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From Post-Colonial Optimism to Developmental Crisis: Governance Failure, State Capacity, and the Awolowo Developmental Framework in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria's post-colonial history depicts a shift from early optimism about economic development to a worsening challenge of governance. Due to systemic governance flaws, endemic corruption, and insufficient accountability systems, early trust in state-led development, which is backed by comparatively strong institutions and purposeful leadership, has slowly decreased. Within the context of political economy, this paper examines the structural and ideological underpinnings of this transition, contending that Nigeria's developmental problems stem from both the deterioration of cohesive developmental principles and institutional fragility. The study interrogates the causative factors that surrounds governance failure as well as development outcomes in Nigeria following the country's transition to democratic dispensation in 1999 by using qualitative research techniques with the use of Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) and interviews. This study demonstrates how development has been hindered and public confidence and trust in state institutions has been eroded by elite-driven governance, which is strengthened by ego-driven political maneuvering and low civic involvement. The study also uses Obafemi Awolowo's democratic socialist ideology as a conceptual framework, emphasizing the importance of equitable resource allocation, welfare-oriented governance, and mass education. In order to reverse Nigeria's developmental failure, the study recommends that restructuring governance on social welfare, accountability within public institutions, and citizen-centered public policies is essential.

Keywords: *Governance Failure; Political Economy; Development Crisis; Democratic Socialism; Developmental Outcomes.*

Introduction

Critical debates within the literature of political studies have been redirected from a monistic perspective of leadership-centric toward an expanded analysis of governance institutions and their performance capacity to achieve sustainable development outcomes within a nation (Fukuyama, 2013; Hale and Fields, 2014). Although leadership is still crucial, new research highlights that state capacity, policy structures, and institutional efficacy are what determine lasting progress (Crossman and Crossman, 2011; Fukuyama, 2013). Therefore, service-delivery, public accountability, and citizen-centric governance are now included in

conversations about leadership, putting the general good ahead of the exaltation of the leaders (Hale and Fields, 2014). Recent research highlights that sustainable development depends on the efficacy of public institutions, policy structures, and state capability, despite the fact that purposeful leadership is very germane (Hale and Fields, 2010; Crossman and Crossman, 2011; Fukuyama, 2013).

In Nigeria, however, the post-1999 democratic experience reflects a persistent gap between expectations and outcomes. Rather than consolidating democratic gains, the period has been marked by weak institutional performance, limited accountability, and declining public trust. Although earlier explanations emphasized leadership failure and unpatriotic followership, such perspectives do not fully capture the structural character of Nigeria's developmental crisis. Increasingly, the problem reflects a deeper governance deficit rooted in fragile institutions, elite domination, and inadequate state capacity (Olanrewaju, 2021; Ogbonna et al., 2012).

Nigeria has experienced a number of interconnected problems after transitioning to democratic governance from the year 1999, including widespread poverty, political violence, banditry, insecurity, and intercommunal strife. These issues highlight structural governance failures that compromise Nigerian government's capacity to provide security, common goods, and egalitarian development in addition to leadership weaknesses. Their persistence draws attention to the shortcomings of leadership-centric interpretations and emphasizes the necessity of a more comprehensive governance framework that incorporates state capability and institutional effectiveness.

Leadership and followership dynamics remain relevant, particularly in explaining political behavior, electoral manipulation, and civic disengagement, but they are best understood within a broader governance ecosystem. Elite-driven politics, patronage networks, and the instrumentalization of youths for electoral and violent purposes have reinforced a system that prioritizes private accumulation over public welfare (Joseph, 1987; Omotola, 2010). Consequently, democratic processes, including elections, have often reproduced cycles of ineffective governance rather than delivering meaningful transformation.

The study also contends that modern studies often embrace an extended analytical framework that addresses governance structures and their consequences for national development, in contrast to older scholarship that embraced a limited, leadership-centric approach. By interrogating the systemic and administrative aspects of Nigeria's developmental challenge rather than relying solely on leadership justifications, this research adds to the growing body of knowledge in the literature on governance failures in Nigeria.

Against this backdrop, the study raises key questions: What explains the persistence of governance failure in Nigeria? How does weak state capacity shape development outcomes? In what ways do leadership and followership dynamics reinforce or undermine governance processes? With the use of qualitative techniques, such as Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews, this study interrogates the trajectory of democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and its development outcomes. It concludes that reversing Nigeria's developmental crisis requires not only institutional reforms but also a re-centering of governance on social welfare, accountability, and people-oriented policies.

Literature Review

This study reviews the following concepts from the literature point of view: Governance failure; State Capacity; Political Economy of Development; Developmental State vs. Developmental Crisis; Corruption and State Capture in Nigeria:

Governance Failure

Governance, within the fields of political science and development studies has undergone a great deal of intellectual transformations both in theory and practice (Ogbonna, et al, 2012). Perspective on governance has broadened from a limited emphasis on official state institutions to a more comprehensive analytical framework that includes the procedures used to exercise power and make decisions as a group (Pierre and Peters, 2000). This study contends that classical justifications, which concentrated on the administrative and institutional structures of the state, primarily connected governance to government. However, modern research increasingly considers governance primarily as multifaceted dynamics that involves how stakeholders from the business communities, state bureaucracies, and private citizens work together to design and implement public policy outcomes (World Bank, 1992; Ogbonna, et al, 2012).

As evident in this study, this study reveals a substantial portion of the literature also makes a theoretical difference between governance and government. Governance includes the broader web of official and unofficial processes that facilitate social coordination and policy execution, whereas government describes formal structures of political control (Pierre and Peters, 2000). In developing nations, in which actors that are not connected to state apparatus, unofficial networks, and outside pressures can have a significant impact on governance results, this variation is especially important. As a result, instead of being solely structured and centralized, Pierre and Peters (2000) opine that, public governance represents a distributed and interdependent activity rather than just a centralized and structured one. As a result, the concept of "effective governance" is another contentious issue in governance studies with no end in sight.

Hence, this study sees governance as the sum total of processes through which the state affairs is being managed and also entails the totality of how citizens are being led and governed by the superior power (leaders). The structured processes that lead to how citizens are to be ruled or led constitute what governance is all about. As Boeninger (1991) argued that governance entails application of power within politics (political power) to run the affairs of the state. To him, governance is the organizational and institutional to use political power to run state's affairs based on the genuine readiness to make policy decisions that are not only beneficial to the citizens but also required of government representative in various public offices. In line with this perspective of governances, this study argues that proportions of governance at all level of administration involve three distinctive factors.

As Ake (1996) rightly argue, governance issues and its challenges in Africa are often placed within the larger frameworks of political economy of post-colonial world. Some intellectuals contend that post-independence rivalry amongst African elites created unhealthy competitiveness and colonial administrative legacies created a redundant governance structures and frameworks within African states that are not only redundant, but also frequently exploitative instead of focus on useful development outcomes (Migdal, 1988; Ake, 1996). Consequently, governmental institutions are frequently seized and privatized for selfish reasons amongst the predatory elites in Africa, which weakens their ability to promote common good, social welfare and sustainable development outcomes (Olanrewaju, 2021). As

a result, institutional design, long-standing power dynamics, and conflicts over the allocation of resources all influence governance in these situations (Ake, 1996).

Generally speaking, the consensus in existing studies on governance in the literature agrees that governance is supposed to be viewed as simultaneously as a possible outcome and also as a procedure. As a procedure to achieve target of development, governance describes the methods by which power is used as well as the creation and execution of public policies. The efficacy of public institutions in accomplishing developmental goals like social welfare of the citizens; state/human security, and economic prosperity for all citizens is thus reflected (Ake, 1996; Pierre and Peters, 2000). When examining the Nigerian instance, where conventional democratic institutions co-exist with enduring governance deficiencies, limited state capacity, and uneven development outcomes (Pierre and Peters, 2000). This twofold viewpoint is especially pertinent to interrogate the curse of governance failure, institutional weakness and state capture of public institutions in Nigeria by centrifugal elites (Otu and Adedeji, 2021; Olanrewaju, 2021). According to this theory, governance is a manifestation of broader political and economic factors that influence state effectiveness rather than just an institutional framework.

State Capacity

Intellectual discourse within the concept of state-capacity revolves around government performance and development outcomes. This study asserts that in development theory and modern political science, state capacity is crucial for understanding differences in development and governance outcomes among nations (Besley and Persson, 2011). Fundamentally, state capacity borders on a state's capability to effectively formulate, implement, and enforce collective decisions to achieve public good. This includes public goods provision, internal security, economic regulation, and resource extraction required for government functions (Migdal, 1988; Mann, 1984; Besley and Persson, 2011). As evident in Migdal (1988), Mann (1984), Cárdenas (2010), and Besley and Persson (2011), state capacity is commonly divided into administrative, fiscal, and coercive capacities. Administrative capacity refers to the effectiveness and professionalism of bureaucratic institutions in policy implementation.

Migdal (1988), in his "state-in-society" perspective, describes the state as a field of competing social forces rather than a unified actor. This contributes to state capacity literature by explaining fractured authority and weak policy implementation in many developing contexts. As Bratton and van de Walle (1997) rightly opines, neopatrimonialism interrogates how informal institutions and patronage networks frequently undermine official administrative authority (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997). From the foregoing, political and historical circumstances often influence state capacity, including institutional development and elite behaviour. Colonial legacies that prioritized extraction over development have weakened state capacity in many post-colonial states, particularly in Africa (Young, 1994). This legacy is reinforced by post-colonial elites who often use public institutions for private gain.

In Nigeria, these contradictions are evident, where public institutions are often treated as extensions of personal or family interests (Young, 1994). Despite abundant human and material resources, governance remains weak, with low efficiency and uneven policy implementation (Young, 1994; Otu and Adedeji, 2021). Also, Ake (1996) and Lewis (2007) argue that this contradiction reflects systemic weaknesses in state capacity rather than simply poor leadership. The gap between institutional planning and actual performance reflects the state's (Nigeria) limited capacity to effectively coordinate and deploy public wealth, assets,

wealth properties for public goods is reflected in the discrepancy between institutional planning and actual performance (North, 1990). In Nigeria, persistent insecurity and poor governance are clear examples of this ugly scenario. Fragile state capacity is further linked to elite capture of institutions such as the judiciary and electoral bodies, along with patronage politics (Otu and Adedeji, 2021). Whenever the use of political authority shifts from serving the general public interest during the allocation of public resources, neopatrimonial practices and informal networks weaken institutional effectiveness (Joseph, 1987; North, 1990). This reduces administrative autonomy and undermines developmental performance/outcome in Nigeria (Joseph, 1987; Okonjo-Iweala, 2018)

Political Economy of Development (Nigeria)

Nigeria's development experience is best understood through a political economy lens that foregrounds the dominance of rent extraction over sustained productive transformation. The oil boom of 1970s entrenched a rentier state structure in which public finance became overwhelmingly dependent on petroleum revenues rather than broad-based taxation (Okonkwo, 2020; Usman, 2022). This fiscal configuration weakened incentives for institutional reform and accountability, as political elites increasingly prioritized the capture and distribution of oil rents over investments in productive sectors. As a result, state versus society relations have remained attenuated, with limited citizen leverage over governance outcomes. Recent scholarship further shows that this rent-dependent trajectory continues to constrain diversification, deepen institutional fragility, and reproduce patterns of elite capture and governance inefficiency (Karl, 1997; Lewis, 2007; Okonkwo, 2020; Usman, 2022).

As Olukoshi (1993) notes, distributional coalitions within the Nigerian state often prioritize short-term resource allocation over long-term developmental planning, resulting in weak policy continuity and inconsistent implementation. In such a setting, governance becomes an arena of negotiation rather than a mechanism of transformation, reinforcing administrative inefficiency and limiting industrial and infrastructural development (Olukoshi, 1993). This dynamic also shapes the nature of leadership and followership within the Nigerian political system. Leadership is frequently conceptualized in personalistic terms, where visionary "big man" authority drives policy direction, yet such individual agency is structurally constrained by weak institutions and competing elite interests (Sashkin, 2004; Mumford et al., 2008). On the other hand, whereas collaborative systems of leadership are egalitarian in theory, in reality they are frequently compromised by power imbalances and poor coordination (Burns, 1978, quoted in Crossman and Crossman, 2011).

Meanwhile, in Nigeria, followership is an active part of government formed by institutional context, incentives, and trust rather than passive compliance. According to Kelley (1992) and Bjugstad et al. (2006), motivation and value orientation impact the efficacy of followership, which can vary from critical involvement to passive obedience. However, patronage politics regularly distorts followership in Nigeria, drawing citizens especially politically active groups into clientelist connections that erode integrity, transparency and accountability and perpetuate unstable governance. This supports the study's larger contention that followership behavior, leadership frameworks, and limited state capacity interact to impact on developmental outcomes rather than just quality of leadership. In the end, the trajectory of development in Nigeria represents a reflection of the underlying political economy rationality of a nation-state where followership and leadership are both ingrained in a structure that prioritizes the allocation of resources above productive economy.

Mkandawire (2015) argues that, the establishment of a progressive state necessitates a competent, largely independent government shielded from elite influences are predatory conditions that are still precarious in Nigeria. Administrative deficiencies, governmental flaws, and the state's restricted capacity to oversee policy on industries or maintain infrastructure development are factual manifestations of such. Conversely, this study contends that Obafemi Awolowo's developmental vision, that highlights the significance of state capacity to positive change and is based on ideological simplicity, investment in social capitals, and controlled public management.

This study argues that these conflicts were compounded by the implementation of market-driven changes via the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which limited public institutions and material underpinnings of governmental capability. This liberalization process decreased expenditures and investment by the government at the public service and undermined the state's controlling authority over vital industries, despite its goals of boosting productivity and integrating Nigeria into the world economy of capitalist market (Bangura and Beckman, 1993). The outcome is a mixed political economy where established patronage mechanisms cohabit with statutory capitalist models, creating a state that is both dominant and ineffectual. Consequently, it is better to understand today's development problems such as fiscal fluctuations, infrastructure shortfalls, and persisting inequality as a result of both limited government capacity as well as political economy inefficiencies. Thus, by establishing financial legality by means of statutory taxation, reorganizing reward systems along productivity instead of rent allocation, and bolstering bureaucratic capability in accordance with a cohesive developmental agenda are all necessary for sustainable development.

Developmental State vs Developmental Crisis

Nigeria's transition from post-independence optimism to ongoing governance and development crises can be explained theoretically by contrasting developmental state accomplishment and developmental catastrophe. Development outcomes are essentially controlled by governmental capability, elite motivations, and the state's capability to manage sustainable development, as was outlined in the chapters on political economy and state capability that came before (Johnson, 1982; Evans, 1995). Robust institutional competence, independence from limited elite dominance, and purposeful economic planning are highlighted in standard developmental state studies, as demonstrated by Eastern Asian experiences (Johnson, 1982; Evans, 1995). However, recent comparative studies highlight the fact that developmental statehood is contingent on a number of factors, including institutional competency and implementation capacity in addition to formally stated policy goals (Mkandawire, 2015; Ikpe, 2020).

On the other hand, the Nigerian state and the rest of post-colonial states in Africa, had progressively transitioned from initial developmental enthusiasm into what is called “developmental catastrophe” or “developmental conundrum” in the contemporary research (Ake, 1996; Yagboyaju and Akinola, 2019; Shadare, 2022). According to the latest study on Nigeria's governance history, elite-dominated political accords, disjointed government mechanisms, and fragile public institutions have continuously compromised state performance (Yagboyaju and Akinola, 2019; Shadare, 2022). This study argues that the present travails of democracy and development in Nigeria revolves around governance failures as well as the poor capacity of the State to stem the tide due to the activities of predatory elite who have captured state institutions predatory.

A great scholar in this perspective is Ake (1996), who contends that Africa's development dilemma is essentially about transactional politics and it stems from a post-independent governments and regimes which puts allocation/control of public resources, and power accumulation ahead of the overall well-being of the citizens (Ake, 1996). As Mkandawire (2015) rightly argued in his study, this approach is similar to the ideas that previously put in this study that connected politics of patronage systems and rentier economics to diminishing state/government capability, when public institutions are turn into competitive theaters as opposed to transformative tools. (Mkandawire, 2015; Yagboyaju and Akinola, 2019).

The foregoing validates Mkandawire's (2015) contention about the weakness of public institutions in Africa that are ingrained in political economy mechanisms, rather than only failure of public policies, is what causes developmental failure (Mkandawire, 2015). This path confirms the main thrust of this scholarly work about an interplay between restricted state capability in Nigeria, and the structural dynamics of political economy in Nigeria. As this study depicts, it shows a rapid change from promising post-colonial developmental ambitions, leading to a persistent developmental conundrum marked by poor execution of policy potential, inconsistent programmes, as well as decreasing government legitimacy before the general public (Mkandawire, 2015).

Corruption and State Capture in Nigeria

In Nigeria, corruption is increasingly becoming normalized due to the state capture of public institutions by elites, weak anti-corruption institutions, and governance failure across all levels (Ogbeidi, 2012; Otu and Adedeji, 2021). Within political economy and development studies, this pattern is frequently seen as an institutional component of governance that is embedded in rentier state dynamics, where access to public office often provides a primary means of wealth accumulation., rather than as a departure from formal regulations.

As Duruji (2010) and Ogbeidi (2012) note, this entrenched system weakens public accountability and transparency, as public resources particularly oil revenues are being diverted through informal networks rather than institutional channels. This aligns with earlier arguments in this study that weak state capacity enables arbitrary control over public resources and undermines institutional effectiveness (Duruji, 2010; Ogbeidi, 2012).

Richard Joseph (1987) conceptualizes this dynamic as prebendalism, where state officials treat public resources as private entitlements distributed to clients and patrons, a view widely reflected in Nigerian scholarship (Oarhe and Awhefeada, 2013). In this context, state capture by political and bureaucratic elites excludes broader public welfare and transforms institutions into arenas of elite competition, resulting in policy inconsistency, weak implementation, and distorted development priorities (Joseph, 1987; Oarhe and Awhefeada, 2013). Administrative effectiveness is further weakened as informal negotiations override formal institutional procedures (Oarhe and Awhefeada, 2013).

Recent studies further argue that clientelist networks linking politicians, bureaucrats, and citizens in reciprocal exchange relations reinforce elite dominance over state institutions (Awortwi, 2018; Okeke and Oruh, 2021). Since access to public goods is often mediated through partisan affiliation rather than rights-based entitlement, institutional autonomy is eroded and state–citizen relations are distorted (Awortwi, 2018; Okeke and Oruh, 2021). This system sustains itself as elites rely on clientelism for political support while citizens adopt informal survival strategies, deepening corruption and worsening poverty, inequality, and infrastructural decay (Awortwi, 2018; Okeke and Oruh, 2021). Overall, endemic corruption and state capture of key institutions, including the judiciary, electoral bodies, security

agencies, and the legislature are central mechanisms through which Nigeria's political economy reproduces weak state capacity and constrained development outcomes (Awortwi, 2018; Okeke and Oruh, 2021).

Democratic Socialism in Nigeria: The Awolowo Developmental Perspective

Democratic socialism is brand of socialism that combines democratic tenets and philosophies to economic, social, political, etc. and others aspects of human life (Omotoso, 2000). It is an aspect of socialism that combines democratic governance with state-led redistribution aimed at reducing inequality and promoting social welfare. Within the broader literature on political economy, democratic socialism is closely associated with welfare state theory, where nation-state actively works to address imperfections in the market and guarantee egalitarian distribution of job opportunities, medical care, and education (Titmuss, 1974; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Offe, 1984). This perspective is tandem with earlier arguments in this study on state capacity, where development outcomes depend not only on markets but are contingent upon the state's capacity to create and provide redistributive and development-oriented initiative and programs in addition to market economies (Awolowo, 1960; Evans, 1995; North, 1990).

In the African context, democratic socialism intersects with African socialism, an intellectual tradition that emerged after independent era, being a concerted effort to address to inequality, dependency ratio, and failures that are associated with imported capitalist models in Africa. While its implementation varied, scholars agree that African socialist thought emphasized communal solidarity, redistribution, and state responsibility in development (Mkandawire, 2005; Ake, 1996). However, as earlier sections on Political Economy and Corruption and State Capture have shown, the failure of redistributive governance in many African states is closely linked to elite capture, weak bureaucratic capacity, and rentier dynamics (Joseph, 1987; Karl, 1997). This reinforces the argument that ideology alone is insufficient without strong institutions and disciplined state capacity to implement welfare-oriented policies.

In Nigeria, the most coherent articulation of democratic socialism is found in the developmental ideas of Obafemi Awolowo, whose framework prioritized free education, social welfare, and equitable distribution of resources as central pillars of national development (Awolowo, 1960, 1977). In southwest Nigeria, social policies and programmes of Obafemi Awolowo particularly in the area of free primary education demonstrate a practical application of welfare-state principles aimed at human capital development and long-term productivity enhancement. This aligns directly with the state capacity arguments in this study, that emphasize that effective governance depends on institutional capability to deliver public goods (Evans, 1995; Mkandawire, 2015). Consequently, Awolowo's democratic socialism provides not only a normative alternative to Nigeria's rentier and corruption-driven political economy but also a structured developmental model that directly responds to the governance failures, state capture, and weak institutional performance that were interrogated previously in this study.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study utilizes state capacity theory to interrogate the study's subject-matter. The theory of state capacity has been widely used by Max Weber, Douglass C. North (1990), and Peter Evans (1995), and has been further developed by scholars such as Timothy Besley and Torsten Persson, Daron Acemoglu (2012), Michael Mann, and Francis Fukuyama. Nigeria's developmental trajectory, from post-colonial optimism to enduring governance failure, can be analytically explained through this theoretical lens.

The theory contends that development outcomes are predicated on a nation-state's capacity to establish and sustain efficient, rule-bound, as well as autonomous institutions capable of designing and implementing public policies. Weber's concept of legal-rational authority, institutional framework as recommended by North (1990) that centres on regulations of the standard game; and Evans' notion of embedded autonomy collectively emphasize the importance of a state that is insulated from predatory interests while remaining effectively engaged with society for developmental purposes. In this regard, the theory explains Nigeria's shift from early post-colonial optimism to developmental crisis as a consequence of institutional breakdown, elite capture of political institutions, and declining bureaucratic competence, all of which weakened the state's capacity to deliver development outcomes.

State capacity theory further demonstrates that Nigeria's governance failure is structurally rooted in weak institutional capability, rentier dependence, and entrenched elite networks that undermine state performance. This study applies the theory to explain both the problematique and findings, particularly the ways in which prebendal politics, fragmented political coalitions, and corruption erode policy coherence and allow informal power structures to override formal institutions. However, while the theory is analytically useful in explaining institutional weakness and developmental failure, its explanatory scope is limited.

It under-theorizes the role of ideology, normative development alternatives, and political leadership visions such as the democratic socialist framework of Obafemi Awolowo, which this study presents as a corrective model grounded in welfare-oriented governance. Moreover, state capacity theory tends to assume that institutional strengthening alone is sufficient for development, whereas the Nigerian case demonstrates that entrenched elite interests and patronage-based political settlements can persistently resist formal institutional reforms. Consequently, while the theory remains central to explaining Nigeria's developmental crisis, it requires supplementation with political economy and normative frameworks to fully capture the complexity of the Nigerian development experience.

Data and Method

This paper uses a qualitative approach to explain its data and method. This method is grounded on theoretical and analytical inquiry within political economy and governance studies. In this study, both primary and secondary were utilized. For primary data, this paper utilizes Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) among contemporaries in the academia and semi-structured interviews for purposively selected public office holders in Ebonyi state, Nigeria. In an effort to create a logical analytical cum normative structure to comprehend Nigeria's development trajectory, it synthesizes the body of research on governance, political economy, state capacity, corruption, elite capture, leadership and followership, and democratic socialism. The study uses secondary data such as internet materials; newspaper publications; journal articles; public commentaries; and other archival documents. It employs an interpretivist approach to critically examine how structural factors such as rent-seeking behavior and institutional fragility shape development outcomes within a context of state capacity deficits and governance failure. Methodologically, the study is comparative and explanatory, linking theoretical perspectives to empirical realities in Nigeria. Additionally, the study also incorporates a normative analytical lens to assess democratic socialism, particularly the developmental ideas of Obafemi Awolowo, as a viable development blueprint to achieve development outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this research reveals that developmental trajectory within the post-colonial Nigerian state represent a fundamental deterioration in state capability, turning early post-independence optimism into persistent dysfunctional governance (Joseph, 1987). This path is consistent with traditional political economics considerations that highlight the need of developmental leadership and institutional cohesion in maintaining national transformation (Ake, 1996; Leftwich, 1995). According to the report, Nigeria's early developmental promise that was based on strategic planning, fiscal responsibility, and welfare approach that has progressively faded as a result of poor policy implementation, ineffective bureaucracy, and the rejection of strategic developmental goals. This bolsters the claim that progress is essentially political rather than just economic, necessitating a disciplined and ideologically cohesive governmental machinery.

As finding of this study demonstrate, a second important finding is that state capture of public institutions and neopatrimonial political structures, which have grown more prominent under the Fourth Republic, are fundamental to Nigeria's governance failure. Since 1999, the majority of democratic government has been based on networks of patronage politics that put the protection of the elite ahead of the wellbeing of the general public. This has weakened accountability, distorted the distribution of resources, and eroded public trust. The finding is in line with position of Joseph's (1987) prebendalism argument, that illustrates how Nigerian state power is hijacked for selfish reasons as opposed to the common benefit of the citizenry. As a consequence, democratization has not resulted in developmental governance instead resulting in increased competitiveness among elites for state resources, which worsens the efficacy of institutions and the sustainability of public policies and programmes.

Within this context of systemic failure, the study demonstrates the ongoing applicability of Obafemi Awolowo's democratic socialism as a cogent alternative paradigm for national rejuvenation in this setting of systemic failure. In order to confront Nigeria's systemic crises within security and governance reforms, Awolowo's ideology within democratic socialism that is based on welfare-driven governance, mass education, and equitable resource distribution, offers both a normative critique and a workable developmental model (Awolowo, 1970). Developmental state theory, which contends that transformative progress necessitates an independent, competent, and socially motivated state, is consistent with Awolowo's focus on strategic state involvement in social infrastructure and education (Leftwich, 1995). The findings indicate that a shift in favor of this type of welfare-driven, regulated governance style is the sole strategy to successfully tackle Nigeria's current socioeconomic stagnation.

By and Large, the study demonstrates that, if governance is reorganized towards accountability, ideological alignment, and social welfare principles, Nigeria's developmental dilemma is changeable rather than irreversible. Rebuilding government legitimacy and re-establishing developmental orientation can be achieved through incorporating Awolowo's democratic socialism into modern governance debate. This calls for a substantive democracy rooted in human development, equality, and institutional performance, rather than democracy based on elections as merely political rivalry. In this approach, the research adds to current discussions in African political economy by reiterating that Nigeria's sustainable economic development is dependent upon the state's restoration as a welfare and developmental agency.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed Nigeria's development pathways through an integrated political economy framework, and discovered that rentierism, inadequate institutional development, and weak capacity of Nigerian state are the fundamental causes of governance crises and poor development outcomes within post-colonial Nigerian state. This paper argued that the viability of state institutions in Nigeria has been repeatedly weakened by oil dependence, dispersed political accords, and elite-dominated distributional coalitions, as demonstrated in the sections above. This has led to policy inconsistent policies, poor execution capacity, and deep-rooted socio-economic inequality (North, 1990; Karl, 1997; Lewis, 2007). In addition to endemic corruption and state capture of public institutions by predatory elite in Nigeria, which distort important state institutions like the judiciary and undermine accountability, transparency and the supremacy of law, these structural deficiencies are compounded by leadership and followership factors influenced by patronage-driven politics in Nigeria (Joseph, 1987; Ogbeidi, 2012; Salihu and Gholami, 2018).

As a remedy these interlocking failures, the study proposes a normative paradigm that is grounded in democratic socialism, particularly as articulated in the developmental vision of Obafemi Awolowo. His emphasis on free education, social welfare, and equitable distribution of resources aligns with welfare state theory and highlights the importance of a capable developmental state in attaining broad-based development (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Mkandawire, 2015). The study therefore concludes that Nigeria's transformation necessitates not only genuine institutional reforms but also a core restructuring of its political economy to promote production-driven governance, improved state capacity, and public investment, capable of breaking the cycle of state capture of public institutions, in order to achieve sustainable development outcomes.

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