



Governance and the Burden of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria Since 1999

Philip Terzungwe Vande, Ph.D

Department of Political Science, Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State

Received: 25.04.2025 | Accepted: 15.05.2025 | Published: 18.07.2025

*Corresponding Author: Philip Terzungwe Vande, Ph.D

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.16110413](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16110413)

Abstract

Governance has been one of Africa's most significant challenges. Nigeria, the Giant of Africa, appears to lack the capacity to deliver services effectively and has struggled with effective governance despite its immense wealth. Despite democracy being acknowledged as the universal goal of government, a moral imperative, a social process, and an acceptable political practice applicable to all human civilizations, operational democracy has remained elusive and a burden on the African continent. Relying on secondary data and the Marxian theory of the post-colonial state, the study argues that postcolonial Africa's neopatrimonialism has remained antagonistic to democratic consolidation due to the weakness of the democratic movement and the international community's accommodating attitude, which takes African leaders' professed commitment to democracy at face value and overly associates democracy with elections, even when they are rigged. It further submits that Nigeria's democratic legacy has been marred by fraudulent elections, poor leadership, corruption, weak institutions, notably the judiciary, deteriorating infrastructure, widespread and extreme poverty, inadequate governance, and a failing security architecture. Among other recommendations, the study suggests an enhanced and strategic leadership recruitment process, strengthening of institutions, and a concerted effort to combat corruption and poverty.

Keywords: Governance, Democratic Consolidation, Weak Institutions, Poverty, Corruption.

Original Research Articles

Citation: Vande, P. T. (2025). Governance and the burden of democratic consolidation in Nigeria since 1999. *ISA Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(4), [8-17].

INTRODUCTION

When Aristotle proposed that "he who does not need the State is either an angel or a beast," he was the first Political Scientist to support and emphasize the importance and necessity of the State (Polis). The study will be based on the concept of democratic consolidation and utilize secondary data as its methodology to achieve specific findings and provide crucial recommendations for the future of consolidating democracy in Nigeria and throughout Africa. Because the State is the highest form of human organization in society, where individual needs that cannot be met by the family, village, or community are addressed at the State level, Aristotle emphasized the significance of the State, not only because governance only takes place within its borders. Therefore, the state's continued relevance in society depends on its ability to govern effectively. To put it another way, the teleology of the state is governance, and good governance at that. In the same way that organizations and countries use governance to control

their interactions and operations, people utilize it in their daily lives to manage interpersonal relationships.

It is believed that governance is a complex yet ubiquitous force that exists in all societies. Thus, governance is a phenomenon that encompasses the complex networks, processes, relationships, and institutions that enable people and communities to voice their concerns, fulfill their rights and obligations, and resolve disputes. Good governance, a subset of governance that deals with the allocation and management of resources to meet group challenges, is defined by the principles of participation, transparency, accountability, the rule of law, effectiveness, equity, and strategic vision.

Notably, most people now agree that democracy is the best type of government in the world. Democracy is a concept and system of governance that is very old. However, Dahl (1999) argues that early hunter-gatherer societies likely had a form of primitive democracy, characterized by three guiding principles: group identity, minimal outside influence, and the



presumption of equality. A new system of governance was implemented by the Nigerian state following the collapse of the country's autocratic regime in 1999. The military dictatorship gave way to representative democracy because the expectations for an excellent administration were far higher than what democratic institutions seemed capable of providing. It was eventually concluded that the cause and nature of the 1999 transition threatened the foundation of democracy and the continuous efforts to fortify it (Arowolo & Aluko, 2012). Postcolonial Africa's neopatrimonialism has remained hostile to democratic consolidation due to the weak democratic movement and the accommodating attitude of the international community, which takes African leaders' declared commitment to democracy at face value and overly identifies democracy with elections, even those that are rigged. Operating democracy has remained a burden for the African continent, despite the region's shifts from authoritarianism to democratically elected governments since the "Third Wave of Democracy." Africa's democratic practices are nevertheless beset by ineffective government, massive and terrible poverty, deteriorating infrastructure, and a failing security architecture. What specifically is wrong with African democracy, especially in Nigeria? How can Nigeria thrive in a democracy?

CONCEPTUALISATION

Governance

The concept of governance has been explored in various ways. Egwu (2018) defines governance as a government's ability to enact and uphold laws and provide necessary services, regardless of whether it is a democratic system. However, he argues that a democratic framework of governance should take precedence over maintaining a clean and efficient state in order to achieve effective development outcomes. This is based on the organizations, processes, and systems that enable people and organizations to voice their grievances, defend their legal rights, fulfill their obligations, and resolve disputes. According to Audu (2016), governance can also be understood as encompassing all aspects of utilizing both formal and informal institutions to exert authority in the management of a state's resource endowment. Thus, it concerns "how public officials and public institutions obtain and use the power to deliver public goods and services, such as the provision of infrastructure, basic services, and a healthy climate" (Audu, 2016, p. 31). It is clear from the aforementioned that governance encompasses both the process of making decisions and implementing them. Included is the use of administrative, political, and economic authority to regulate a state's operations. The social relationship between the leaders of a political society and the people they govern is referred to as governance. It is sufficient to emphasize that economic growth requires strong and responsible state institutions, which in turn reduce conflict, especially intra-state conflict, prevalent in Nigeria today. Therefore, good governance is characterized by democratic processes, political participation, distributive justice, equity, accountability, efficacy, and transparency. Negative governance is necessary to disprove these.

Democracy

Democracy is a form of government and a deeply rooted culture that allows citizens to participate in the political process and holds elected and appointed state officials accountable and responsive. It is a legitimate system of government governed by a body of laws that protects people's fundamental rights, encompassing civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. Thus, democracy is fundamentally a people-centered system. Fundamental individual freedom and broad participation are among its defining characteristics. To have an elected, accountable, and responsive government, Ukase (2014) emphasized that democracy necessitates that people be governed by their consent and mandate, which are freely given.

Furthermore, the claim that democracy requires the capacity to engage in political decision-making has been made accurately (Oke, 2010). This bolsters Ake's (1991) claim that democracy rejects authoritarianism and arbitrariness, celebrates the consent of the governed, and preserves human personality and values. Thus, democracy, whether liberal, African, or modern, refers to a system of governance that guarantees equal opportunities for all, the fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty, representativeness, majority rule, minority rights, consultation, freedom to choose from a wide range of programs, consensus on basic issues, and regular elections. In a democracy, every citizen has the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Despite differences in how democracy is conceptualized and used, all conceptions of democracy aim to rule society in a way that power genuinely belongs to the people.

Consolidation of Democracy

Democracy is a form of government and a deeply rooted culture that allows citizens to participate in the political process and holds elected and appointed state officials accountable and responsive. It is a legitimate system of government governed by a body of laws that protects people's fundamental rights, encompassing civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. As a result, democratic consolidation indicates a level of maturity in democracy that renders it immune to reactionary forces, both internal and external, that could threaten or destroy it. Thus, the term "democratic consolidation" describes the challenges in protecting emerging democracies, extending their existence beyond the immediate future, ensuring they are resilient to the threat of authoritarian repression, and erecting barriers against possible waves of reversal (Schedler, 1998).

From a broader perspective, Azeez (2005) contended that democratic consolidation involves more than simply creating democratic institutions and symbols, or toppling supposedly undemocratic individuals and forces. He contends that democracy's survival and consolidation depend heavily on its capacity to uphold political stability, shield the public from the atrocities of war and other violent conflicts, and improve people's material circumstances, including access to adequate and reasonably priced education, housing, better health care, employment opportunities, food, and portable water. In

addition to ensuring the economic well-being of the population, another key component of democratic consolidation is the legitimization of political institutions and processes. According to Diamond (1999, p. 62), democratic consolidation is the process of acquiring broad and profound legitimacy, which leads to all significant political actors—both elites and the popular—thinking that democracy is the best course of action for society among all the workable options they can consider. Additionally, it connects the process of reducing the system's failure probability to the moment at which democracy can be regarded as permanent.

Therefore, democratic consolidation upholds the regime and views the central political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political competition and conformity to democratic principles. It manifests itself in improved economic development, a well-established democratic culture, and a stable party system. Extending the legitimization thesis, Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 33) stressed that democratic consolidation must also involve a shared moral or behavioral commitment to the specific laws, values, attitudes, and practices of a country's constitutional system. Therefore, the growth of democracy depends on protecting and advancing the economic and social freedoms of the populace. When we refer to "democratic consolidation," we mean a political system in which democracy, as a complex network of institutions, laws, and systematic incentives and disincentives, has become "the only game in town," a dominant cultural role, and an immutable system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed the neo-Marxist theory of the post-colonial State, which is a subset of the classical Marxist political economy approach. The writings of Ekeh (1972), Alavi (1973), Ake (1981), and Ekekwe (1986), among others, have contributed to the understanding and explanation of the character of peripheral governments from a Marxist perspective. These works form the foundation of the post-colonial state theory. Understanding the nature, structure, history, composition, and character of peripheral states, such as the Nigerian State, is the primary goal of the theory in order to explain the dynamics of political change and processes within the State. It is sufficient to state that these procedures encompass the essence and character of Nigerian liberal democracy in all its forms. They argued that because the state dominates politics, it is the main factor influencing most societal processes, including civil society and the consolidation of democracy. The thesis holds that the post-colonial state was a product of imperialism. As a result, it has followed the colonialists' developmental objectives, which were established by imperialism and its local sympathizers, rather than representing the interests of the great majority of the indigenous population. It is challenging for the post-colonial state to extricate itself from the dire situation it has found itself in without fundamentally altering its current nature. Engels (1919) wrote, "The state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie," which Omoyibo (2014, p. 23) quotes. Similarly, Ake (1981, p. 5) noted that the state is a specific type of class dominance, where the exchange

of commodities mediates the process of domination. This distinguishes the institutional processes of dominance from those of the ruling class and even presents society as an impartial force that stands alongside the ruling class.

Additionally, Alavi (1973, p. 146) asserts that "post-colonial States and their apparatus are instruments of primitive accumulation by the dominant class and their collaborators." According to Ekekwe (1986), post-colonial administrations are based on the colonial state. This led to the incorporation of several key elements from pre-colonial primitive state structures. The primary objective of the colonial state was to establish conditions that enabled the foreign bourgeoisie to collaborate with the ruling class, exploiting the local populace and natural resources to accumulate wealth. The post-colonial state was constructed on this foundation.

The postcolonial State in Africa is characterized by its limited autonomy, which leads to an exclusive politics expressed in the power struggle based on efficiency norms rather than legitimacy norms; the victory of the vicious over the virtuous circle; the concentration of power; the imposition of political control and dominance; the estrangement of leaders from their constituents; and the use of extremism in the exercise of power. The stakes and battles for state authority are extremely high in this environment and often take the form of "a zero-sum game." The frequency or intensity of the aforementioned forces affects how democracy is operationalized and consolidated in African governments (Ogbonna, 2014).

Because state-building is presented as arbitrary authority, it entails conquest and servitude, undermining it and making it the political equivalent of primordial accumulation "in a rather violent form." It deprives people of their autonomy in a political system that would otherwise be autonomous. It imposes "alien rule" on them by (i) claiming the resources of the lands it controls and (ii) employing "legitimate force" to put an end to resource warfare and opposition to democracy. Therefore, state-building in Africa becomes fairly violent when factions or social classes vie for resources and power (Ake, 1996). The dynamics of socioeconomic formations, their configuration, and their change (including the consolidation of democracy), he continues, depend on a knowledge of the nature, history, and character of the State. Consequently, it is imperative to recognize that the principal attribute of African states is their remarkably low degree of autonomy. This implies that the state's institutional structure limits its independence from the different social classes, especially the hegemonic one. Because of this, it plays a significant role in the ongoing class struggle in society, which has a substantial impact on the preservation of democratic consolidation and sound governance. States in post-colonial formations differ from those in advanced capitalist societies in that, in the latter, factors relating to the level of development of productive forces make the state a direct tool of capital accumulation for the dominant class or its elements. In contrast, in the former, the state serves to uphold the economic and social relations under which bourgeois accumulation occurs (democracy) (Ekekwe, 1986, p. 12). Ake (1996) succinctly addresses the key concerns raised by the neo-Marxist theory of the post-colonial state regarding democracy and African development. Furthermore, "it is

necessary to approach it historically, as the past, rather than specific evolutionary dynamics, has shaped the present, and many modern analysts have chosen to overlook these prior experiences and events," according to Gutkind & Wallerstein (1976, p. 21). The introduction and spread of capitalism, colonialism, or more precisely, colonial imperialism, as well as all the important and complex processes that are revealed in the distinct political, economic, and social framework of colonial and post-colonial Africa, are all examples of social realities that this theory implicitly sees as being clarified and demythologized through historical analysis.

The aforementioned inputs suggest that the neo-Marxian theory of the post-colonial state can be used to analyze Nigerian governance and operational democracy. Consequently, this method has been employed by Arowosegbe (2001) and Ogbonna (2014), among others, to examine various political events, including the consolidation of democracy. This theory is therefore not only well-liked but also helpful in examining significant subjects such as democratic consolidation and governance.

DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

A condition of democratic maturity, known as "democratic consolidation," renders a democracy immune to regressive forces, both internal and external, that could threaten or undermine it. Thus, the term "democratic consolidation" describes the challenges in protecting emerging democracies, prolonging their existence beyond the immediate future, ensuring they are resilient to the threat of authoritarian repression, and erecting barriers against possible waves of reversal (Schedler, 1998).

From a broader standpoint, Azeez (2005, p. 24) contended that democratic consolidation involves more than simply creating democratic institutions and symbols or toppling supposedly undemocratic leaders and forces. He contends that democracy's survival and consolidation depend heavily on its capacity to uphold political stability, shield the public from the atrocities of war and other violent conflicts, and improve people's material circumstances, including access to adequate and reasonably priced education, housing, better health care, employment opportunities, food, and portable water. In addition to ensuring the economic well-being of the population, another key component of democratic consolidation is the legitimization of political institutions and processes. For Diamond (1999, p. 62), democratic consolidation is "the process of acquiring broad and deep legitimacy, such that all significant political actors—both elite and popular—think that democracy is the best course of action for society out of all the workable options they can think of". Additionally, it connects the process of reducing the system's failure probability to the moment at which democracy can be regarded as permanent.

Therefore, democratic consolidation upholds the regime and views the main political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political competition and conformity to democratic principles. Given its robust democratic culture and steady economic growth, it seems to be a stable party system. Extending the legitimization thesis, Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 33) stressed that democratic consolidation must also

involve a shared moral or behavioral commitment to the specific laws, values, attitudes, and practices of a country's constitutional system. Therefore, the growth of democracy depends on protecting and advancing the economic and social freedoms of the populace. If we use the term "democratic consolidation," we mean a political system in which democracy, as a complex network of institutions, laws, and systematic incentives and disincentives, has become "the only game in town," has taken on a dominant cultural role, and is unalterable.

It should be emphasized that democratic consolidation begins when democracy is established following a free and fair election and lasts for a period when there is a very low probability that it will fail or, conversely, a high probability that it will endure. He continues by saying that democratic consolidation entails a process of being widely and deeply legitimized to the point where all important political actors believe that popular rule is the best option for their country. Important political players, all relevant observers, and the general public must then have the hope that the democratic government may last for a reasonable amount of time, allowing it to erect barriers against what Huntington (1991) would refer to as a "reverse wave." Additionally, it is a process that strengthens and develops a new democratic culture to the point that there is a serious risk of it reverting to authoritarianism in the absence of external shocks. According to Huntington (1991), democraticization is merely the elites' agreement that democracy is the best form of governance for themselves and their communities. This suggests that democracy cannot flourish unless those in positions of power want it to.

According to Linz and Stepan (1996), consolidated and non-consolidated democracies differ in their capacity to satisfy the following criteria:

- Democracies require freedom of association and communication.
- A political society must have a free and democratic procedure.
- Constitutionalism and the rule of law are fundamental.
- The state machinery must be impartial and organized by legal-rational bureaucratic norms.
- Opportunities for economic growth must exist, and property rights must be upheld.

Furthermore, two requirements stand out in this context, even though other criteria are proposed to characterize a consolidated democratic system. The first is the "two election test," often referred to as the "transfer of power test," which considers the "behavioural" aspects of democratic consolidation by examining how political players respond when they lose an election, as noted by Schedler (1998). Clearly, democratically elected regimes are unlikely to survive if they lose subsequent elections and fail to accept the results of those elections. Thus, democracy is established when a ruling political class or party loses an election and hands over power to an opposition party (Oni, 2014). This illustrates the readiness of well-known politicians and their supporters to respect election laws and prioritize the democratic system over their

personal or party interests. The second is the "generation test" or "simple longevity" test. The importance of this criterion lies in the fact that years of regular competitive elections should be sufficient to assess whether a democracy has been established, even when power is not transferred to a different political party or class. According to the criterion, regular, lawful, and continuous elections would have ingrained in the populace a mindset that becomes indifferent to any near-replacement of democracy (Oni, 2014).

Therefore, in consolidated democracies, democracy becomes the only feasible alternative when no significant political faction seriously attempts to overthrow the democratic system or provoke domestic or international violence in an attempt to secede from the State. When this happens, the newly elected government that has emerged from the democratic transition is no longer primarily focused on how to avoid a democratic breakdown. From an attitudinal perspective, democracy becomes the norm, even in the face of a serious political and economic crisis; the great majority of people believe that any further political change must originate within democratic processes. Again, when all members of the polity recognize that established norms will settle political disagreements within the State and that breaking these norms is likely to be costly and ineffective, democracy is constitutionally entrenched. Stated differently, democracy becomes routineized with consolidation and becomes thoroughly embedded in social systems. Thus, democratic consolidation requires a state's democracy to be strengthened, preserved, and improved (Ogbonna, 2014).

Democratic regimes must conduct outstanding governance to achieve a consolidated democracy, according to Oni (2014). It also emphasizes the preservation of democratic values, including free and fair elections, judicial independence, adherence to the rule of law, and public participation. Essentially, effective governance fosters greater public welfare, accountability, and transparency among public officials in the administration of state activities, while reducing political violence and corruption. These democratic challenges are among the many difficulties Nigeria has encountered since 1999. Therefore, it is essentially complex, if not impossible, to fully achieve democratic consolidation in all theoretical postulations. As a result, states that primarily satisfy the criteria are referred to as "consolidated."

CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

With great excitement and anticipation, the country began its transition from military authoritarianism to civilian democratic governance once again on May 29, 1999. Since then, the democratic system, including the institutions meant to fortify it and give democracy meaning to the average citizen, has been under some strain due to the patrimonial nature of the State and the legacy of the long military rule, which shared without exception the lack of democracy, accountability, responsiveness, and good governance. It is more realistic to envision the negative impact that the fictitious abuse of these antiquated governing principles would have on Nigerian politics. Although Nigeria has been under a democratic administration for over 20 years, the country has yet to fully

achieve the ideals of good governance, which are a logical consequence of democratic government (Odo, 2015). This is even more worrying.

Academics agree that several problems pose a threat to Nigeria's democratic consolidation. In other words, Nigeria's democratic consolidation is hindered by several factors, including the godfather syndrome, pervasive poverty, election manipulation, ethnic, religious, and identity conflicts, the nature of the struggle for political power, corruption, and a weak enforcement mechanism. Furthermore, Oji (2024) asserts that democracy has become the most potent political force in the world today. Democracy is a preferred and widely favored form of government over others due to its unique significance, applicability, and capacity for citizen participation. The popularity of this political tactic has grown globally over time. Nigeria has been practicing democracy continuously since 1999, for more than 26 years; however, several problems have hindered the country's democratic progress. He added that several issues, such as the godfather syndrome, pervasive poverty, election tampering, ethnic-religious and identity disputes, the nature of the struggle for political power, corruption, and a lackluster enforcement apparatus, are impeding Nigeria's democratic consolidation. A credible electoral system, an independent judiciary, and the rule of law are just a few of the viable democratic institutions that are unable to establish themselves in Nigeria because of widespread corruption in all areas of public life, according to Odo (2015, p. 4). People's trust in politicians has declined as a result of these structural issues becoming frighteningly apparent. These challenges include:

Election irregularities: The electorate can only choose representatives they want to serve in public office and take part in democracy through a credible election. In addition to increasing voter and candidate confidence, this process rekindles the possibility of fortifying democratic institutions and processes (Ebomoyi, 2023). However, Nigeria's elections have been marred by irregularities such as ballot box theft, vote tampering, and voter intimidation. These irregularities have undermined the legitimacy of the country's democracy and eroded trust in the electoral process. Umukoro (2022) asserts that democratic regimes require electoral processes, and Nigeria has made several attempts to improve the integrity of its elections through the implementation of modifications made by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Nigeria's electoral changes from 2010 to 2022 have led to specific technological and institutional innovations. However, they continue to have minimal effect on the consolidation of democracy and election turnout. The quantitative data indicates that while INEC's capacity and enforcement of the law are expanding, public participation is declining and result contestation is rising (Lambe et al., 2023). Furthermore, Mene (2024) affirms that Nigerian election irregularities, including ballot box snatching, vote buying, voter harassment, unauthorized result announcements, and the potential for voter apathy, directly address the study's purpose. This finding aligns with a study by Omilusi (2022), which suggests that election-related corruption influenced the outcomes and hindered the development of democracy in the 2019 general elections. Nigeria's democratic governance has also been significantly

impacted by youth-instigated electoral violence, which has resulted in sociopolitical and economic upheavals.

Corruption: Corruption is a significant barrier to Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Nigeria's democracy remains seriously threatened by widespread corruption, which impacts the country's politics, economy, and society in numerous ways. The absence of effective anti-corruption measures has created an environment that is favorable to corruption. Nigeria ranked 140th out of 180 countries, with a score of 26 out of 100 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024, a marginal improvement from its 2023 score of 25. Despite this slight improvement, Nigeria remains one of the lowest-ranked countries, indicating a persistent governance problem. A closer look reveals systemic problems that continue to hinder Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts. Because Nigeria's policymakers are the primary culprits, the country's efforts to combat corruption have been largely unsuccessful.

Another significant barrier to the successful implementation of democratic government in Nigeria is the widespread corruption that permeates every part of Nigerian society. As a result, Vande and Kussah (2016) claim that an unchecked culture of corruption has continued to plague Nigerian society in all spheres at an alarming rate, encouraging tolerance and acceptance for such a way of life. Again, it is clear that the Nigerian government has not only failed to uphold its moral and religious values but has instead encouraged pure, distorted, unchecked, and unregulated capitalist tendencies, as evidenced by the enduring corruption and the government's seeming incapacity to prevent or mitigate the threat. Examples of this include excessive materialism and the accumulation of national wealth by individuals at the expense of the broader society's well-being and interests (Irikana et al., 2013, p. 30). In other words, Nigeria's persistent corruption and lack of discipline can be attributed to several factors, including the public's admiration and approval of ill-gotten wealth, preoccupation with materialism, and a desire for a rapid path to wealth. Nonetheless, corruption is undoubtedly one of the greatest dangers to societal development and human progress. When such unethical behavior becomes the norm and way of life for a group of people, it is far more severe and worrisome. In such a scenario, the catastrophic effects on the general well-being of society are most easily imagined. Because it not only distorts governance but also permits dysfunctional behavior and promotes the diversion of monies meant for social services into private pockets, corruption is a significant factor undermining democracy and lowering the standard of living for citizens. Without a doubt, the fundamental principles of democracy, such as the need for an accountable and democratic government, have been severely weakened by corruption. When people feel that political leaders are pursuing their interests unduly, they become disillusioned and start to question the legitimacy of the state, its leaders, and even the system and processes that created them. Political corruption has significantly eroded the foundation of state power, casting doubt on the legitimacy of democracy as the most effective system of governance (Ebegbulem, 2020).

Poverty: Despite the country's exceptional affluence, a significant portion of its citizens live below the poverty line.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics' 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index survey (2023), 133 million Nigerians, or 63% of the country's population, live in multidimensional poverty. It also revealed that the National MPI is 0.257, which indicates that people experiencing poverty in Nigeria suffer from just over 25% of all possible deprivations. The relationship between poverty and democratic consolidation is complex; by undermining institutional frameworks and decreasing civic engagement, economic hardship erodes public trust in democratic processes (Okonoboh et al., 2025). However, the loss of the right to vote or even the rise of authoritarian inclinations can sometimes be consequences of extreme poverty. Okonoboh et al. (2025) state that, in addition to holding regular elections, democratic consolidation requires the enshrinement of democratic concepts such as accountability, transparency, and inclusivity (Paalo et al., 2024). Protests, public outrage, and political indifference have all been triggered by the continued economic suffering that a greater number of Nigerians must endure, which further complicates the effort to advance democratic standards. Failure to effectively eradicate poverty has consequences for the consolidation of democracy since it breeds societal instability, political disillusionment, and animosity (Okonoboh et al., 2025). These conditions foster political instability, which could endanger the country's democratic institutions and governance practices. This pervasive sense of failure has contributed to a deterioration in public confidence, as demonstrated by the declining voter turnout in the most recent elections (Stanley et al., 2024). As a result, advancing a more stable and effective democracy becomes challenging. People's social and economic freedoms must be upheld and promoted via democracy. Vande (2013) asserts on page 108 that "democracy is meaningless where there is mass and abject poverty among the people."

Security: Nigeria's main security concerns are insurgency, terrorism, and banditry. Thousands have perished, millions have been displaced, and these security threats have impeded the country's economic growth. Since 1999, Nigeria has faced numerous security issues, making it one of the most pressing concerns. The growing number of internally displaced people (IDPs) has compromised election integrity and transparency, disrupted elections, incited electoral violence, and undermined democratic institutions, according to Awopeju and Adesina (2023). Nigeria's attempts to fortify democracy are severely hampered by the state's responses to several security concerns.

Once again, the Fourth Republic of Nigeria has been unable to fully enjoy the advantages of democracy due to instability and violent extremism. It is concerning that the State has continued to look for good governance in vain and seems to lack the ability, if not the capacity, to monopolize the lawful use of physical force, even though Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 was welcomed in the hopes that it would bring about a good governance regime that would ensure the welfare, peace, and security of the populace (Vande, 2019). This gap has allowed violent extremist groups to flourish and spread, threatening the government's legitimacy and engulfing Nigeria in turmoil. The Nigerian State has witnessed an increasing, pervasive, and complex magnitude of violent conflict that threatens peace, order, and its corporate existence. Nigeria's violent conflicts include the South-South resource-based

conflict, the South-East separatist agitations and self-determination uprisings, the North-East Boko Haram insurgency, the North-Central threat of killer herders, the North-West armed banditry and kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, ethno-religious crises, and communal conflicts. Nigeria's security situation has deteriorated as a result of these developments. The only way to solve the problem is to eradicate violent extremism and insecurity, since they are harmful to democratic governance.

Poor Governance: Nigeria's political structure is often criticized for being ineffective and inefficient. The bureaucracy is notorious for its delay in addressing crises, and the nation's leadership is frequently accused of being disengaged from the concerns of the people. Isinkaye (2024) highlights the need to fortify Nigeria's democratic process while restating that democracy is a universal norm. He maintained that the claim that Nigeria is struggling to achieve democracy is debatable. These problems are complex, encompassing social, political, and economic unrest throughout the country. According to his research, this is because Nigeria's colonial past—which includes a legacy of authoritarianism, paternalistic governance, exclusionary politics, years of military rule, and poor governance by successive civilian governments over time—has negatively impacted the country's democratic process.

The aspiration of Nigerians for an operational and meaningful democracy, driven by efficient administration, has remained elusive due to the challenges that continue to undermine the country's democratization process. One of Nigeria's persistent problems since independence has been the lack of really national and selfless leadership. Scholars like Achebe (1983), El-Rufai (2012), Odo (2015), and Vande & Kussah (2016) have all agreed in their research that Nigeria has experienced subpar leadership. Furthermore, Odo (2015) agrees with El-Rufai (2012) that since gaining political independence in 1960, Nigeria has not had the opportunity to be led by a willing and capable leader; instead, it has been led by individuals who can be best described as "accidental leaders." These are leaders who were appointed to their positions without considering their background or qualifications. Most of the time, they were not prepared for or anticipating this level of responsibility. Due to policies lacking vision, this has contributed to the country's shortcomings. Odo (2015) asserts that the leadership issue highlights the fact that the majority of Nigeria's developmental problems stem from a lack of competent, visionary, and goal-oriented leadership. Therefore, the leadership issue is the primary reason for Nigeria's problems since independence, more so than any other hypothetical or assumed issue that scholars often raise. According to him, most Nigerian leaders have demonstrated a lack of commitment to true nationhood by allowing personal objectives and the influence of regional, ethnic, and religious groups to overshadow national issues.

Therefore, the application of effective leadership, social reformation, the reinforcement of the rule of law, and efficient electoral management is necessary for the consolidation of Nigeria's democratic process (Oni, 2014). The absence of good governance, which can be attributed to faulty constitutional arrangements, corruption, economic mismanagement, undemocratic internal party politics,

fraudulent electoral systems, rule of man rather than rule of law, and a lack of accountability and transparency, is the primary barrier to democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Lack of Democratic Culture: A notable absence of a strong democratic culture persists in Nigeria's democracy. However, to establish a solid democracy, democratic governments must exercise good governance. It also urges upholding democratic values, such as free and fair elections, judicial independence, adherence to the law, and public participation (Oni, 2014). Many Nigerians continue to question the benefits of democracy and often opt for dictatorial rule. As Oji (2024) rightly points out, democracy is currently the most potent political force in the world. Democracy is a preferred and widely favored form of government over others due to its unique significance, applicability, and capacity for citizen participation. The popularity of this political tactic has grown globally over time. Although Nigeria has been practicing democracy continuously for over 26 years, since 1999, several problems have hindered the country's democratic process. Again, the lack of strong governmental institutions capable of enforcing laws and regulations is one of the primary factors impeding Nigeria's democratic consolidation. As a result, public officials can embezzle public funds without fear of repercussions or fines. Nigeria is headed toward becoming a society without a robust and effective legal framework for law enforcement or the judicial system.

One of the primary challenges to establishing an authentic and meaningful democracy in Nigeria is the patrimonial nature of the country's government. A comprehensive grasp of Nigerian governance can be gained from the history and evolution of the Nigerian state, which provides important insights into the nature and character of the state and its political class. Rafiu et al. (2009, p. 157) assert that throughout its development, particularly during the colonial era, the State shaped the viewpoints and gave guidance to indigenous political leaders and citizens. As a result, the Nigerian State was beset by multiple problems and was underdeveloped, distorted, and disarticulated upon gaining independence. Like its colonial predecessor, Nigeria's post-colonial state serves as a tool in the hands of the ruling class to oppress other socioeconomic classes. Furthermore, the Nigerian State is a neo-colonial state that serves to further the interests of the capitalist metropole rather than the interests of the public at large. Political intolerance, a system of public office patronage, a relationship of dominance and control between leaders and the led, and a deeply embedded winner-take-all political system—in which the loser loses everything, sometimes even their life—were all characteristics of the military-style administration that was passed down to it. Therefore, the political environment and governance that have prevailed since independence seriously impede development.

CONCLUSION AND THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

Democracy is, without a doubt, the most widely recognized form of government in the world today. The public finds it immensely appealing, and nearly all governments and

leaders strive to be perceived as democratic. Typically, this is based on the notion that democracy fosters the political and socioeconomic advancement of a community by providing avenues for political engagement. Nigeria has been experimenting with democracy for a record amount of time under the Fourth Republic, but the road to good governance and true democracy has not been clear. One of the problems seen as endangering the realization of practical democracy and good administration is the absence of leadership capable of overseeing a complex and pluralistic state such as Nigeria. Other difficulties include the existence of faulty and inefficient institutions, such as the legislature, the court, and the electoral administration body, as well as the prevalence of poverty and insecurity.

The following suggestions have been put out to help Africa, and especially Nigeria, establish and thrive as a democracy.

There is an urgent need for a strategic and systematic leadership recruitment process in Nigeria. A role that is somewhat similar to that of the king-makers of the past must therefore be played by Nigerian universities and other esteemed institutions, such as the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), trade union organizations, and civil society organizations, all of which possess in-depth knowledge of both domestic and international issues.

Intentional government policies should strengthen the strengthening of institutions in Nigeria. Thus, the legislature, the judiciary, civil society, political parties, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and anti-corruption agencies must be allowed to operate freely and effectively in order for democracy and good governance to thrive and endure.

By implementing people-centered policies and programs that address people's basic needs, a significant effort should be made to reduce poverty and inequality. Nigeria is experiencing a serious social and economic crisis. To help people overcome poverty, create jobs, provide suitable infrastructure, and ensure a decent standard of living for everyone, tangible and progressive policies are required.

Reorienting the public, especially the political elite, to embrace and support the country's values—which promote diligence, honesty, integrity, openness, and accountability at all levels of government—is necessary to shift attitudes. Additionally, people ought to be informed and empowered to ask their elected representatives for reports on their stewardship.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1983). *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Company.
- Adamu, A. (2020). Poverty and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and the Way Forward. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*, 10(1), 25-32.
- Ake, C. (1996). *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- _____ (1991). For Africa, the way forward. *The Guardian*, 13 November, Lagos, pp. 2-3.
- _____ (1981). *A Political Economy of Africa*. London: Longman.
- Alavi, H. (1973). The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh. *New Left Review*, 7 (2).
- Amuwo, A. (2009). The Political Economy of Nigeria's Post-Military Elections, 1999–2007. *Review of African Political Economy*, 36(119), 37-61.
- Arowole, D.E. and Aluko, O.A. (2012). Democracy, Political Participation and Good Governance in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 1(3), 797-809.
- Arowolo, D. and Aluko, F. (2010). Globalisation, Democracy and Good Governance: The Interface. *Academic Leadership Journal*, 8(3), 1-9.
- Arowosegbe, J. O (2001). The Political Economy of State Creation in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ekiti State, an M.Sc. Thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Audu, J. (2016). Good Governance, Bad Governance and National Security: Interrogating the Dichotomy, in Okolie, M., Ibrahim, S. and Saliu, H. (Eds). *Governance, Economy and National Security in Nigeria*, Nigerian Political Science Association.
- Awopuju, A. and Adeshina, D. (2023). Insecurity and Implications of State Response on Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science (NAJOPS)*, 8(1), 125 – 141.
- Azeez, A. (2005). Political Violence in Nigeria: Implications and Options for Democratic Consolidation. In Ayinla, S.A. (Ed.). *Issues in Political Violence in Nigeria*. Ilorin: Hamson Printing Communication.
- Chimee, I. N. (2009). Ideological Flux, Ethnicity and Corruption: Correlates in Explaining Leadership Failure of Nigeria's Founding Fathers, in Edoh, T. et al (eds.). *Democracy, Leadership and Accountability in Post-Colonial Africa: Challenges and Possibilities*, Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.
- Dahl, R. (1999). *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ebegbulem, J.C. (2020). The Impacts of Political Corruption on Democratic Consolidation and

- the Electoral Process in Nigeria. *Academicus - International Scientific Journal*, 21(21), 38–45. DOI: [10.7336/academicus.2020.21.03](https://doi.org/10.7336/academicus.2020.21.03).
- Ebomoyi, I. (2023). Electoral Misconduct and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: From Vote Buying and Selling to Technological Fraud. *South-South Journal of Humanities and International Studies*, 6 (1), 433 – 452.
- Egwu, S. (2018). *Governance, Separatist Agitations and the Survival of the Nigerian State*. A Keynote Address presented at the First National Conference, organised by the Department of Political Science and Diplomacy, Veritas University, Abuja, 5th March, 2018.
- Ekeh, P.P. (1975). Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa. *Comparative studies in society and history*; No.17.
- Ekekwe, E.N. (2006). *An Introduction to Political Economy, Nigeria: Chuzzy Services*.
- El-Rufai, N.A. (2012). *The Accidental Public Servant*. Ibadan; Safari Books Ltd.
- European Union Election Observation Mission (2019). Nigeria 2019 General Elections: Final Report.
- Gutkind, P.C & Wallerstein, I. (1976). *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Huntington, S.P. (1991). *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Irikana, G.J., Epelle, A. & Awortu, B.E. (2013). Cultural Disorganisation and Deepening Crisis of Corruption in Nigeria; A Discourse. *Review of Nigerian Political Economy*, 2 (1 &2).
- Isinkaye, K.A. (2024). The Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *Green University Review of Social Sciences*, 10(1), 51-64.
- Lambe, E. O., Hassan, S.I. and Alabi, A. (2023). Political Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Focus on the 2019 and 2023 General Elections. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 16(2), 453-468.
- Linz, J.J. and Stepan, A.C. (1996). Towards Consolidated Democracies. *Journal of Democracy*, 7(2), 14–33.
- Mene, A.E. (2024). Examining Electoral Irregularities in Nigeria: An In-Depth Analysis of Malpractices During the 2023 General Elections. *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science (NAJOPS)*, 9(1), 133 – 154.
- National Bureau of Statistics (2022). *Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022)*. Abuja. Accessed from <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/news/78>.
- Odo, L.U. (2015). Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: Political Science*, 15(3), 1-9.
- Ogbonna, C.N. (2014). CSOs and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria and Ghana, 2003- 2013. Unpublished M.Sc. Dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Oji, O.R. (2024). Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria (1999-2023). *International Journal of Academic Management Science Research*, 8 (9), 31-45.
- Oke, L. (2010). Democracy and Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, in Agagu, A.A., Arowolo, D., Afinotan, L.A. and Lawal, T. (Eds). *Public Administration in Nigeria*, Alabi-Eyo & Co. Ltd, Akure, pp. 312–322.
- Okonoboh, O.W., Irabor, E.F. and Ogiangbe, O.H. (2025). Poverty and Democratic Consolidation In Nigeria: A Study of President Buhari's Administration. *EDSU Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies (EJPAS)*, 2(1), 62 – 72.
- Okoronkwo-Chukwu, U. (2013). Female Representation in Nigeria: The Case of the 2011 General Elections and the Fallacy of 35% Affirmative Action. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(2), 39-46.
- Omilusi, M. (2022). Ritual of Electoral Democracy, Growing Political Awareness and the Paradox of Contagious Skepticism. *Advances in Politics and Economics*, 5(3), 78-84.
- Omoyibo, K.U. & Moruyi, O. (2014). Political Economy Diagnosis of Crude Oil Theft in Nigeria: The Way Forward. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (2).
- Oni, E.O. (2014). The Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria, 1999-2007. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 5(4), 1–29.
- Oni, E.O. (2014). Democracy and the Challenges of Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *Ibadan Journal of the Social Sciences*, 12 (2), 183 – 200.
- Paalo, S. A., Dotsey, S., Dramani, A., & Apeamenyo, R. (2024). Democracy as Electoral Ritualisation? The Illusion of

Democratic Consolidation in Ghana. *African Journal of Democracy and Election Research*, 4(2), 29-47.

Rafiu, O.O., Owolabi, A. and Folasaye, S.N. (2009). The Nigerian State, Political Assassination and Democratic Consolidation: A Historical Exploration. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 3(2), 156–164.

Schedler, A. (1998). What is Democratic Consolidation? *Journal of Democracy*, 9(2), 91–107.

Transparency International (2024). Analysis of Nigeria's Performance in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024. Accessed from <https://www.fiscaltransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Analysis-of-Nigerias-Performance-in-the-Corruption-Perceptions-Index-CPI-2024.pdf> on 15th July 2025.

Ukase, P. (2014). Interrogating the Nexus between Minority Agitations and Democracy/Good Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, in Egwemi, V. et al (Eds), *Federalism, Politics and Minorities in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Professor G. N. Hembe*, Lagos: DAHITI & DALILI Publishers.

Umukoro, J. (2022). The Impact of Electoral Reforms on Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Legal & Political Studies*, 10(4), 63-67.

Vande, P.T (2019). Governance and the Proliferation of Violent Extremism in Nigeria: Implications for National Security. A Paper Submitted for Presentation at the 32nd Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), at the University of Calabar, Cross River State, from 22nd -25th July, 2019.

Vande, P.T. and Kussah, T.K. (2016). Leadership and National Development in Nigeria: Situating the Missing Link. *Journal of Political Inquiry*, 2(2), pp. 216–230.

Vande, P.T. (2013). Democracy and Socio-Economic Rights. *African Journal Economy and Society*, 2 (1), 105-122.