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NAVIGATION TURMOIL: UNPACKING THE EFFECTS ON POLITICAL INSTABILITY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation is grappling with the debilitating effects of political instability on its socio-economic development. The situation remains a central challenge to understanding Nigeria's developmental challenges. This paper investigates the interplay and effects of political instability on Nigeria's socio-economic development from 1960 to 2026, with emphasis on regime changes, electoral violence, insecurity, ethnic and religious tensions, and governance crises. Using a qualitative historical analytical approach and drawing on political economy and institutional theories, the paper analysis evidence from academic literature, policy documents and development reports. The paper argues that long-term socio-economic transformation depends on strengthening democratic institutions, promoting inclusive governance, ensuring policy continuity, and improving accountability. The findings indicate that recurring political instability has disrupted policy implementation, weakened institutional capacity, reduced investment, intensified poverty and unemployment, reduced economic growth, reduced human capital development, and hindered inclusive national development. Although democratic rule has expanded political participation since 1999, persistent governance deficits and insecurity continue to impede sustainable socio-economic growth and progress. To this end, the paper reveals a pressing need for transformative governance, security-sector reforms, and actionable anti-corruption efforts to reboot Nigeria's economy and enhance citizens' welfare. It concludes that political stability is not merely a political objective but a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable socio-economic development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Political instability, Socioeconomic development, governance, democracy, sustainable development, Nigeria's economy*

Introduction

Ideally, every nation, whether developed or developing, desires a stable and peaceful society. Society is characterised by a symbiotic network of political, economic, social,

religious, legal, educational, and sociocultural systems, each with the capacity to explore its own terms, for the interests and values it produces.[1] Throughout the ages, societies have experienced relative peace and all forms of upheaval, including social, economic, cultural and political. Some have promoted development; others have been practically counter-productive. A reference to the collective conviction of great philosophers such as Heraclitus, F. Hegel, Karl Marx and Georg Simmel is instructive: any society (irrespective of its physical and natural endowment) that does not undergo conflict is most unlikely to register meaningful or remarkable progress. In other words, for a country to achieve sustainable development, conflict is inherently inevitable, and such a nation may have, in one way or another, experienced conflict or instability in history. It is a natural feature of human existence.[2] Conflict often produces political instability when it escalates into electoral violence, insurgency, ethnic clashes, or prolonged political crises. Conflictual politics breeds political instability. This creates a cyclical relationship. Political instability refers to the persistent condition in which a country's political system experiences frequent disruptions, uncertainty, or conflict that weakens government institutions' ability to govern effectively, maintain order, and implement public policies. Recent democratic-conflict scholarship likewise argues that conflict is inevitable, while instability largely depends on how institutions manage it.[3] However, protracted instability, whether at the individual, group, community or State level, can be

[1] V. Uchendu, "Civil Society and Democracy: Theoretical Perspective," in *Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria*, ed. Okon Edet Uya (Calabar: CATS Publishers, 2000), 36.

[2] M. F. Ibsen, "Domination, Social Norms, and the Idea of an Emancipatory Interest," *Constellations* 31, no. 2 (2024): 160–73; Nicole Deitelhoff and Cord Schmelzle, "Social Integration through Conflict: Mechanisms and Challenges in Pluralist Democracies," *KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 75, suppl. 1 (2023): 69–93; Burcu Gedikli and Mehmet Eren Gedikli, "Integrating Marx and Simmel on Social Conflict: Theoretical Synthesis and Modern-Day Implications," *Uludağ University Faculty of Arts and Sciences Journal of Social Sciences* 27, no. 51 (2026): 687–700.

[3] V. August and M. Westphal, "Theorizing Democratic Conflicts beyond Agonism," *Theory and Society* 53, no. 5 (2024): 1119; Deitelhoff and Schmelzle, "Social Integration through Conflict."

destructive, hindering, forestalling, and frustrating the process of meaningful and peaceful outcomes, including national development or nation-building.

Nigeria, a country located in West Africa and rated as the most populous country in Africa and perhaps in the world, with a population of over 200 million, and also with vast and abundant natural, mineral, and human resources, has not just immense potential for growth and development, but also a significant influence on the continent's economic, social and political landscape. However, since independence in 1960, the country has continually experienced political instability.[4] In fact, Nigeria's history of political instability dates to its independence in 1960, with visible challenges of regional imbalances, ethnic domination, constitutional and census crises, electoral violence, and later numerous military interventions, civil war, and democratic experiments. Some historians and political critics have argued that political violence and instability have become a recurring feature in Nigeria, largely because of the country's paradoxical heterogeneity. These assertions imply that the country's famous characteristic of "Unity in Diversity," supposed to be a blessing, is often perceived in practice as a curse. Although the foundation for Nigeria's seemingly perennial political instability was laid long ago, right from the colonial days, it was nurtured, sustained, and transmitted into the post-colonial era. In retrospect, considering Lord Lugard's obnoxious policies, including the "Divide and Rule" which was embedded in the famous indirect rule system, colonial constitutions, lopsided and disarticulated institutions to foster colonial economic but self-serving interests, and other anti-sustainable development policies, the post-independence political leaders adopted and validated those legacies, taking advantage of them to the detriment of the country as a whole. Evidently, the pattern and intensity of political, social, economic and cultural interactions among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups or nationalities in

[4] E. E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence* (London: Hurst, 1998), 342.

the immediate post-independence period revealed deep structural weaknesses within the parliamentary system, democratic institutions, and political leadership. These underlying deficiencies undermined national cohesion and governance, making the collapse of the First Republic increasingly inevitable. The country was submerged in political violence and instability. Even when the pre-independence wounds of the Kano riot of 1953 and self-government motion move were yet to be healed, came a few of years with the Western Region Crisis of 1962, Census Crisis of 1962/1963, General Elections of 1964, the Constitutional crisis of 1964, the tragic pogrom in the Northern parts of the country leading to the massacre of thousands of Igbo people of the defunct Eastern Region, the military coup of January 15, 1966, and the Civil war which began in 1967–1970, fought with bitterness and vengeance.

In other words, the First Republic, which spanned from 1960 to 1966, was marked by significant political challenges arising from notable factors like ethnic and regional domination, ethnic divisions, and competition, lust for power, constitutional crisis, unbalanced regional structures, pseudo-federalism, electoral malpractices, regional crisis, census controversy, corruption and mismanagement, undue political interference and suppression, ethnic tensions, to mention a few.[5] In the Second, Third, and Fourth Republics, including the unfortunate interjectory military regimes, the storylines are not different; rather, the situation degenerated in phases, and indeed into more serious challenges. Historical evidence has proven that apart from brazen displays of political arrogance, the elite ruling civilian class based on tribalism, ethnicity, or deliberate and well-calculated pursuit of policy programmes of marginalisation and sectionalism, most military interventions experienced in Nigeria from January 15, 1966, to May 29, 1998, were inspired by tribal, ethnic and religious sentiments and tendencies inherent in the country's social diversity. Mutual suspicion, distrust, and violent confrontation over

[5] B. J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973), 15.

critical issues of national importance have become a permanent scar on the nation's psyche, frustrating nascent but genuine efforts and commitments toward national integration and sustainable economic development. In other words, this instability is not only complex and multifaceted but also has far-reaching consequences for the country's socioeconomic development, including economic instability, infrastructure deficits, unemployment, reduced purchasing power, poverty, insecurity, cost of living, and inequality. Consequently, the instability in the Nigerian system has also led to a lack of trust in institutions, reduced investors' confidence, and limited access to quality education. Beyond this, the country's over-reliance on oil revenue (mono-economy) has made it vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices, further exacerbating economic instability.

Fundamentally, despite its potential, Nigeria's development and quest for national integration have continued to be hindered by recurring political crises, corruption, and poor or absent governance. Put simply, political instability has become a recurring phenomenon in Nigeria, affecting the country's ability to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development. This paper's introduction and significance lie in its relevance to Nigeria's development trajectory. This implies that understanding the impact of political instability on socioeconomic development is crucial for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders seeking not only valuable insights but also effective strategies to promote sustainable development and improve Nigerians' lives. The paper also highlights the issue's complexity and the need for a nuanced understanding of the causes of political instability and its consequences for Nigeria's socioeconomic development.

Political Instability

The word "Political" is derived from the word *Politics*. In common parlance, it is often viewed as a "game of interest" and the ultimate "decider and allocator of resources" in any

legitimate human society. Harold Lasswell, a renowned political scientist, sees it also as a matter of "who gets what, 'when' and 'how.'" Paul Krugman's apt quotation, "Politics determines who has the power, not who has the truth," has been identified as a significant source of political instability in many Third World countries, including Nigeria. Politics within the State matrix determines power. No meaningful intellectual discussion on political instability and its effect on socioeconomic development can be sufficient without delving into the concept of power politics. Within the Liberal-bourgeois approach to the State, political power remains the ultimate factor, contrary to the Marxist perspective, which sees politics and its related concept of power through the prism of economic determinacy.

However, many other writers in the fields of Social Sciences and Art and Humanities have tended to conceive the word "Politics" or "Political" as a very interesting term. For instance, in the bid to provide us with the meaning and definition of the concept of "Political instability," Claude Ake, in his study notes, "A Definition of Political Stability", stresses the need to define "Political" first before defining political stability or instability. He argues that "we have clearly not defined the political in the usual sense of demarcating particular acts that are political from those that are not."[6] On this point, he defines "Political" in terms of its effects. He further argues that specifying a particular effect is more important than declarations about intrinsic differences between particular acts. Claude Ake concludes that "if it is clear what this effect is, then the political is defined, whatever variety of particular acts that may be associated with this effect."[7] Conversely, he defined "Political stability", which is the opposite of "political instability", as the "regularity of the flow of political exchanges. The more regular the flow of political exchanges, the more stability."[8] Other literature makes clear that "Political

[6] C. Ake, "A Definition of Political Stability," *Comparative Politics* 7, no. 2 (1975): 271.

[7] Ake, "Definition of Political Stability," 272.

[8] Ake, "Definition of Political Stability," 273.

Instability" means different things to different scholars, depending on the perspective they choose. In fact, no agreed-upon standard definition of political instability exists. Although political scientists generally agree that the concept is multidimensional, they still disagree on how many dimensions it includes. In other words, Political instability is a multidimensional condition characterized by recurrent political violence, mass protests, regime or government crises, weak institutions, contested transfers of power, and policy discontinuity that undermine the stability and legitimacy of the State. It could also be conceived as the "extent to which the distribution and exercise of political power within a State are challenged by internal or external actors, resulting in threats to governmental continuity, institutional effectiveness, public order, and the peaceful functioning of democratic processes."[9] Jong-A-Pin attempts to differentiate four dimensions of political instability. First, politically motivated violence; second, mass civil protests; third, instability within the political regime; and fourth, instability of the political regime.[10] According to *the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Political Instability is a political scenario in which* sudden changes or collapses are likely to occur in a society.[11]

In David Sanders's view, political instability is the discontinuing of a system or the frequency of unstable events in a political system.[12] A. K. Fosu defines political instability as instability of governments, regimes, and communities within a nation.[13] He further stresses that a military coup d'etat indicates political instability: "It is assumed that a successful coup indicates the greatest degree of instability, followed by an unsuccessful coup and then by a

[9] M. W. Dirks and Torsten Schmidt, "Political Instability and Economic Growth: Causation and Transmission," *European Journal of Political Economy* 85 (2024): 102586, p. 2.

[10] R. Jong-A-Pin, "On the Measurement of Political Instability and Its Impact on Economic Growth," *European Journal of Political Economy* 25, no. 1 (2009): 18.

[11] *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), s.v. "instability."

[12] D. Sanders, *Patterns of Political Instability* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 49.

[13] A. K. Fosu, "Political Instability and Economic Growth: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 40, no. 4 (1992): 830.

plot."[14] A. Nwankwo posits that Political instability in developing countries entails the use of militarism imposed by developed countries to betray the regressive character of non-colonialism consistently. He maintains that the almost irreversible preponderance of the armed forces in the politics of the nation and the increasing use of violence as an instrument of conflict resolution, even in interpersonal relations, are some of the phenomena trending toward neo-colonial militarization. Several other operational definitions of political instability focus on government duration. B. Russett measures political instability by tracing the number of chief executives. He measures the average number of years the chief executive remained in office. J. Blondel, M. Taylor and V. Herman equally took this path of defining political instability: "any administration is considered as in government which fulfilled two conditions: that of being headed by the same prime minister and that of relying on the support of the same party or parties in the chamber."[15]

Accordingly, contemporary political scientists increasingly recognise that violence, conflict, and other forms of civil strife are always associated with the exercise of power at all levels of political interaction and can breed political instability. In sum, political instability can be defined as a situation where a government or political system is characterised by uncertainties, anarchy, human rights abuses, lack of freedom of the press and information, poverty, failed leadership/governance, unproductive and poor economic growth, kidnapping, killings, riots, violence, conflict, and vulnerability to change against the existing set objectives and policies of a legitimate government. Conversely, Political Stability by Dudley is "a condition where there is congruence between the constitutive and regulative rules of the system such that changes within the action-set either in terms of the re-alignment of forces in the set

[14] Fosu, "Political Instability and Economic Growth," 832.

[15] J. Blondel, "Party Systems and Patterns of Government in Western Democracies," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 2 (1968): 190. See also Michael Taylor and V. M. Herman, "Party Systems and Government Stability," *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 1 (1971): 28–37.

or in its configuration, can be made to follow from and conform to the regulative rules of the system."[16] In Nigeria, under Evaristus Isife's conception of forms of instability, the country seems to have experienced all of them since 1960, when it was granted independence, to date. Said Jaouadi, Lamia Arfaoui and Azza Ziedi have argued that political instability, war, and institutional weaknesses have become common and fundamental features of developing countries in recent times. They further maintain that under such conditions, formulating policies for long-term growth is likely impossible. Virtually all countries in sub-Saharan Africa, they assert, have demonstrated several forms of political violence or civil war. According to them, political instability harms economic growth and the fundamental bases of economic performance in developing countries.[17] This implies that political instability can undermine the economic environment necessary for sustained growth. This explains why Evaristus Isife asserts that political instability has remained an inescapable factor in Nigeria as a developing nation because it has unabatedly defied the strategies and efforts of well-meaning Nigerians, and successive governments have continued to penetrate deeply into Nigeria's political space or climate.[18]

Socio-economic Development

The concept of "socioeconomic" refers to the interaction between social and economic factors that affect individuals, communities, or societies. It represents the interplay or meeting arena where the social and economic lives of citizens or a group of people converse and converge. It entails some forms of behavioral patterns, interactions, and reactions over some

[16] B. J. Dudley, quoted in Echikwonye, "Political Stability and Extra-Parliamentary Carpet Crossing in Nigeria's First and Second Republic," *Journal of Political and Administrative Studies* 2, no. 2 (n.d.): 149.

[17] S. Jaouadi, L. Arfaoui, and A. Ziedi, "Political Instability and Growth: Case of the Developing Countries," *International Journal of Social Science Research* 2, no. 1 (2014): 26.

[18] E. E. Isife, "Political Instability in Nigeria: Causes, Impacts and Philosophic Solutions," *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18, no. 6 (2020): 1.

pertinent or critical issues. Social factors may include healthcare, education, culture, social status, and relationships, while economic factors include income, employment, inflation, taxation, industrialization, poverty, wealth, access to resources, and the general economy. Fundamentally, socioeconomic factors can influence critical issues such as quality of life, opportunities and access to resources, and social mobility.

The word or concept "Development" means different things to different people or groups. In other words, several perspectives exist on the concept of development; hence, it is difficult to identify a standard, general, or precise accepted meaning. Development Studies and humanities literature have offered useful perspectives based on scholarly works and paradigms. The classical- liberal economists or scholars, such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and John Keynes, conceived development from a narrow economic perspective, equating it with economic growth, per capita income, industrialization, Gross Domestic Product, Gross National Product, and national Income, leaving behind other critical aspects of development.

Richard Meier, for instance, defines development as rising to the highest value of Gross National Product (GNP) through capital and industrialisation. The Marxian school views development through a broader, multidimensional lens. For instance, development here is not limited to acquiring industries or building skyscrapers. Still, it encompasses such processes as productivity, modernization, modern technical know-how, social and economic equalization, qualitative and quantitative education, healthcare, improved infrastructure, institutions, and well-being, attitudes and rationally coordinated policies and programmes of development; the increase in per-capita incomes or economic growth, but also includes sustainable improvements in the living standard of the people, which are guaranteed through the provision of gainful employment, coupled with the presence and availability of social and economic infrastructures. Economic growth, which classical-liberal theorists purportedly equate with economic development, is a significant contributor and necessary ingredient of economic

development. Economic development is the creation of enabling conditions that promote and stimulate a rapid and substantial increase in the basic material well-being of the majority. It is measured by the increase in per-capita income, which is itself a function of the growth rate of national income.[19]

This is achievable through political leadership policies that promote economic growth through land reforms, capital-intensive industrialization, educational schemes, and an effective public health system. However, they are unachievable if there's political instability in the country. Socioeconomic development, which is a component of sustainable development, must be measured through such areas as the reduction in the opportunities for malnutrition, the considerable reduction in high infant mortality rates, the availability of potable water, the availability of access to quality educational material, the growth of public health, greater employment opportunities, the gradual socioeconomic level generated by the majority of the people whereby an average level of society is established, the reduction in the level of high inflation and unemployment indices of per capita income, and through the efficient allocation of resources in regulating the types of social relationships.

Economic development could be viewed as the sustained, concerted action of policymakers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area. It also refers to quantitative and qualitative changes in the economy, including development of human capital, critical infrastructure, regional competitiveness, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, health and safety, literacy, and other initiatives. Economic development differs from economic growth. Economic development is a policy intervention aimed at achieving people's economic and social well-being; hence, socioeconomic development. Economic growth is a phenomenon of market productivity and a rise in Gross

[19] E. Ivorgba, "The Impact of Political Leadership on Economic Development in Nigeria," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 7 (2024): 1276.

Domestic Product.[20] All economic policies aimed at improving an economy also aim to improve human existence. Economic development, viewed from a human perspective, focuses on how economic growth is managed, and how wealth is distributed in society to benefit the majority. This broadens people's choices, including longer life through well-planned economic development in terms of food quality, healthcare, access to quality education, and resources for a decent standard of living; the degree of political freedom; guaranteed human rights; and personal self-respect.[21] Nigeria has made some progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. However, there is a high need to diversify the Nigerian economy into the non-oil Sector. This will go a long way toward expanding sources of economic growth and development and making them broad-based, thereby creating employment and reducing poverty.

The concept of economic development can also be examined through the lens of a false dichotomy in the development process. The dichotomy resulted due to the identifying of economic development with the advancement of the "centre" (the more developed and industrialised countries, usually capitalist, on the one hand) and the possibilities of the "periphery" (viz the Less Developed, Undeveloped, Underdeveloped or Developing countries, often countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, on the other hand), what most political economist referred to often time as economic growth, is a sustained increase in the output of goods and services of a country, usually measured at one sector of the economy most times through the increase of the Gross National Product (as one of the forms of indicators of economic development itself).

[20] M. P. Todaro and S. C. Smith, *Economic Development* (England: Pearson Dimension Publications, 1998), 5–6.

[21] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2014: Sustaining Human Progress; Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience* (New York: UNDP, 2014).

Political Instability and Socioeconomic Development: A Nexus

Existing literature shows a correlation between political instability and socioeconomic development. In other words, the relationship between political instability and economic growth has been a major concern in modern times and in the literature.[22] A. K. Fosu has observed that political instability has an inherent capacity to influence economic development through several "factors of production," including lack of investment, emigrating labour forces, and reduced production output. According to Łukasz Jannils, political instability is multidimensional, and no single definition is universally accepted.[23] His review examines dimensions including politically motivated violence, mass civil protests, and instability within political regimes. He also reviews evidence linking political instability with economic outcomes such as economic growth, investment, inflation, fiscal deficits, public debt, and financial-market functioning. To him, the phenomenon's economic consequences extend beyond political uncertainty to affect investment, economic growth, inflation, fiscal conditions, and market functioning. In other words, political instability is used extensively in economic research because including it has significant implications for economic functioning. Samuel Huntington notes that "just as economic development depends, in some measure, on the relation between investment and consumption, political order depends in part on the relation between the development of political institutions and the mobilization of new social forces into politics."[24] He argues that when political institutions fail to support a society's social and economic dynamics, it poses a fundamental challenge to politics, particularly regarding political instability. Supporting this, Uisoon Kwon points out that "the level of

[22] T. Akinlo, O. H. Arowolo, and T. B. Zubair, "Political Instability and Economic Growth in Nigeria," *Review of Socio-economic Perspectives* 7, no. 2 (2022): 48.

[23] Ł. Jannils, "The Concept of Political Instability in Economic Research," *International Journal of Management and Economics* 57, no. 3 (2021): 268–84.

[24] S. P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), vii.

institutionalization of any political system can be defined by the adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence of its organizations and procedures."[25]

According to Emmanuel Ivorgba, with a human population of over 230 million and rich in natural resources, Nigeria, popularly referred to as the "Giant of Africa" and "Continent's Powerhouse," holds vast potential for economic growth and development. Despite this abundance of human and natural resources, the country has faced numerous complex challenges and struggles on its path to economic prosperity.[26] Nigeria has experienced significant political, social, and economic changes since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960. Political leadership continues to play a central role in Nigeria's fate. Overall, the effects of political instability on economic development show that political opportunities drive economic policies, especially when external factors are influential. He argues that effective political leadership in creating the best opportunities for economic policy is also important because stability depends on how political markets function in different countries.

Causes of Political Instability

When Chinua Achebe aptly summarised Nigeria's challenges in three words in The Trouble with Nigerian Leadership, he was likely highlighting the core factors driving political, social, economic, and cultural instability in Nigeria. He did not view Nigeria's problems as related to its abundant natural and human resources. To him, the issues are not about Nigerian character, land, or unemployment; they are about leadership. That is, the reluctance or inability to meet the demands of true leadership, especially in setting a positive example for others to follow. Genuine leadership requires a commitment to personal responsibility and integrity,

[25] U. Kwon, "The Impact of Political Instability on Economic Growth: Evidence from Developing Countries" (master's thesis, Western Michigan University, 1997), 32.

[26] Ivorgba, "Impact of Political Leadership," 1274–82.

qualities essential to fostering a stable and prosperous nation. Oludiran Akinleye and Ibrahim Adekunle observed that despite the massive resources from oil wealth, Nigeria has not been able to record long-term economic growth and stability, with far-reaching implications.[27] They further contend that poor leadership and wrong policy measures, to name a few, have contributed to this growing menace. Consequently, this has prompted everyone, or any well-meaning social gathering, to start rationalising how institutions can be best harnessed for macroeconomic stabilization in Nigeria. Equally, Evaristus Isife attributes Nigeria's political instability to several factors, including poor governance, collapse of critical sectors, unemployment, widespread poverty, violent agitations, terrorism, and conflict.[28] Conflicts and violence often lead to political instability, and these conflicts can originate from three dimensions: the political, socioeconomic, and religious spheres.

In Nigeria, the political dimension, along with economic, ethnic-cultural, and religious factors, has historically been a source of tensions and instability. Most conflicts arise mainly due to inequality, marginalization, or neglect, poverty and religious extremism (such as the Niger Delta Militant crisis, killings, and kidnappings in the South-East by the dominant separatist movement, IPOB, ESN, and MASSOB), religious differences (such as the Christian-dominated south versus the Muslim-dominated north), ethnic clashes (such as Hausa/Fulani versus Yoruba, Igbo versus Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani versus Igbo, or against minority ethnic groups, as evidently shown in the pattern of raiding of communities, looting, maiming, kidnapping and killings in the Southern Kaduna, Niger, Benue, and Jos) and (Islamic fundamentalists militant groups such as the Boko Haram, and ISWAP versus the Christian

[27] O. Akinleye and I. Adekunle, "Institutions and Macroeconomic Instability in Nigeria," in *Leading Issues in Macroeconomic Stabilisation and Financial Development: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Oluwatayo Fakiyesi*, ed. Risikat O. S. Dauda, Simeon O. Akinleye, and Emmanuel D. Balogun (Lagos: University of Lagos Press and Bookshop, 2019), 1–17.

[28] Isife, "Political Instability in Nigeria."

minority in the north-east, north-west, north-central). Martin Ugbudu aptly captured this scenario when he observed that.

> Since the advent of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, hitherto long nurtured but suppressed feelings of neglect, marginalization, discrimination and domination by aggrieved communities, nationalities/sections of the society against the Nigerian State have burst into the open. The political landscape has been inundated with separatist agitation movements, calls for resource control/true federalism and the restructuring of the polity. This has surreptitiously given vent to the emergence of ethnic militias, escalation of youth restiveness, acts of kidnapping and hostage-taking, which have posed a threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria.[29]

The practice of pseudo-federalism, which has been prevalent in Nigeria since independence, has also been a major cause of political instability. Rotimi Suberu's work on Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria created a more dynamic and interesting narrative.[30] His study explains the structural and federal roots of political instability, rather than treating instability simply as changes of government or political violence. He observes that Nigeria's federal system has served as an institutional mechanism for managing ethnic and regional diversity. Still, its operation has also generated intense competition over revenue allocation, territorial restructuring, political representation, and population figures. According to him, these federal disputes have contributed significantly to persistent ethnic and political tensions and have complicated efforts to achieve stable governance in Nigeria.

However, since 1999, successive democratic governments have clearly demonstrated leadership failure stemming from a lack of political will to hold perpetrators accountable or to break the cycle of violence and political instability, particularly among elites and powerful political, business and religious figures who often play roles in sponsoring conflicts.

[29] M. I. Ugbudu, "Corruption, Social Justice and Political Instability in Nigeria," *Journal of Global Economics and Business* 1, no. 1 (2020): 68.

[30] R. T. Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).

Challenges of Socio-economic Development in Nigeria

Available literature shows a significant relationship between political instability, investment, consumption, and government consumption.[31] Political instability is also linked to unemployment, poverty, industrialization, income, investment, production, savings, access to education, healthcare, and other factors. This is practically evident in developed and developing countries, as validated over the years in several studies. The problems associated with socio-economic development in Nigeria are not only enormous but also complex. Some are endogenous (internally induced), while others are exogenous (externally induced). The endogenous factors are internally caused and include issues such as poor leadership, lack of credible leaders, misappropriation of funds or embezzlement, implementation of counterproductive economic policies, excessive importation, lack of economic diversification, reliance on a single economy and over-dependence on oil, a weak taxation system, poverty, inflation, high unemployment rates, and corruption. Conversely, the exogenous factors involve foreign or external influences, pressures, international economic shocks, international ideological or extremist networks, and policies that tend to undermine the country's economic system.

Sarka and Bulus's studies have revealed that many external factors are associated with development in Nigeria. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), imposing policies on citizens is a common issue. Generally, and regrettably, most socioeconomic structures or institutions in Nigeria are neither viable nor resilient enough to withstand the rigor and dynamics of some global policy practices, especially those from international financial institutions. The UNDP report further states that most policies in Less developed nations are imposed on the uninformed masses. These policies are created by the

[31] Dirks and Schmidt, "Political Instability and Economic Growth," 8.

government and its ruling agents without proper consideration of the target population, meaning the masses are not allowed to participate in formulating policies that affect their well-being. The report also reveals that Nigeria ranks 152nd among 187 countries in human development, indicating an average quality of life and standard of living. Nigeria's Human Development Index is recorded at 381, which is below the acceptable level. While corruption is a global challenge, Nigeria is deeply ensnared in it.[32]

Impact of Political Instability on Socioeconomic Development in Nigeria

Studies have shown that political instability usually has far-reaching consequences for the socioeconomic development of nations, whether developed or underdeveloped. In Nigeria, the effects of political instability are evident, especially with the persistent violent conflicts and insecurity that have plagued the nation for decades. Given its uncertain and insecure nature, political instability has, since independence in 1960, adversely affected Nigeria's economic policies and the implementation strategies of successive governments, whether civilian or military. It has affected the country's Gross Domestic Product, Gross National Income, per capita income, savings levels, foreign reserves, revenue generation, fiscal capital accumulation, budgets and their implementation strategies, productivity, and investments, both domestic and foreign direct investment. Tomola Obamuyi and Oladapo Fapetu identify corruption, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, politics, and governance as socio-political challenges affecting Nigeria's economic development. They argue that these challenges contribute to economic instability, poverty and unemployment, and emphasize accountable management of national resources and proactive government responses.[33]

[32] S. Sarka and B. S. Bulus, "The Effects of Political Instability on the Socioeconomic Development in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria," *International Journal of Law, Politics and Humanities Research* 26, no. 4 (2022): 8.

[33] T. M. Obamuyi and O. Fapetu, "The Nigerian Economy in the Face of Socio-Political Challenges: A Retrospective View and Ways Forward," *International Journal of Finance & Banking Studies* 5, no. 3 (2016): 32.

Chimezie Nwadike et al.'s study is instructive, as they found a significant effect of policy (a product of politics) instability on Nigerian economic growth during 1970–2015. The study found that political instability was significantly associated with economic growth, indicating that instability in the political and policy environment has important economic consequences. However, their Granger-casualty analysis found no causal relationship between political instability and unsustainable national economic growth for the study period.[34]

Similarly, Daniel Onyejiuwa and John Ifaka who examine the "effect of economic corruption and political instability on Nigeria economy" contend that, political instability has negative effect on GDP. The study provided an empirical link between corruption, political instability and economic output, rather than treating political instability only as a political phenomenon. To them, corruption and political instability can undermine productive economic activity, investment and broader economic performance.[35] Currently, it has created a vulnerable situation, marked by high levels of violence (electoral, political, religious, ethnic, among others), unemployment, especially among rural farmers and an alarming state of insecurity, including food insecurity. Political instability hampers the effective utilisation of Nigeria's abundant natural and human resources, leading to widespread poverty and economic hardships. Despite Nigeria's vast resources and potential, political instability continues to constrain its progress as a regional power. Addressing these root issues is vital to unlocking Nigeria's true potential and fostering sustainable development. It is truly devastating to see how political instability in Nigeria has led to the loss of many lives due to violent crisis like the Nigerian Civil War and ongoing conflicts with groups like Boko Haram, religious crises, banditry, and

[34] G. C. Nwadike, K. J. Ani, and V. Ojakorotu, "Assessing the Political Economy of Policy Instability and Its Effect on Nigerian Economic Growth, 1970–2015," *Journal of Reviews on Global Economics* 8 (2019): 72.

[35] D. C. Onyejiuwa and J. O. Ifaka, "The Effect of Economic Corruption and Political Instability on Nigerian Economy," *Ekpoma Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2024): 12.

unknown gunmen. These tragic events not only result in human casualties but also have profound effects on the nation's workforce and economy.

Furthermore, the ongoing political instability in Nigeria acts as a major obstacle to foreign investment. The absence of peace and stability discourages foreign investors from participating in the country's economy. Nigeria must foster a peaceful, secure environment to attract foreign investment that can promote economic growth and development. Political instability generally hampers a nation's productivity. Several governments since Nigeria's independence in 1960 have established a legacy of corruption, lawlessness, ethnic tensions, widespread poverty, sectionalism, and communal violence. In summary, political instability has undermined Nigeria's socioeconomic development by creating insecurity of life and property, inconsistent policy implementation, frequent protests and strikes, and underdeveloped infrastructure.

Measures to Curb Political Instability

Addressing the issues plaguing Nigeria is essential to foster stability, attract investments, and protect the well-being of all individuals affected by conflicts, thereby promoting sustainable socioeconomic development. To this end, transformational leadership and constitutional reform could help reduce political instability and its effects on socio-economic development in Nigeria. Politicians and other stakeholders holding public office in trust must see politics as a noble, selfless call to serve the people, free from bitterness and rancor, and should internalize the spirit of equity, fairness, and justice, especially when implementing policies or distributing resources at all levels.

Second, political leaders should lead by example, promoting unity and peaceful coexistence among citizens and ethnic groups rather than fostering division. As a democracy, Nigeria should cultivate democratic principles and values to strengthen our emerging

democracy. Also, there is a dire need to establish mechanisms for crisis management and resolution within government institutions, which is vital to addressing tensions effectively.

Additionally, we need to emphasize good governance in both theory and practice. This is because it is key to ensuring social justice, equality, and equitable resource distribution. By prioritizing these principles, Nigeria can foster a peaceful and stable environment, reducing the need for citizens to face unnecessary hardships.

More so, Nigerian leaders need to collaborate to build a harmonious and prosperous future for all Nigerians. They must adopt good political culture, free from ethnocentrism, marginalization, sectionalism, ethnic or regional dominance, statism, electoral manipulations, malpractices, reckless political inflammatory statements, and political arrogance that breeds disunity. Moreover, creating an enabling environment by the government to attract investors to engage in Foreign Direct Investment. This is one of the ways to promote the industrialization of the economy and economic growth.

Lastly, the government should intensify efforts to diversify the economy and avoid politicizing the issue. The country could benefit greatly if these sectors are properly harnessed, especially in agriculture, solid minerals, tourism, information technology, and communication.

Conclusion

Socioeconomic challenges, largely driven by political instability, have been identified as the major hindrance to achieving meaningful or sustainable development in Less Developed Countries such as Nigeria. Indeed, political instability and socioeconomic development have remained topical subjects in the modernization approach for many decades because of the peculiar characteristics that define the economies of less developed societies like Nigeria. Today, Nigeria faces serious political and socioeconomic crises ranging from electoral violence and malpractice, kidnapping, killings, banditry, acute food shortages, unemployment, and mass

poverty, to mention a few. To this end, viable conflict resolution agencies and mechanisms should be established to foster peace and harmony in the country's political space. Most importantly, "Special Tribunals" should always be in place to hear and address pre-election matters within two months, not only to prevent their inherent implications for the system but also to restore public confidence. A national conference should be convened to discuss critical national issues reinforcing political instability in Nigeria, including marginalization, minority cries, incessant strikes in key sectors of the economy, human rights abuses, corruption among public officials, pre- and post-election matters, farmer/herders' clashes, judicial interpretations, among others.

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