highlighted the extent of financial mismanagement and corruption within the government (Nigerian Tribune, 2004). Additionally, allegations of corruption involving members of Obasanjo's inner circle, including his Vice President Atiku Abubakar, further underscored the challenges faced in combating corruption effectively (Adewale, 2002). The oil sector, a major source of revenue for Nigeria, was particularly susceptible to corrupt practices. Reports indicated that substantial funds from oil sales were diverted or mismanaged, limiting their potential positive impact on development (International Crisis Group, 2004). This mismanagement contributed to ongoing economic instability and hindered efforts to improve living conditions for the average Nigerian.

Major Findings

From the forgone analysis, findings from the study revealed as follows: First, Nigerian leadership faces significant challenges including corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and inconsistent policy implementation. The lack of accountability and transparency in both public and private sectors often undermines effective governance and development. Corruption has remained a pervasive issue, undermining development efforts and governance. Dickson and Ezirim (2017) had identified corruption occasioned by stealing and misappropriation of public assets, mismanagement and overdependence on oil earnings as the major factors that instigated economic recession in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Despite various anti-corruption campaigns and reforms, high-profile cases and allegations continue to emerge, indicating systemic problems.

Second, Nigeria's heavy reliance on oil exports has made its economy vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. Effective leadership in economic diversification and investment in sectors like agriculture, technology, and manufacturing is essential for sustainable development. Third, attempts by successive administrations to strengthen and weaken democratic institutions have varied considerably. For instance, Obasanjo's tenure saw the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) aimed at combating corruption. However, Buhari's tenure faced criticism for perceived attempts to undermine judicial independence and curtail press freedom.

Fourth, electoral integrity has been a persistent challenge, with issues of electoral fraud and manipulation affecting the credibility of elections. The 2019 and 2023 elections highlighted both progress in terms of technology (e.g., the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System) and ongoing issues with violence and vote-buying. Fifth, economic performance in Nigeria has been a mixed bag. Despite periods of growth, such as the oil boom in the early 2000s, the economy has faced significant challenges including recession, inflation, and unemployment. The implementation of economic policies under Buhari's administration, like the Anchor Borrowers' Programme and the National Social Investment Programmes, aimed to address some of these issues but faced varied success rates.

Sixth, infrastructure development has been a focal point, with mixed results. Projects such as the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway and the Abuja-Kaduna Railway have shown progress, but overall infrastructure development has struggled with inefficiencies and corruption. Social development indicators such as healthcare and education have seen incremental improvements but still lag behind global standards. Seventh, economic inequality and regional disparities remain significant

issues. Northern Nigeria, in particular, faces higher levels of poverty and underdevelopment compared to the southern regions. The Federal Government's attempts at balanced regional development, including various federal allocations and special intervention funds, have not fully addressed these disparities. Eight, security challenges, notably the rise of insurgencies like Boko Haram and banditry, have been a major concern throughout this period. The effectiveness of different administrations in tackling security issues has varied, with persistent issues of under-resourced security forces and inadequate counter-terrorism strategies. Ninth, youth unemployment has been a growing concern, exacerbated by limited job creation and economic instability. High levels of youth unemployment contribute to increased migration pressures, both internally and internationally. Various initiatives have been launched to address youth unemployment, but substantial challenges remain (Olufemi, 2022).

Conclusion

Over twenty-five years of democratic governance in Nigeria, a series of reforms and initiatives aimed at addressing longstanding governance challenges such as corruption, infrastructural deficits, and socio-economic inequalities have witnessed substantial changes and developments in leadership and socio-economic progress. While there have been notable achievements, such as improvements in infrastructure and some economic growth, numerous challenges persist, including corruption, security issues, and regional disparities. However, on the one hand, the democratic period has brought with it increased political participation and a more vibrant civil society, reflecting a growing commitment to governance and accountability. On the other, persistent challenges such as political instability, economic fluctuations, and security concerns have continued to test the resilience and effectiveness of Nigeria's leadership.

The Nigerian government should strengthen independent bodies that oversee government activities and ensure they align with democratic principles. Strengthen anti-corruption agencies and enforce strict penalties for misconduct. The nation should promote federalism by devolving more powers and resources to local governments. This will ensure that development initiatives are more tailored to local needs and can be implemented more efficiently. Diversification of the nation's economy from dependence on oil and invest in other sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing is a *desideratum*. This will create incentives for private sector investment in these areas. Moreover, the federal government should invest in critical infrastructure such as transportation, energy, and communication networks and develop public-private partnerships to leverage resources and expertise.

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