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INYUVESI YASETHEKWINI YEZOBUCHWEPHESHE

Cultural Resistance and the Law: Assessing the Implementation of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPPA) in Osun State

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPPA) of 2015, focusing on how cultural resistance weakened its effectiveness. The implementation and domestication in 2021 in Osun State marked a new era in the fight against Gender-Based Violence. Despite domestication, entrenched institutional limitations, socio-cultural norms, and patriarchal traditions, its success is hindered. A qualitative desk review was adopted, drawing on primary data from policy documents, while media reports, supported by the extant literature, provided secondary data. Legal pluralism theory was adopted as a framework of analysis. Despite awareness of these harmful traditional norms, religious and traditional leaders continue to resolve issues through customary practices that contradict government provisions, making survivors face limited access to justice, inadequate support services, and stigma. At the same time, the law enforcement agency has limited training, and its campaign efforts for VAPPA remain low, especially in rural communities where its prevalence is high. Compared with other states in Nigeria, Osun State lags in its institutional and domestication efforts. It highlighted that culturally sensitive, diverse traditional strategies needed to be integrated with legal provisions to promote restorative justice. Recommended that both religious and traditional leaders be educated on the legal provisions, that indigenous research be conducted on harmful cultural practices, and that gender studies be incorporated into formal education. Government policy, integrated with community engagement and dialogue, creates meaningful and accessible justice amid cultural drift.

Keywords: Gender-based Violence, Cultural practices, statutory law, constitutionalism, domestic violence

Introduction

Globally, gender-based violence (GBV) has been a persistent and pervasive issue. Often, it is shielded by entrenched cultural norms, religious interpretations, and institutional inertia (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2022). Nigeria has seen increased momentum in implementing the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act of 2015, yet its efforts and effectiveness in Osun State remain limited. Media coverage of the VAPPA in Osun State primarily focuses on legislative milestones and advocacy campaigns, with limited coverage of survivors' experiences or case outcomes. The *#JUSTICE4SGBVSURVIVORS* initiative, launched in Osogbo, received attention but failed to arouse sustained public discourse. A national survey conducted by Invictus Africa reported that only 49.3% of Nigerians had heard of the VAPP. Among them, just 29% understood its provisions, with awareness significantly lower among rural residents and

those with limited education, indicating a critical gap in public knowledge and engagement (The Guardian, 2025).

The VAPP Act was designed to combat different forms of GBV/VAW, including harmful cultural practices such as female Genital Mutilation (FGM), harmful widowhood practices, and wife battery, and all other forms of abuse that affect women's psychological well-being (Anyogu & Okpalaobi, 2017). The enactment of legal provisions does not depend solely on their implementation provisions, but also on effective domestication, especially where there is little or no awareness. While the federal government sought to implement VAPPA across all 36 States of the federation, only 34 States, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), complied (Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2025). The enactment complemented existing laws, such as the Criminal Code, Cap 34, Volume 2 of 2002; the Protection Against Domestic Violence Law of 2013; and the Child Rights Law of Osun State, 2007.

Osun State represents the compelling intersection between law, custom, and resistance, as communities view harmful cultural practices as essential components of the Yoruba identity. This perception undermined the implementation of VAPPA, as people prioritised cultural identity, beliefs, and norms over legal provisions. According to Ipas Nigeria (2024), Osun State is one of the states in Nigeria that struggles with domestication due to embedded traditional cultural norms and beliefs that hinder its successful implementation.

Research Problem

With the domestication of the VAPP Law in Osun state, entrenched cultural practices persist as a generational inheritance. Amid this persistence, the law continues to become ineffective. The conflict between statutory and customary law revealed a critical gap. Although VAPP Law exists, its implementation in local communities in Osun State is challenging. The constraints between customary law and statutory law need to be examined to understand how local law can be localised to accommodate fundamental human rights, while also identifying the barriers that hinder its effectiveness.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative literature review approach, using secondary data sources. The material reviewed includes academic journal publications,

books, relevant policy documents, archival materials, and newspaper reports that directly address gender-based violence and the VAPPA Law.

Cultural Resistance: Concept and Manifestation

Cultural resistance is the way people push back against legal provisions that challenge their beliefs (Merry, 1995; Haastrup, 2025). It is the conscious or unconscious opposition that challenges legal, political, or ideological reforms intended to dismantle harmful cultural practices (Jegede,.2025). Resistance may be obvious or subtle, and may be expressed through non-compliance with the law, selective case and enforcement, the raging of public voices, and the reinterpretation or deliberate misinformation of such acts. Ipas Nigeria (2024) reported that community and religious leaders, as well as some government officials, doubted the applicability of the VAPP Law due to the perception that it erodes indigenous traditions and cultures. The deeply embedded cultural practices and resistance to the legal provision posed a critical question about the relationships between law and society. Omoniyi (2020) and Aragbuwa and Omotunde (2022) note that these cultural practices are deeply embedded in the community, part of Yoruba identity, and culturally normalised. These practices conflict with the legal provisions of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law (VAPPA), weakening its effectiveness and efficiency, as cultural allegiance undermines the law enforcement agency's efficacy.

For instance, despite the campaigns against FGM, it remains a stark phenomenon in Osun State, with its prevalence primarily in rural communities. Izevbizua and Omoruyi (2024) have noted that weak law, systemic failure, and the handling of perpetrators influenced the continuous and persistent nature of FGM. Similarly, Fitchett (2024) argues that harmful practices like wife battery, widowhood rites, and forced marriage are seen as a normal obligation of tradition, making it difficult for victims and survivors to seek support. Thus, entrenched patriarchal culture will hamper the effective implementation of VAPPA due to the widespread acceptance of these norms (Olademo, 2022; Idowu et al., 2023).

Silva et al. (2024) observe that harmful practices are prevalent, as indigenous traditions and displacement pressures result in a hybrid form of resistance that complicates enforcement. The authors emphasised that as people from the South-west migrated, they continued to uphold their culture. However, community leaders' respect for culture outweighs the Statutory law. Chinagorom et al. (2024) have noted that despite Nigeria ratifying various

legislative frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), implementation remains weak due to cultural resistance and pushback.

Theoretical Framework

The study used the Legal Pluralism framework as its foundation. The theory recognises the coexistence of different legal systems, statutory, customary, religious, and informal, within a single socio-political space (Mukaddam, 2024; Hariri & Babussalam, 2024). Legal pluralism is not aligned with a single authoritative source of law but recognises multiple authorities and acknowledges a normative order (Seminario, 2024). This framework aligns with the Nigerian context, where the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, intersects with cultural and religious traditions, making its existence difficult to accept.

The foundational proponent of Legal Pluralism is Eugen Ehrlich**,** whose seminal work emphasised the concept of *"living law",* the norms that govern everyday life outside the formal legal system (Ehrlich & Ziegert, 2017). The authors argued that the most acceptable known laws are not those codified by the state but those deeply entrenched and accepted by the community through practices and social institutions. In Osun State, the religious and traditional rulers are deeply embedded in customary law and have authority within their cultural jurisdictions to address harmful cultural practices and GBV, thereby sidelining the VAPPA Law and weakening its effectiveness and legitimacy.

Building on Ehrlich's foundation, Sally Engle Merry expanded Legal Pluralism to encompass human rights and gender justice, exploring how certain laws are resisted and rejected at the international level due to embedded cultural practices. However, the global human rights framework is embedded in the national framework but is mostly resisted, reshaped, and interpreted in practice by local communities (Merry, 1988; 2006a; 2006b; 2024). This relates to the case of Osun State, where the domestication of the VAPPA represents an attempt to localise global norms in the fight against all forms of harmful cultural practices against women and girl children. In contrast, the cultural resistances challenge effective implementation and domestication because of the ingrained patriarchal and gender norms and practices.

Furthermore, Merry (2006b), in the analysis of *transnational legal culture,* has argued that law must not be radically imposed but must gain legitimacy by being widely upheld. Legal Pluralism not only helps us understand the tension between law and culture but also recognises the harmonisation of multiple legal systems through culturally sensitive approaches and community engagement. The lack of awareness and education, and survivors' delayed seeking of justice, hinder the effectiveness and reliability of the VAPP law.

Despite its contribution to the intersection of culture and law, it is a critique that Legal Pluralism may be indirectly supporting harmful traditional practices and subjecting women to violence. For instance, customary resolution of disputes may prioritise the reconciliation and silencing of the victim or survivor, thereby reinforcing patriarchal traditional practices. As Webber et al. (2020) have noted, acceptance of radical Legal Pluralism must align with acceptance of fundamental human rights and gender justice. In Osun State, while traditional cultural practices must be preserved, they must be consistent with fundamental human rights.

Domestication of VAPP Law in Nigerian States

The implementation of the VAPP law in Nigeria serves as a milestone in the fight against gender-based violence and other harmful cultural practices. With survivors' confidence and legal protections, perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, and advocacy and community awareness have helped shift people's mindsets. As of 2025, only 34 states, including FCT, have domesticated the law, with varying degrees of implementation. Some have extracted parts of the law, while others still rely on old laws and have yet to make use of provisions (Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2025). These show that most women are not getting due justice, especially those who are vulnerable.

Research highlighted how states like Kano and Taraba failed to implement the law due to several factors, like socio-cultural barriers, religious interpretations, institutional weakness, and unresponsive legislators in the legislatures that continue to obstruct the recognition of marital rape and domestic violence (Essien, 2023; Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2025). The research underscores the broader challenges of protecting women's rights in Nigeria, as the failure of Kano and Taraba to domesticate the acts poses a serious threat to the justice system and reinforces impunity (Obagboye, 2020a; Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2023; Partners West Africa

Nigeria, 2025).

Lagos and Ekiti States have taken a new approach to the fight against GBV, adopting alternative frameworks to combat the menace. Lagos enacted the *Protection Against Domestic Violence Law* in 2007, while Ekiti harmonised its existing frameworks through the *Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Amendment Law* of 2019. These states have made efforts to implement and enforce the VAPP law, thereby strengthening the delivery of justice to victims. The implications of integrating VAPP Law into communities include challenging harmful cultural norms, restoring survivors' confidence, facilitating effective case reporting, and promoting cooperation between government and civil society (Ikuteyijo et al., 2024). However, resistance from traditional institutions, limited awareness, inadequate resources, and insufficient legal and counselling support services pose barriers. VAPP Law is an enforceable legal document; having been assented to by the president, all states must domesticate it through their state assemblies as a constitutional and moral imperative. Therefore, any state that fails to domesticate it conflicts with the power of the Constitution and exposes its citizens to a cycle of violence.

Table 1.   Domestication of the VAPP Act in Nigerian States

S/N	STATE	Legislative Status (Bill)	Executive Status (Law)
1	FCT	Passed	Assented to on 23rd May 2015
2	Abia	Passed on 3rd December 2019	Assented to on 1st October 2020
3	Adamawa	Passed on 1st March 2021	Assented to on 30th August 2021
4	Akwa Ibom	Passed on 10th June 2019	Assented to on 19th June 2020
5	Anambra	Passed in 2017	Assented in 2017
6	Bauchi	Passed in May 2015	Assented in 2020
7	Bayelsa	Passed on 17th February 2021	Assented in 2020
8	Benue	Passed on 26th May 2019	Assented to on 28th May 2019

9	Borno	Passed in 2022	Assented to on 10th January 2022
10	Cross River	Passed in 2021	Assented to on 31st December 2021
11	Delta	Passed on 28th July 2020	Assented to on 7th October 2020
12	Ebonyi	Passed on 1st May 2018	Assented in May 2018
13	Edo	Passed on 17th June 2021	Assented to on 5th August 2021
14	Ekiti*	Passed the Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Amendment Law 2019	
15	Enugu	Passed on 4th April 2019	Assented in April 2019
16	Gombe	Passed on 18th October 2022	Assented to on 13th December 2022
17	Imo	Passed on 27th July 2021	Assented to on 17th December 2021
18	Jigawa	Passed on 24th February 2021	Assented to on 24th February 2021
19	Kaduna	Passed in December 2018	Assented on 1st December 2018
20	Kano	Yet to be passed	—
21	Katsina	Passed	Assented to on 22nd December 2023
22	Kebbi	Passed on 30th September 2021	Assented to on 27th July 2022
23	Kogi	Passed on 22nd March 2021	Assented to on 27th June 2022
24	Kwara	Passed on 24th September 2020	Assented to on 15th October 2020
25	Lagos*	Passed the Protection Against Domestic Violence Law (2007)	—

26	Nasarawa	Passed on 6th January 2021	Assented to on 21st January 2021
27	Niger	Passed on 24th February 2021	Assented to on 3rd November 2021
28	Ogun	Passed on 17th January 2018	Assented in 2018
29	Ondo	Passed on 2nd July 2021	Assented to on 15th July 2021
30	Osun	Passed on 12th August 2021	Assented to on 11th October 2021
31	Oyo	Passed on 18th December 2020	Assented to on 26th February 2021
32	Plateau	Passed on 24th December 2020	Assented to on 19th May 2022
33	Rivers	Passed in January 2020	Awaiting assent in 2021
34	Sokoto	Passed on 19th January 2021	Assented to on 22nd November 2021
35	Taraba	Passed on 24th February 2022	—
36	Yobe	Passed in 2021	Assented to on 16th April 2022
37	Zamfara	Passed in December 2023	Assented in 2023

Source: VAPP Tracker, 2025-Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015

Legal Framework and the Challenge of Domestication in Osun State

The VAPP Act of 2015 gained wider momentum in response to GBV in Nigeria (Adelakun et al., 2025). Its passage spurred collaborations among diverse stakeholders at all levels in their campaigns and awareness-raising efforts. Before its implementation, Nigeria was known for its older frameworks, such as the Criminal and Penal Code, which could not address the offences related to harmful cultural practices and GBV. Izevbizua and Omoruyi (2024) have noted that VAPP Law is the first of its kind to address all forms of harmful cultural practices and gender-based violence, offering a practical approach to justice and dignity. However, non-compliance and

weak political will undermine its effectiveness.

Government officials, stakeholders, and civil society organisations in Osun State advocate implementing VAPPA through awareness and sensitisation programmes and activities. Akintade (2021) reports that the wife of the former Governor implored all stakeholders to reinforce the implementation through collaborative efforts by government agencies, civil society organisations, and traditional rulers in the state. Stakeholders have identified weaknesses in the implementation of the laws and have mounted pressure on the government to enforce them, according to the Administration of Criminal Justice Law. This requires strengthening the Sexual Assault Referral Centres to ensure they are functional (Eighteen Eleven Media, 2023). IPAS Nigeria (2024) noted that the law enforcement agency lacks sufficient training, while advocacy and awareness remain low, especially in rural areas with high prevalence. Survivors mostly face stigmatisation, limited access to justice, isolation, banishment, and support services, such as shelter, mental counselling, which further weaken the law's intended action against GBV/VAW. Umeh et al. (2021) note that violence in Nigeria lacks a clear definition. However, the VAPP Law provides a detailed categorisation of violence, ranging from physical, psychological, emotional, economic, sexual and different harmful traditional practices. However, not all states have domesticated or implemented the law; even where they have, they face bureaucratic hurdles within the judicial system.

The Osun State legislature passed the VAPPA in August 2021, and the governor assented it in October 2021 (Idris, 2025). However, the law has suffered significantly from the absence of post-legislative scrutiny. The non-institutional capability remains a constant obstacle. Arowolo (2023) notes that without specialisation of the special court and training and retraining of officers, the VAPP Law will be ineffective. In Osun State, the ineffective institutional capacity has left many citizens neglected, and survivors coerced into abandoning justice.

Onochie and Nmor (2024) argue that judicial delay in delivering judgments and the misinterpretation of the law undermine the law's effectiveness. As Ekhator (2019) rightly observed, the promotion of women's rights development often clashes with the deeply patriarchal practice, while people of Osun state see the VAPP Law as an external imposition. The challenge, therefore, is not to see it as a tool for destroying their community's cultural identity, but as an intervention to combat harmful practices and protect fundamental human rights.

Law vs. Culture: Analysis of Findings and Discussion

Compared with other Nigerian states, Osun lags in implementing the VAPP law. Ekiti State has harmonised its GBV laws and set up specialised courts, while Lagos passed its Protection Against Domestic Violence Law in 2007. These states highlight the importance of institutional coordination, budget support, and public participation in turning legal frameworks into fundamental protections (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2023; Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2025). In its evaluation, IPAS Nigeria (2024) found that although 32 States have provisions for issuing protection orders, only 18 have incorporated them into broader GBV tracking systems. The report stressed that domestication alone is insufficient; effective implementation, monitoring, and community involvement are crucial for achieving meaningful results (IPAS Nigeria, 2024).

Aina-Pelemo, Olujobi, and Yebisi (2023) have noted that Nigeria's legislative framework needs urgent attention as survivors find it difficult to access. Imam-Tamim (2022) notes difficulties between statutory law and the religious system, as the legal system must strike a balance to ensure community adherence. Obagboye (2020b) highlights the difficulty in the lack of compliance in the enforcement of the law in Nigeria and the power to criminalise sexual violence. Meanwhile, Izevbizua, Benin, and Omoruyi (2022) have asserted that the government must strictly enforce the law to eliminate harmful traditional practices justified by the glorification of culture (Igwe, 2015). In Osun State, reconciliation serves as another root, prioritising perpetrators over accountability (Idowu et al., 2023). Ugwu (2020) notes that the law is established as an imposition or external force to destroy the existing *status quo*. These perceptions fuel resistance and challenge the implementation of GBV legislation.

Chika and Nneka (2014) have noted that these harmful traditions are commonly practised in societies in the Eastern part of the country, making adherence to legal enactments difficult. Similarly, Okondu (2023) noted the need to incorporate indigenous knowledge of the law at the local level, especially regarding gender discrimination, and to involve relevant stakeholders to help uphold the law. Oduola and Muthuki (2018) have found that in Oyo State, there was a revolt against the law and a reluctance to accept them as victims. Anyone who made a case or reported the perpetration of GBV would be banished, shamed, pressured, and even

stigmatised, as upholding traditional institutions is considered more important than legalised law. The situation is the same in Osun State, where any individual who reports such claims would be stigmatised and shamed (Eighteen Eleven Media, 2023). Cultural silence also reinforces harmful cultural practices. In Osun State, cultural silence receives little attention, and the law is seen as an abstraction, with limited visibility in public discourse and public opinion (Idowu et al., 2023).

Conclusions

The study explored the tension between statutory legal frameworks and entrenched cultural norms in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Osun State. It is important to note that while Osun State's domestication of the VAPP Act is a commendable legislative achievement, its implementation continues to reveal gaps. Cultural resistance, institutional shortcomings, and low public awareness continue to limit the law's effectiveness. Closing these gaps requires a different approach that combines legal reform with community engagement, capacity building, and ongoing advocacy.

Findings from IPAS Nigeria (2024) revealed that the law enforcement agency has low training, and while the awareness and campaign for VAPPA remain low, especially in rural communities where its prevalence is high, survivors face stigmatisation or banishment from the community, limited access to justice, and inadequate support services. The absence of legal services, support aids, and shelter makes the victim more vulnerable, compounds their problem and undermines their justice. The 2020 pandemic exposed the fragility of GBV/VAW response to the act, as economic hardship rose because of the lockdown, many women are in a vulnerable position, and this pandemic shut down the whole world, as women faced severe domestic violence from their spouses. Osun state is seen as one of the hotspots of GBV/VAW in Nigeria during the Lockdown, and there is a need for culturally sensitive interventions that go beyond the legal provision of the law. GBV response of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) by the Centre for Women's Health and Information (CEWHIN), in Osun state, which advocates for the inclusiveness and survival of this centre's approach (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2022). However, these initiatives remain ineffective, unsustainable, and limited without community and institutional support.

The study analysed how cultural resistance continues to obstruct the

government's efforts and responses to GBV/VAW. The historical background, its domestications, and its deeply rooted cultural practices challenged the authority of the Osun State government. Using a qualitative method, the study uncovers the tension between law and custom while revealing societal and cultural norms that threaten statutory authority and affect justice. The study recommended an actionable strategy to address this, promoting a survival-centred approach, raising awareness of its legal implications, and engaging traditional leaders.

Most importantly, the study concluded that there should be a community-driven approach to gendered justice, that these customs can be localised to align with human rights, and that cultural practices sensitisation programs can be established or reformed without practices that affect the dignity of women and girls. Rather than dismantling cultural identity, the study called for a supportive environment, examined the role of that environment in shaping social norms, and highlighted its commitment to dignity, justice, and equality for all people.

Tradition, culture and religion continue to subject women to violent acts and shape their perception of morality, justice and gender roles. These practices often negate the law, creating fear and stigmatisation and silencing of women into extinction as survival or victims failed to seek redress, and perpetrators enjoy accountability given to them as the patriarchal traditional system is deeply ingrained in the Nigerian system. However, the tension is not insurmountable, as dialogue, innovation, reforms, and community engagement offer opportunities for both the community and legal authority.

As Omorogiuwa (2022) argues, the law should not be, as its name implies, merely statutory, but an act that people see and commit to change without resistance or the imposition of authority. In interpreting this study's findings, it becomes clear that there is tension between law and culture, and that this is not a binary conflict but a dynamic negotiation. To avoid incompatibility between legal norms and cultural values, they must be harmonised through inclusive, participatory processes. The VAPP Act provides a legal foundation, but its success depends on societal willingness to embrace change and protect the rights of all people.

VAPP law has gained significant momentum in Osun State since its establishment as a tool to combat the harmful effects of GBV. Despite its domestication, it remains constrained by entrenched cultural practices. Thus, the law must be friendly and harmonise with the cultural

realities, with empathy, education, training, and creative awareness campaigns in the media and public programmes. For any government policy to succeed, a family must be settled, as law only works when the home front is peaceful and free of poverty, problems, and challenges.

Recommendations

The recommendation offers a range of holistic approaches, including religious engagement and traditional inclusion, education and awareness, gender-sensitive law enforcement, and the community-based VAAPA track. Through these, Nigeria and Osun State can move forward in responding to GBV and harmful cultural practices. Firstly, traditional and religious leaders are not just custodians of traditional law; they also play important roles in their communities, where they are respected and serve as gatekeepers of culture and tradition. Statutory laws should not compete with traditional law but should face reality and involve local stakeholders through training and retraining, while imposing consequences in a friendly manner.

Secondly, many rural communities are distant from these laws; there is a need for community-based programmes in rural areas, as non-governmental organisations cannot track them. These community members will serve as a direct link to the non-governmental organisation for reporting cases of harmful cultural practices. To ensure that survivors are not silenced by fear or stigma, community-based reporting mechanisms must be established. These systems, managed by trusted local actors such as women's groups, youth leaders, or health workers, can provide safe spaces for disclosure and facilitate timely referrals to legal and psychosocial services. Anonymity and confidentiality must be prioritised to protect survivors and encourage reporting. Other ways, such as storytelling, narrative, radio, and television programmes, can educate people in rural areas and help VAPPA gain a foothold, with the laws announced consistently and clearly, and spoken in the community's indigenous language for clarity.

Thirdly, the judiciary, police, and other officers who will attend cases of GBV and harmful cultural practices must have the necessary knowledge. They must understand the legal terms, report the case carefully to avoid shaming the victim in society, and be detailed and understand the cultural context of the issue at hand, without jeopardising the case.

Girls and women must be educated and enlightened right from childhood to avoid violence, not that the educated do not witness violent acts. However,

it reduces perpetrators' actions, as awareness-raising makes it easier for women to understand their fundamental human rights and the appropriate channels to forward their complaints. It is important to incorporate it into civic education or critical pedagogy, as law, culture, and gender will form the bulk of it and be passed down from one generation to the next.

Despite the domestication of VAPPA in Osun State, local people still see it as a hindrance to their culture. However, integrating such a law into the community is paramount, as it will enable the implementation of multiple strategies to enhance its effectiveness and inform the community about its legal implications and rewards. Also, during integration, it must include human and capital development, support for victims, and, only through these means, can we move beyond this paper approach and use it to transform lives. Religion also forms part of the culture, coexisting with it. The teaching in the holy book should be the one to preach gender justice and interpret it rightly. These will help ensure that practices are not violent, in accordance with fundamental human rights. As religion preaches peace and support for gender equality and equity, harmful cultural practices will continue to exist.

Community-based research should be conducted periodically to track the law's effectiveness through case reporting. These will help the relevant stakeholders evaluate the feedback to the authority, determine whether the law is effective, and assess whether it is making progress toward its stated purpose. Such data will not only inform policy refinement but also offer scalable models for other states navigating similar tensions.

Finally, if the Legal Act is to be progressive, it must not rely solely on statutes but must also speak to people's minds and ideas. However, the battle is not only a Legal battle but also a cultural reckoning; it demands love, kindness, and empathy, and it must be protective and transformative, not imposing or coercive. There is a need for a mindset of cultural change that aligns with fundamental human rights rather than resistance. It is important to note that the recommendations provided here are not gainsaying but rather serve as a paradigm shift in the context of VAPPA domestication and implementation. It is necessary to note that Legal reform must show empathy, community engagement, educational transformation, a n d cultural

reforms and dialogue; only then can Law transcend into justice, dignity and societal renewal of hope in culture and traditions.

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Challenges in the Administrative Processes of Community-Based Non-Profit Organisation in Durban, South Africa

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Challenges in the Administrative Processes

Abstract

This research paper explores the administrative challenges faced by non-profit organisations (NPOs) operating in Durban, South Africa, drawing on insights from NPO founders. Using a qualitative methodology, the study employs semi-structured interviews with NPO leaders across sectors such as education, health, and community development. Findings reveal that NPOs in Durban face significant obstacles, particularly in sustaining funding, addressing human resource constraints, meeting regulatory compliance requirements, and building capacity. Many NPOs struggle to secure adequate financial support due to intense competition for limited grant funding and reliance on unpredictable government funding, thereby affecting their operational effectiveness. Additionally, high staff turnover and reliance on volunteers exacerbate human resource challenges, hindering service delivery. Regulatory burdens further complicate operations, as navigating complex compliance requirements demands significant time and resources. The study underscores the need for enhanced training and capacity-building initiatives to equip NPO leaders with essential management and administration skills. The paper concludes with recommendations to foster the digital transformation of the administrative process among NPOs. By addressing these administrative challenges collectively, NPOs in Durban can enhance their effectiveness in serving the local communities.

Keywords: Public administration, Non-profit organisation, administration, digital transformation.

Introduction

NPOs are described as organisations that work to improve the lives and means of subsistence of those who are underprivileged or have not yet realised their full potential in society (Diab, 2021). In South Africa, these organisations are private and organised in nature, as they are institutionally distinct from the government (Nkabinde & Mamabolo, 2022). According to the South African NPO Act (No. 71 of 1997). A NPO is "a trust, company or other association of persons established for a public purpose; and the income and property of which may not be distributable to its members or office-bearers except as reasonable compensation for services rendered".

South Africa is still a very unequal nation plagued by poverty and misery, and there are still apparent remnants of its authoritarian past. According to Odeku (2023), the years of segregation during the apartheid era are still the source of issues with inequality, social exclusion and a lack of integration. These socio-economic problems continue despite the government investing a significant sum of money in social upliftment to address these causes

(Rogerson & Rogerson, 2023). Due to the ongoing demand for social development, non-profit organisations (NPOs) are seen by South African society as a source of social service delivery, development and improvement, as well as a means of mobilising for social change.

Despite their necessity, NPOs have not received the level of support they need from either the government or civil society to ensure their continued existence (Sithole, Phesa & Sibanda 2024). However, NPOs are integral to the social fabric of communities worldwide, serving as vehicles for change and development in response to diverse societal needs (McIntyre, 2021). In Durban, South Africa, an urban centre characterised by economic diversity and significant socio-economic challenges, there are high unemployment rates, widespread inequality, and various social issues (Mvunabandi & Mbonigaba, 2023). NPOs in this region have emerged to fill crucial gaps in service delivery, advocating for marginalised communities and providing essential programs that improve quality of life (Mvunabandi et al., 2022). Engaging in a wide range of activities, from educational support and healthcare initiatives to environmental conservation and social justice advocacy. Nevertheless, the operational landscape for these organisations is fraught with challenges that can undermine their effectiveness (Henna & Mdiniso, 2024).

Research Problem

Community-based NPOs in Durban are essential players in addressing the socio-economic challenges within their communities, including poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and social welfare. Despite their critical role, many of these organisations face persistent challenges in their administrative processes that significantly hamper their effectiveness and sustainability (Sibisi & Makka, 2022). Many NPOs rely on manual, paper-based systems for record-keeping and communication, which lead to inefficiencies, errors, and delays in data retrieval and reporting (Suykens *et al.*, 2022). The absence of digital tools also hampers effective communication both internally and with external stakeholders, reducing overall organisational responsiveness (Gee *et al.*, 2023). These interconnected administrative shortcomings contribute to operational inefficiencies, reduce stakeholder trust, and limit the potential impact of community-based NPOs (Lim & Kim, 2025). Consequently, the sustainability and scalability of these organisations are compromised, diminishing their capacity to address pressing community needs over time.

Given this context, it is imperative to undertake an in-depth investigation into the specific administrative challenges faced by community-based NPOs in Durban. This article aims to evaluate administrative process challenges through the lens of an NPO founder, providing insight into the underlying

challenges that hinder the effectiveness of administrative processes in community-based NPOs and ultimately affect the communities they serve. Secondly, the researchers explore the experiences of NPO founders and recommend best practices for administrative processes with a focus on digital transformation. Addressing these administrative challenges is crucial for improving resource utilisation, compliance, and effective management practices, enhancing service delivery, improving stakeholder engagement, and ultimately empowering NPOs to serve communities better. This work aspires not only to inform current stakeholders in the NPO sector but also to inspire future policy developments and collaborative efforts that can strengthen NPOs' role in promoting social welfare and community resilience.

Literature review

Administration processes for community-based NPOs

An organisation's administration is its very essence. Administrative process, as noted by Joensuu-Salo, Viljamaa and Varamäki (2022). This is how verdicts are made, assignments are given and finished, data is collected and shared, and resources are distributed. Bellini and Raglianti (2023) aver that it is the method by which an establishment, organisation or institution completes tasks. Examples of administrative processes include setting up meetings, processing bills and costs, tracking personnel and payroll, responding to customer questions and correspondence, keeping up with office supplies and equipment, and organising mail and document filing systems. (Persada and Nabella 2023). However, in global NPOs, insufficient resources, inadequate planning and management, poor leadership and communication, a lack of accountability and corruption, a lack of skilled workers and training, outdated infrastructure, low citizens' participation, and adverse effects from external political and economic circumstances are some of the leading causes of poor administrative service delivery (Mampane, 2023). NPOs in South Africa are not excluded from global issues, as outmoded, flawed and unreliable administrative processes impair NPO service delivery.

Accountability of administrative processes in community-based NPOs

A robust understanding of administrative challenges in community-based NPOs rests on an interconnected theoretical lens—namely, Governance theory and NPO foundation theory. In practice, the 'Governance theory' of NPOs involves balancing policy direction, compliance obligations, funding

allocation, and program outcomes within environments that supply modest resources and uncertain funding streams (Young, 2021). Regulations and laws apply to NPOs. Chu and Luke (2023) suggest that adherence to rules and regulations is a key component of accountability. Fulfilling these responsibilities demonstrates prudent resource management and helps preserve the company's legal standing and reputation (English, O'Neal-McElrath, and Kanter 2025). To carry out their tasks, NPOs rely on public confidence and support. Assuring stakeholders and donors that their funds are being utilised sensibly and for the right reasons, accountability demonstrations increase openness and trust.

Maintaining public confidence is essential to long-term viability and gaining continued support. Frequently, NPOs focus on humanitarian, environmental or social issues. It is morally required of these groups to exhibit accountability because they seek to improve society. Accountability ensures that NPOs' actions align with their declared ideals and tenets (Chu & Luke, 2023). On the other hand, 'NPOs foundation theory' focuses on NPOs' vision, mission, and upliftment projects for communities (Pilon & Brouard, 2023). NPO administration refers to applying business, leadership and creative abilities to support an NPO in its efforts to serve as many people as feasible and operate as efficiently as possible (Dicke & Ott, 2023). In NPOs, it is important to realise that the most effective way to grow an organisation is to invest in its employees. Many NPO management skills can be taught, while others are innate.

Administrative Governance theory *vs* NPOs foundation theory

However, literature suggests that perspectives emphasise the potential for conflict between governance theory and NPOs' foundation theory (Toepler & Anheier, 2021; Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Neumann *et al.*, 2024). This is due to the overload of administrative processes and the opposing interests of NPO governance compliance. Leaders of NPOs must strike a balance between achieving their missions and maintaining their administration processes aligned to governance requirements (Oyelola, 2025). However, to increase operational effectiveness, enhance donor transparency, and meet changing stakeholder expectations in a digital environment, NPOs must adopt a digital system to align administrative processes (Zimmermann, Soares & Roca, 2024; Tumpa & Naeni, 2025).

Challenges that affect the administration processes in community-based NPOs

According to De Corte, Arys and Roose (2022), NPOs work hard to accomplish ambitious objectives with inadequate or very little funding. Individual contributors, corporations, foundations, government agencies, investments, and other potential sources may provide funding for the organisation, depending on its size, structure, and mission. However, fundraising is unexpected and highly competitive. Even if NPOs are successful in raising money, the funds frequently come with complex conditions that limit how they can be utilised (De Corte, Arys and Roose 2022).

Contributions are frequently made to NPOs with the agreement that either none of the funds is used for overheads, or only a small portion be used for overheads. Moreover, donations to charities can occasionally be made with a specific program or goal in mind. Therefore, to ensure a variety of restricted and unrestricted funding sources, non-profit directors must identify a broad range of fundraising channels while avoiding overreliance on a single donor or funding source (De Corte, Arys and Roose 2022).

In relation to the issue of finance, Kober and Thambar (2023) note that forecasting and budgeting in non-profit organisations can be difficult due to a variety of restricted fund categories and unreliable funding sources, as known fund sources are not always guaranteed. To ensure expenditure is budgeted to support ongoing operations while continuing to meet the goal, financial managers must be exceedingly cautious when projecting revenue for future financial quarters. Accurate income predictions and forecasting are critical components of non-profit budgeting (Kober &Thambar, 2023). Therefore, one cannot predict how much money will be available to spend on programs until one knows how much money the organisation will raise. To ensure that money is set aside and budgeted correctly, leaders administering must monitor the cash in several limited buckets while they predict their budget (Kober & Thambar, 2023).

According to Holzer (2024), it can be hard for NPOs to manage their cash flow, which involves coordinating when funds come in and go out of their organisation. When NPO funding is limited and somewhat unreliable, the situation can be odd due to erratic timing. For instance, end-of-year giving campaigns result in many NPOs receiving a significant portion of their annual earnings at year-end. Donations are welcome at any time, but if

NPOs receive the majority of their funding in the last month of the year, which may make it difficult to cover expenses from previous months (Holzer, 2024).

Jung (2024) notes that NPOs that receive grant funding are likely responsible for monitoring the search and application procedures, as well as the awards and their reporting obligations. Although grant management is complex, particularly for organisations that receive funding from multiple awards, grant funding is crucial to the functioning and success of charities. Missed deadlines, misappropriation of funds, and noncompliance with standards can all result from poor grant management. In the short term, this can harm NPOs by preventing them from making the most of their grants' potential. The organisation may thus suffer long-term consequences, including reputational harm and difficulty obtaining continuous grant funding (Jung, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This research study employs the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as the analytical framework to investigate the challenges hindering the effectiveness of administrative processes in community-based NPOs in Durban. The UTAUT framework offers a comprehensive lens for exploring the factors influencing the adoption, acceptance, and utilisation of technology, an increasingly critical component of NPOs' efficient administration. Administrative inefficiencies in community-based NPOs are often linked to limited or ineffective use of information and communication technologies (ICT). The UTAUT model helps to systematically examine the determinants affecting technology adoption, such as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Methodology

The study utilised a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with NPO founders in Durban, eThekwini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. Permission for this study was granted by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development and the Institutional Research and Ethics Committee (IREC) of the Durban University of Technology. Ten (10) NPO founders in Durban were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of various community-based NPOs, including those focused on health, education, and community development. The following selection criteria were used to select NPOs' founders who participated in the study.

Relevance: The NPO should engage with or have an impact on the communities in the research area, which is the eThekwini region in KwaZulu-Natal.

Experience: The NPO must have considerable experience in the field to possess the knowledge and abilities to participate in the study.

Credibility: The NPO should have a good track record of implementing effective programs and using resources efficiently.

Availability and willingness: The NPO should be available throughout the study's duration and willing to cooperate in the research.

Ethical regulations: The NPO should follow professional and ethical conduct in its organisational practices or projects; and

Independent status: Preferably, an NPO not affiliated with any biased or harmful entity.

The pseudonyms P01–P10 were used to represent the interviewed participants. Information gathered from participants had to be corroborated to enhance reliability and quality. The study adhered to ethical considerations outlined in DUT's research guidelines, aligning with the philosophical examination of right and wrong in research ethics.

Data analysis

Primary data are collected directly from participants through interviews, focus groups, mail, or computerised surveys to address the study's questions (Velentgas et al., 2013). In this study, the qualitative data instruments included face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the founders of community-based NPOs based in Durban. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in questioning, enabling participants to share their thoughts and experiences more openly. These questions explored current administrative processes and the factors affecting them in community-based NPOs.

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, following established academic guidelines by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). An analysis of data from open-ended questions with NPO founders led the researcher to identify themes, generate preliminary codes, identify potential themes, meticulously evaluate and define these themes, and ultimately present the findings in accordance with established qualitative data analysis procedures. This study adhered to the same process and steps outlined in the literature for qualitative data analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Xu & Zammit, 2020).

Thematic analysis facilitates the categorisation of interviewees' real-life experiences into several themes, thereby enabling a thorough understanding of the issue under investigation (Humble & Mozelius, 2022). Thematic analysis was employed to identify common challenges and insights shared by the participants. Thereafter, the researcher identified themes and sub-themes to interpret the qualitative data and compare the findings with the literature.

Results

NPO founders represent a critical stakeholder group whose first-hand experiences provide invaluable insights into the administrative challenges that shape organisational effectiveness. Their reflections reveal nuanced barriers to administration beyond those identified in the broader literature. The analysis of the content data unfolded across three thematic dimensions aligned with the study's objectives. Firstly, to provide insight into the underlying challenges that hinder the effectiveness of administrative processes in community-based NPOs, ultimately affecting the communities they serve. Secondly, exploring the experiences of NPO founders can reveal best practices and innovative solutions.

The findings presented below are synthesised from primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 founders of community-based NPOs operating in diverse socio-economic contexts in Durban. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis in accordance with established academic guidelines. Researchers immersed themselves in the data, generated preliminary codes, identified potential themes, and meticulously evaluated and defined them, ultimately presenting the findings in accordance with established qualitative data analysis procedures.

NPO founders were asked about the significant challenges the NPO experienced within the current administrative processes. The key findings are presented in Figure 1.1 and thereafter discussed.

Figure 1.1: NPOs' insight into significant challenges within the NPOs' administrative processes

Source: Moodlley-Bhulaye, 2025.

Resource constraints

NPO founders highlighted an overwhelming financial constraint as a

significant barrier to effective administrative operations. Many participants reported that insufficient funding restricts the NPOs' ability to invest in necessary technology, hire qualified staff, and provide adequate training. This perception underlines a common belief that financial stability is critical to overcoming administrative hurdles. The following participants cited that:

> Limited resources often mean that we struggle with time management. Staff sometimes encounter workload pressures, which can lead to lapses in administrative diligence. Also, funding is an issue. Employees are encouraged to communicate challenges and work collaboratively to prioritise and delegate tasks (P03).
> Limited funding and high demand for services can stretch our resources thin. Staff burnout is also a concern, as administrative tasks can sometimes become overwhelming alongside community service (P07).

NPOs often operate with limited staff and rely heavily on volunteers. This can lead to burnout and high turnover rates. Recruitment and retention of skilled personnel remain issues, compounded by poor remuneration and limited career development opportunities.

Workload and staff burnout

Many NPO founders expressed concern about the high workloads placed on the limited NPO staff. The perception of chronic understaffing leads to burnout and stress among employees, thereby affecting the NPO's productivity and motivation. This recognition of the human factor emphasises the need for adequate staffing and support to maintain a healthy work environment. Here are some of the participants' responses.

> The main challenges are limited staff and funding. Employees often experience burnout and overwhelming stress at work. Everyone at the NPO has to complete an administrative task; there is no escape. Staff rely on teamwork and communicate openly about their workloads to ensure that critical tasks are prioritised (P04).

Many NPO leaders expressed a need for ongoing training in governance, project management, and fundraising techniques. Lack of access to capacity-building resources limits NPOs' effectiveness, hindering their ability to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances.

Technological challenges

NPOs' founders exhibit mixed perceptions of technology. In contrast, many recognise the importance of adopting digital efficiency solutions, a

A significant portion of organisations report feeling overwhelmed by the rapid pace of technological change. Participants' response is as follows:

> A significant challenge is the limited financial resources, which make it hard to invest in better technology and additional administrative support. Staff often collaborate closely to share workloads and best practices, and we encourage open discussions about the hurdles they face (P05).
> The constrained budget limits our ability to finance technology and administrative support. High volunteer turnover also makes consistent administrative practice difficult. We work as a team, share knowledge, and support one another in managing workloads and overcoming administrative challenges (P08).

The lack of digital skills among staff and insufficient training further exacerbate these challenges, leading to a reluctance to fully embrace technology.

Compliance pressures

The perception of compliance with regulatory requirements is a source of stress for many NPOs. NPO founders have expressed concerns about the complexities of navigating legal obligations and maintaining transparency and accountability, often leading to anxiety about potential penalties or scrutiny from stakeholders. Participants' responses are as follows:

> The dedication to compliance with regulatory requirements is a source of stress. Our staff is prioritising more hours spent on manual administration tasks than on assisting communities. Funding is also another challenge we experience (P09).

Navigating the complex legal and regulatory framework governing NPOs in South Africa is a daunting task for many NPO founders. There is an ongoing challenge to remain compliant with the requirements set by the Department of Social Development and other regulatory bodies. This includes reporting and record-keeping, which can be resource-intensive. Many NPOs in Durban struggle with securing sustainable funding. The competition for grants, limited donor trust, and high reliance on government funding pose significant challenges. Financial mismanagement and lack of budgeting skills further exacerbate the issue. NPO founders highlighted the need for financial literacy training to enhance their capabilities.

Data management issues

NPOs' founders perceive inadequate data management practices as a significant challenge affecting the NPO operations. NPO founders cite

difficulties in storing and analysing data. This perception underlines the need for improved data processes and infrastructure. The following participant cited that.

> Storing and maintaining data management processes hamper the NPO's ability to make informed decisions and have a quick, practical impact. It does take time to find and identify data in a timely manner when working within communities. Our financial limitations broadly restrict our ability to invest in more sophisticated technology that would enable instant data retrieval. Additionally, high demands for our services can outpace our administrative capacity, creating operational bottlenecks (P10).

Support for capacity building

The perception of a gap in support for capacity-building initiatives is evident, with NPO founders expressing a need for targeted training programs that address the NPO-specific administrative challenges. Organisations recognise that external support and tailored training could significantly enhance their operational capabilities. Participant P01 expressed the following statement:

> There is no support given to NPO in terms of assisting with training for maintaining administrative tasks with a more minor admin task team. There are always budget cuts, and then a reduction in the number of admin staff within the NPO. If there was free external support for administration, we would use it. With our current budget, we cannot enhance our administrative process or improve our NPO's capabilities (P01).

Overall, the findings reveal that NPO founders have a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced in the community-based NPO administrative processes. Additionally, the findings reflect a combination of internal and external factors affecting NPOs' operational effectiveness.

Discussion

The results of this study shed light on the administrative operational complexities that define the community-based NPOs. Insights from NPO founders revealed several critical findings regarding the administrative hurdles these organisations face, as well as potential pathways to address these challenges and capitalise on existing opportunities.

One of the primary challenges faced by NPOs is limited financial resources.

Many NPOs rely heavily on donations, grants, and fundraising to support their operations, resulting in chronic underfunding (Reficco *et al.*, 2021). This lack of resources can lead to insufficient staffing and inadequate infrastructure, impacting the organisation's ability to carry out its mission. Many NPOs struggle to compete for funding, particularly as they face stiff competition from other organisations and the increasing expectations of funders who often require more extensive reporting and accountability (Finley *et al.*, 2021). As NPO founders rely on funding to proceed with administrative processes, if there are no funds to pay for an internet connection at the NPO, all documentation progress halts.

Additionally, the findings indicated that staff at NPOs often wear multiple hats due to limited personnel, resulting in increased workloads. This is particularly problematic in smaller organisations where staff may have to juggle administrative tasks with direct service delivery (Wang & Seifert, 2021). The pressure to perform under such conditions can lead to burnout, which affects not only employee well-being but also the organisation's continuity and quality of service. High turnover rates can disrupt programs and lead to the loss of institutional knowledge, further exacerbating service delivery challenges (Setati, 2023). This can contribute to NPO staff burnout, leading to delays in administrative processes. It was found that adopting technology presents both opportunities and challenges for NPOs. Camngca *et* al. (2024) highlighted that many organisations struggle with outdated administration systems (manual) or lack the resources for modern technology upgrades. This can limit the NPO's operational efficiency, inhibit effective communication, and affect service delivery.

NPO leaders frequently emphasised the potential of a digital system to streamline administrative tasks, reduce time spent on paperwork and enable staff to focus more on core mission-driven activities (Holman, 2022). NPO Managers noted specific examples where digital tools could minimise redundant processes. Similarly, NPO administrative staff echoed these sentiments, discussing time-consuming, manual processes. These participants expressed eagerness for a system that automates reporting, provides audio-to-text capabilities, tracks donations, and manages volunteers, thereby enhancing NPO productivity and morale. Mziray and Mshana (2023) highlighted that addressing these challenges requires advocacy at the municipal and national levels, along with improvements to procedures to ensure the NPO is compliant, whilst still focusing on the NPO's core mission.

The research highlights the interconnectedness of these challenges, suggesting that addressing one area can lead to improvements in others. For

For example, enhancing knowledge of digital administration may lead to improved implementation of digital administration processes, while better financial management monitoring practices can enhance NPO funding allocation.

Conclusion

The study highlights that while NPOs in Durban play a vital role in social service delivery, they face a myriad of administrative challenges that impede their success. Addressing funding instability, regulatory compliance, administrative capacity, technology adoption, and stakeholder engagement is crucial for enhancing the operational efficiency of NPOs. The insights provided by NPO founders in this research serve as a valuable resource for understanding the local context and informing strategies to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of NPOs in the region. By addressing these challenges collaboratively, NPOs can better fulfil their missions and contribute positively to the communities they serve.

Recommendations

The research recommends establishing support networks for NPOs to enhance knowledge sharing and collaboration. Additionally, targeted training programs focused on compliance, technology use, and effective stakeholder engagement could empower NPO founders to better navigate their administrative challenges. The paper concludes with several actionable recommendations for NPO founders in Durban.

Implement a capacity-building programme focused on financial management, human resources practices, and compliance training.

By training staff in financial management, NPOs can better budget, track, and report funds, ensuring resources are used effectively and transparently. It would help improve financial oversight for the NPO. In addition, training NPO administrative staff in human resource practices helps standardise recruitment, performance management, and staff development, reducing turnover and increasing productivity.

Compliance training would ensure that the organisation adheres to legal and regulatory requirements, avoiding penalties and minimising operational risks. Moreover, capacity building reduces errors, improves decision-making, and empowers staff with skills that optimise day-to-day operations.

Foster networks among NPOs to share best practices and resources.

NPOs' networking facilitates knowledge sharing among the administration, such as the exchange of successful administrative methods, innovative management techniques, and lessons learned to help organisations avoid

common pitfalls.

In an attempt to find cost-saving methods among NPOs in a region, sharing resources such as training materials, office space, or administrative tools can reduce operational costs. It is also recommended that NPOs engage in collaborative problem-solving to jointly address administrative challenges, enhancing efficiency through collective expertise and guidance from communities or stakeholders. Partnerships can enable smaller NPOs to leverage others' strengths, improving service delivery without duplicating efforts in the same communities.

Engage in advocacy to influence policy decisions affecting NPOs' operations and help ensure a more supportive ecosystem.

Advocacy can lead to policies that reduce NPOs' bureaucratic burdens, simplify administrative reporting, or offer tax incentives, making administrative processes smoother. By influencing policy, NPOs may gain access to additional grants and government support, thereby improving financial stability and administrative planning. In return, the NPO would improve its image in the community, thereby attracting skilled personnel interested in efficient, impactful NPO operations. It is recommended that a supportive policy environment enables NPOs to focus more on core programs and less on navigating complex regulations.

Enhance community outreach and engagement strategies to build trust and collaborative relationships.

Improved NPOs' stakeholder communication could result in more effective outreach, streamlined communication, and fewer misunderstandings and administrative follow-ups. Enhanced NPO community outreach administration would attract more engaged communities, resulting in steadier volunteer contributions and donor support. Additionally, continuous NPO community engagement would provide valuable insights for the NPO, enabling feedback on how to improve future projects and operational adjustments without costly trial-and-error. This process can enhance the NPO's reputation and collaboration with local authorities and partners, simplifying operations.

Enhance administrative processes through digital transformation.

Digital tools automate NPO repetitive administrative tasks such as data entry, reporting, and scheduling, reducing manual errors and freeing up staff time. This process would improve data administration processes within the NPO. A digital system would facilitate secure, organised access to a store of records, thereby enhancing decision-making and compliance. Digital workflows reduce paper use, physical storage needs, and communication delays, lowering operational expenses and making NPO administration processes more cost-efficient. Additionally, digital platforms would enable

efficient communication among dispersed teams and stakeholders, making administration more flexible and responsive. Moreover, technology would enable instant tracking of projects and finances, allowing for prompt adjustments and transparency.

Implementing these recommendations collectively enhances the administrative efficiency of NPOs by building internal capacity, fostering collaborative ecosystems, shaping supportive policy environments, strengthening community ties, and leveraging technology to enable more intelligent workflows. These improvements not only make operations more cost-effective and transparent but also empower NPOs to maximise their social impact.

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African Citizenship and the African Union's Vision of Africanity in the Twenty-First Century

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African Citizenship

Abstract

The main objective of the African Union (hereafter referred to as the AU) in the twenty-first century is shaped by the ideology of Africanity, a recognition of Africa's "Africanness". This main objective, which includes creating an African-citizenship-based continent by the year 2063, is considered a means of achieving a prosperous and united African continent. The rationale for African citizenship is to establish a situation in which all Africans have comparable rights and privileges across all AU member states. Meanwhile, member states' rigid adherence to sovereignty prevents the continent from achieving its goal of shared citizenship. Non-citizens are denied the privileges and rights of citizenship under the various national laws that define citizenship. The study thus seeks to examine the AU's role in establishing a common African citizenship and the impact of this role on achieving Africanness in the twenty-first century, considering the challenges of creating a common African citizenship. The study will use textual analysis of secondary data to achieve this goal.

Keywords: African Union, Africanity, Citizenship, Africanness, African integration.

Introduction

European colonial powers established the present borders of African states, which continue to affect post-colonial Africa. The legacies of colonialism, including boundaries and identity, significantly shape the current relationships between African states and their citizens. The Berlin Conference, held in 1884-1885, served as a pivotal precursor to colonial enterprises in Africa, delineating territorial boundaries that have persisted into the post-independence era. Consequently, various issues have arisen from this colonial heritage, including conflicts like the Nigeria-Cameroon border dispute and the Rwandan genocide, which highlight the adverse effects of colonial structures in Africa. Scholars argue that post-colonial African states struggle to achieve development because they were formed by imperialist powers primarily for exploitation (Young, 1994; Mutua, 1995; Mamdani, 1996; Ake, 1996; Englebert, 2000). The infrastructure established by the colonial administration was primarily oriented towards facilitating the transportation of raw materials from the interior regions to the seaports for export to European markets. These colonial structures were inherently exploitative, designed to serve the economic interests of the colonisers at the

expense of the colonies themselves.

In this context, it is argued that post-colonial African states must undergo reconfiguration to foster the continent's development. Mutua (1995) contends that the current post-colonial African states are not viable for sustainable progress and advocates establishing 14 new federated states to replace the existing ones. His argument rests on the premise that African states need to relax their rigidity on sovereignty to form a unified entity that promotes collective development. Prior to his proposition, the independent African states had established the Organisation of African Unity in 1965 to solve the existential threats posed by the lingering effects of colonialism on post-colonial states. The OAU was founded on Pan-Africanist ideology, which sought to encourage cooperation among independent African states. Pan-Africanist ideology emerged in the New World, aiming to foster solidarity among people of African descent in the face of various forms of oppression. This movement seeks to unify the global black diaspora in their collective struggle against systemic injustices and inequalities.

The establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was primarily intended to provide a platform for African independent states to collaborate and address their collective challenges. However, the OAU's inability to resolve conflicts and foster development on the continent ultimately led to its replacement by the African Union (AU) in 2002. The AU was created to enhance the continent's development by unifying its member states. It has implemented various policies, agendas, and initiatives through its different organs to achieve its objectives. The "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" is among its key frameworks, adopted in June 2015. This document serves as a shared strategic blueprint for inclusive growth and sustainable development, aiming to optimise the utilisation of Africa's resources for the benefit of all Africans (African Union Commission, 2015). Central to the Agenda 2063 is the idea of Africanity, which has been a driving force behind the establishment of the OAU and the AU. African unity is adopted to represent the ideas and approaches for uniting the states on the continent. The consciousness of oneness is critical to the AU idea in the 21st century. Consequently, the AU has devised measures to facilitate the free movement of goods and people throughout the continent, thereby creating a united African continent. For instance, the introduction of the African Continental Free Trade Area is aimed at

> create a single market for goods and services, facilitated by the movement of persons, in order to deepen the economic

integration of the African continent and under the Pan African Vision of "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa" enshrined in Agenda 2063.

In pursuit of this aim, the African Union (AU) implemented various strategic actions and policies. The implementation of these strategies adopts a bottom-up approach, thereby initiating the integration process at the level of the eight Regional Economic Commissions (RECs). This methodology underscores the importance of engaging local stakeholders and institutions early in the integration process to ensure that the unique contexts and needs of each region are adequately addressed. These efforts aim to foster a sense of African citizenship within these RECs. The eight recognised RECs are to serve as points of entry for the integration process by facilitating the free movement of people and goods within their respective sub-regions. However, despite the AU's initiatives, a strong sense of Africanness appears to be lacking among many Africans.

The prevailing issues of xenophobia and the strict adherence to national sovereignty by states continue to impede the realisation of African citizenship within the AU, leading to the notion of "*Us vs Them*". The *Us-versus-Them sense, fuelled by national interest, influences citizens' behaviour and the making of nationality laws in states across* the continent. Citizenship laws in African states are instruments of the state that define who is a member and who is qualified to be a member. The disparities and complexity in citizenship laws across the African continent indicate the challenges bedevilling the AU's goal of attaining a continent of shared identity by 2063.
 Accordingly, this study explores the concept of citizenship in the African Union's goal of creating a united African continent. Using secondary data, it argues that although Agenda 2063 does not explicitly aim to establish continental citizenship, its second and fifth aspirations—focused on promoting a shared identity across Africa—implicitly imply this goal. The study also maintains that the diverse and complex nature of citizenship laws across African countries poses a significant barrier to achieving the AU's vision.

Citizenship: Understanding the Concept

Citizenship is a concept that has been examined through the lenses of law, sociology, and political science. Each discipline approaches citizenship to affirm an individual's recognition and status within a state. Consequently,

literature has explored citizenship from both individualistic and relational perspectives (Young, 1989; Ong, 1999; Delanty, 2000; Isin &Bryan, 2002; Lister, 2007; Parekh, 2008; Bellamy, 2008). The individualistic perspective delves into themes of status, identity, and rights (Schuck, 1989; Spinner-Halev, 1994; Etzioni, 1995). In contrast, the relational perspective views citizenship as the individual's role within the state and the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the state (Delanty, 2000; Isin & Bryan, 2002; Lister, 2007; Parekh, 2008; Bellamy, 2008). Together, these two perspectives provide a foundation for conceptualising citizenship.

Marshall (1963) identified three stages of the history of the concept of citizenship while analysing the inherent relationship between citizenship and migration. According to him, citizenship evolved from civil citizenship—the rights necessary for individual freedom: liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought, and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice. Marshall's (1963) explanation of civil citizenship considers the concept from the individualistic analytical perspective. Marshal's emphasis on freedom and rights enjoyed by individuals constitutes the definition of citizenship status.

On the other hand, political citizenship emerged in the 19th century to mean the right to exercise political power. Marshall (1963) conceptualised political citizenship as either membership in a body invested with political authority or as an elector of its members. Citizenship, here, is defined as the right of individuals to participate in the political activities of the state. Political citizenship is conceptualised from a relational analytical perspective. Participation in the political system of a particular state determines who is a citizen of that state.

Marshall (1963) identified social citizenship as the last stage of the history of citizenship. This stage, which dominated the 20th century, focuses on the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share in the full social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society. This historical analysis of the trajectory of the concept of citizenship indicates the continuous shifting of its conceptual boundaries. According to Marshall (1963), citizenship is a civil, political and social phenomenon with multifaceted definitions.

For Heater (1999), citizenship can be analysed through three frameworks: state recognition of membership, the relationship between nationality and citizenship, and the methods by which citizenship is defined. Membership recognition explains citizenship as the legal recognition by a state of an individual as a member of that state. This individualistic analysis of citizenship is built on the idea that the state recognises membership. The

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The nationality and citizenship dichotomy considers citizenship from political discourse. On methods, Heater (1999) identifies two: *Jus Sanguinis* – citizenship by descent- and *Jus Soli* – citizenship by state territory. Heater's (1999) analytical framework suggests that citizenship can be viewed as being based on legal recognition, nationality, and the process of its acquisition.

Tilly (1995) argues that citizenship can be referred to as a "category," the "role", and "identity." He explains citizenship as a category that denotes a set of actors distinguished by their shared privileged position *vis-à-vis* a particular state. Tilly (1995) explains that citizenship denotes an enforceable mutual relation between an actor and state agents. Citizenship, as a role, is understood by Tilly (1995) to encompass all of an actor's relations to others that depend on the actor's relation to a particular state. Lastly, regarding identity, he considers citizenship to be the experience and public representation of a category, tie, or role. In his approach, Tilly (1995) conceptualises citizenship as a psychological expression of belonging that leads to active participation in the state's civil, political, economic, and social activities. Thus, Tilly (1995) defines citizenship as a continuing series of transactions between person and agents of a given state in which each has enforceable rights and obligations uniquely by (1) the person's membership in an exclusive category, the native-born plus the naturalised and (2) the agent's relation to the state rather than any other authority the agent may enjoy.

Citizenship in the Context of Agenda 2063

The African Union has steadfastly pursued its primary objective of fostering a united African continent since the establishment of the OAU. Central to this mission is creating a United African Front, guided by the Agenda 2063 framework, with the aim of its realisation by 2063. Agenda 2063 serves as a crucial plan of action for the AU, outlining seven key goals to be achieved by the target date. These goals represent a continuation of the pan-African movement that has spanned centuries, emphasising unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity, as advocated by Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance (AU Commission, 2015). The document underscores the importance of collectivism and shared identity among individuals across the continent, focusing on strategies to promote unification and development in Africa throughout the 21st century.

The document outlines seven aspirations to shape the continent's future. Two of these aspirations, specifically Aspirations Two and Five, emphasise the importance of establishing a unified African identity by 2063. Aspiration Two, titled "An integrated continent, politically united based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance,"

envisions the emergence of a united, strong, sovereign, independent, and self-reliant continent that achieves complete economic and political integration (the AU Commission, 2015). This aspiration represents a political initiative aimed at achieving the continent's political unity, ultimately seeking to create a single sovereign state encompassing all existing African nations. Similarly, Aspiration Five, "An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics," focuses on fostering a distinct African cultural identity, along with shared values and ethics, as essential components for Africa's resurgence on the global stage (the AU Commission, 2015). This fifth aspiration seeks a culturally rooted unification of the continent, where African culture plays a pivotal role in global politics. One of the strategies the African Union (AU) implemented to foster a united continent was the introduction of an ordinary passport for all Africans. Proposed in 2016, the idea of a single passport aims to promote the free movement of people and goods throughout the continent. While the organisation has yet to fully realise this initiative, developing a unified passport represents a significant step toward establishing a sense of African citizenship.

The concept of African citizenship is effectively captured within the AU's various strategic frameworks, including Agenda 2063 and the push for an ordinary passport. Although the explicit formation of African citizenship is not directly articulated in the AU's strategic documents, the underlying actions and objectives suggest that these strategies are oriented toward cultivating a shared sense of identity among African citizens.

Citizenship Laws in Africa

The concept of citizenship in modern Africa has its roots in the colonial era, which significantly shaped notions of identity and belonging. During this period, colonial powers delineated membership along the boundaries they established, thereby highlighting the territorial dimension of citizenship in the colonial context. The subsequent formation of new states and the imposition of bounded territories resulted in new identities across the continent, diverging from the rich tapestry of ethnic and cultural identities that existed prior to colonialism. These emergent identities, shaped by colonial impositions, largely disregarded the ethnic and cultural affiliations prevalent in Africa, ultimately aligning post-colonial notions of citizenship with Eurocentric paradigms. In this context, these colonial boundaries largely influenced the delineation of citizenship.

In post-colonial Africa, citizenship laws are predominantly informed by the principles of jus soli and jus sanguinis. These two concepts are instrumental in determining citizenship status across various African states. According to

Manby (2010), *jus soli* refers to the acquisition of citizenship based on an individual's place of birth. Conversely, jus sanguinis denotes a framework wherein citizenship is conferred through descent from parents who are or were citizens of a state (Manby, 2010). This bifocal approach to citizenship originated from colonial and European perspectives on national membership, adopted during colonial rule in Africa.

As such, citizenship laws throughout the continent are governed by either jus soli or jus sanguinis, or a combination of the two. The specific application of these principles varies by state, with distinct criteria defining citizenship eligibility in each national context. Common factors influencing citizenship laws across African states include race, religion, gender, and naturalisation processes. These variables reflect the complex interplay between historical legacies and contemporary legal frameworks that shape citizenship across Africa's diverse political landscapes.

Race

Race operates as both a social and cultural construct, categorising individuals based on perceived biological and colour differences. It serves as a framework for dividing humans into distinct groups worldwide. Omi and Winant (2014) argue that race functions as both a social and biological system for classifying people. The biological perspective has evolved into one that emphasises social and cultural interactions leading to social selection. In some regions of Africa, race-based classifications play a crucial role in defining citizenship laws. Manby (2010: 3) points out that in at least half a dozen countries on the continent, individuals from certain ethnic groups are effectively barred from obtaining nationality by birth, a restriction that extends to their children and grandchildren. Countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Malawi, and Mali require applicants to demonstrate race or ethnic affiliation to obtain citizenship. According to Manby (2010), both Liberia and Sierra Leone maintain that only those "of Negro descent" are entitled to citizenship from birth. Likewise, Malawi's constitution specifies that citizenship at birth is limited to those with at least one parent who is not only a citizen of Malawi but also "a person of African race." In Egypt, citizenship law similarly prioritises Arab descent over other races in determining citizenship.

Religious Requirement

Religion, defined as the relationship between humanity and the divine, serves as a criterion for acquiring citizenship. Three major religions are predominant in Africa: Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR). According to Kaba (2022: 19), of the 1.3 billion people on the

continent, 657.3 million (51.3%) identify as Christians, 552.7 million (43.1%) as Muslims, and 34.5 million (2.7%) as adherents of African Traditional Religions. This distribution indicates that Christianity and Islam are the principal religions in Africa. As a result, some African nations impose restrictions on citizenship based on religious affiliation.

Religious criteria for citizenship are prevalent in predominantly Islamic North African countries. In this region, the Muslim population is approximately 223 million, compared with 7 million Christians and 1.2 million practitioners of African Traditional Religion (Kaba, 2022). Consequently, nations such as Egypt, Morocco, Libya, and Algeria consider religion an integral requirement for obtaining citizenship. Manby (2010) highlights that several states in North Africa have laws that discriminate on the basis of religious affiliation in the acquisition of citizenship. Notably, the citizenship laws of Egypt, Morocco, and Libya prioritise Islam, placing practitioners of this faith above those of other religions.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination has significantly influenced the political systems of most African nations since their independence in the 1960s. The issue of gender imbalance, particularly concerning women's rights, remains a central topic in discussions that shape the politics of many African states. These discussions often focus on women's representation and participation in government. However, discrimination against women extends beyond the political and economic realms; it also affects citizenship acquisition for women. According to Manby (2010), many nationality laws in Africa exhibit gender discrimination, depriving women of their rights to pass citizenship to their children and husbands, while men retain the right to bestow their citizenship rights upon their children and wives. Such discriminatory nationality laws exist in several African countries, including Benin, Burundi, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, and Togo (Manby, 2010).

While the continent has seen some reforms in this area, Manby (2010) noted that more than two dozen countries either altogether prohibit women from passing their nationality to non-national spouses or impose discriminatory residency requirements on foreign men married to national women seeking nationality. The states identified by Manby (2016) include Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Comoros, the Republic of Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, and Tunisia. This situation suggests that the reforms have not sufficiently addressed the fundamental issue of women's rights to transmit their citizenship. Instead, the reforms primarily enhance

access to nationality for the children of national mothers rather than achieving full equality.

Naturalisation

Citizenship by naturalisation is a common practice in the nationality laws of various African countries. This legal process transforms residency into full membership within a nation. Many national laws delineate the procedures for acquiring citizenship through naturalisation. According to Manby (2016), every African nation, in principle, allows for the attainment of nationality via naturalisation based on long-term residency and the fulfilment of additional requirements. However, the specific laws governing the naturalisation process vary from one state to another across the continent. Each country establishes its own criteria for individuals seeking citizenship under its respective legal framework. Manby (2016) has identified several of these criteria, including duration of residency, cultural connections, language proficiency, and government recommendations.

Citizenship in African Unity: Implications and Challenges

The idea of African citizenship is central to aspirations two and five of the African Union's Agenda 2063. These two aspirations are designed to promote the unification of African states and citizens, fostering a cohesive front across the continent. Aspiration Two advocates for a united Africa that builds dynamic and mutually beneficial relationships with the Diaspora. It underscores an integration process that facilitates the free movement of people, forming the foundation for the AU to establish a common citizenship status for all individuals on the continent. According to the African Union's Agenda 2063 (2015), the political unity of Africa represents the pinnacle of the integration process. This process encompasses the free movement of people and the establishment of continental institutions, ultimately leading to comprehensive economic integration. By 2030, it is expected that a consensus will be reached on the structure of the continental government and its institutions. This vision is to promote a form of political integration that is inclusive of all citizens, allowing individuals to move freely across borders and participate in governance under a continental political framework.

The concept of shared identity is deeply embedded in this second aspiration. Similarly, aspiration five acknowledges the rich diversity of African cultures and peoples; it primarily emphasises the establishment of a shared identity for the continent. This aspiration embraces the cultural diversity of Africans and the continent while emphasising the importance of fostering Pan-Africanism. It aims to establish a shared history, destiny, identity, and

heritage, along with respect for religious diversity and awareness of the aspirations of African people and their diaspora. The foundation of this collective identity is anchored in pan-Africanist ideas and ideology. The strategies will prioritise the promotion of culture, heritage, and a common identity and destiny, thus facilitating a Pan-African approach and contributing to the African Renaissance (AU Agenda 2063, 2015). The two aspirations are strategically aimed at establishing a unified citizenship status across the continent. This concept of citizenship, which emphasises identity and loyalty to the state, is reoriented through these aspirations toward the African Union (AU). It is anticipated that this new identity will foster solidarity among Africans, ultimately paving the way for a singular African citizenship status.

However, the discrepancies in restrictive laws governing citizenship acquisition across African countries present a significant barrier to achieving unified citizenship status. The continent continues to face challenges related to discrimination embedded in citizenship laws, which often hinge on factors such as race, religion, and naturalisation processes. These restrictions complicate efforts to create a singular citizenship status. Manby (2010) notes that citizenship acquisition laws in Africa are exceedingly stringent, rendering the pathways to citizenship impractical. Manby (2016) highlights that there are relatively few cases of citizenship acquisition compared with the high volume of applications across the continent. This discrepancy is attributed not only to legal factors but, more significantly, to practical considerations: the procedures involved are often laden with bureaucratic requirements and lengthy processing times. For example, in South Africa, the naturalisation process requires applicants to submit their applications to the mayor of their municipality. The mayor then forwards the application to the *Direction d'administration du territoire* for a moral character inquiry. Following this, the dossier is sent to the Ministry of Justice for verification before ultimately being considered and approved by the presidency (Manby, 2016). This lengthy process influenced procedures across the continent. If these processes are indeed infeasible, the realisation of a united African citizenship—an aspiration articulated in both the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights—risks being undermined by the various barriers to citizenship acquisition across the continent.

The rise in xenophobic attacks across the continent poses a significant challenge to realising the vision of African unity outlined in Agenda 2063. These assaults, perpetrated by some Africans against their fellow Africans, reveal a troubling discrimination rooted in xenophobia. Individuals are targeted based on their national origin or association with another African

nation and are often labelled as "aliens." As Akinlabi (2022) observes, this creates a vicious cycle in which individual-level resentment and stereotypes are perpetuated, with each nationality subjected to derogatory representations often linked to the issues faced by host African states. This bias is primarily defined by a sense of territorial identity, a construct rooted in colonial perspectives on citizenship. The resulting divide between citizens and non-citizens negatively affects the African Union's efforts to foster a sense of African citizenship.

The challenges faced by the African Union (AU) substantially hinder its mission to foster continental integration and establish a unified African citizenship. The objectives delineated in Agenda 2063 appear to be threatened by diverse citizenship acquisition laws and the actions of individuals across the continent. Despite the AU's emphasis on the importance of unrestricted movement of persons and goods as a fundamental strategy for achieving its objectives, the emergence of xenophobic attitudes across Africa is a concerning trend. Furthermore, the anticipated implementation of an e-passport has yet to materialise, despite the initial target date of 2016. These challenges markedly obstruct the African Union's (AU) efforts towards continental integration and the realisation of common African citizenship. The goals articulated in Agenda 2063 seem to be compromised by the varying citizenship acquisition laws and actions adopted by citizens throughout the continent. Although the AU underscores the critical importance of free movement for individuals and goods as a pivotal strategy for realising its aspirations, escalating xenophobic sentiments across Africa signify a troubling trend. Additionally, the expected rollout of an e-passport has not yet occurred, despite the original 2016 target date being missed.

Conclusion

This study asserts the African Union's (AU) pivotal strategies for uniting the continent in the 21st century. It thoroughly examines the concept of citizenship delineated in the AU Agenda 2063, a strategic framework that embodies the AU's aspirations. While the notion of African citizenship is not explicitly articulated, Aspirations Two and Five compellingly indicate a robust movement toward establishing a shared African identity and unity. This fosters an understanding of citizenship rooted in identity and recognition. Despite the ambiguous treatment of citizenship in the AU Agenda 2063, this analysis unequivocally argues that the AU's aspiration for a united Africa strongly calls for African citizenship.

Moreover, this study champions the AU's initiatives promoting the free

movement of people and goods across the continent, alongside the introduction of the AU Passport, as key mechanisms that enhance the sense of African citizenship. The objectives articulated in Aspirations Two and Five of Agenda 2063 reflect the AU's unwavering commitment to establishing a common citizenship status for the continent. However, these ambitious plans, envisioned for realisation by 2063, confront formidable challenges, including xenophobia and the inconsistencies in citizenship acquisition laws prevalent across Africa. Such discrepancies significantly obstruct and complicate the pursuit of citizenship across the continent. Additionally, discriminatory requirements persist as critical barriers to establishing a cohesive framework for citizenship acquisition across Africa. In conclusion, this study firmly contends that pervasive xenophobic attitudes and the disparity in citizenship acquisition laws across the continent critically undermine the AU's efforts to forge a unified African citizenship.

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Analysing the textual communication of the Nigerian government's framing of Rice Policy on Facebook

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Abstract

This study analysed textual communication on Facebook regarding the Nigerian government's rice policy. The theory of technological determinism formed the theoretical framework for the study. The study analysed 25 posts on rice on the Facebook accounts of selected government handles under the administration of late President Muhammadu Buhari. The study's findings showed that most posts on rice addressed issues related to the government's rice policy. Also, the findings showed the government's commitment to achieving local rice production and food sustainability. The study recommended that the Tinubu government continue to use social media to frame its rice policy, and that such framing should not be limited to Facebook. It further recommended greater use of video and graphic content as alternatives to textual communication in framing the government's rice policy.

Keywords: Agriculture, Anchor borrowers' programme, food security, local production, social media.

Introduction

Rice is an essential food item for Nigerians and across the globe, as it has continued to play a significant role in everyday diets (Okpiaifo et al., 2020). Perhaps the status of rice is so high because consumers prefer it, occasioned by rapid urbanisation, the reduced time and effort in its preparation, which made it a fast meal for working-class people, and its accessibility to the rich and poor. So important is rice that it has become a matter of state policy and food security in Nigeria (Faleye, 2019). Prior to the evolution of social media, the government used broadcast and print media as means of influencing and informing the public about its policies. With advent of Facebook, Twitter, now X, Instagram, YouTube, etc., government institutions now provide relevant content and reach out to larger audience through their social media networks with the sharing functions available on social media platforms to push its policies, including the rice policy which became more effective on April 2016 (Ebosele. 2016), when the Nigerian government under late President Muhammadu Buhari announced a more stringent policy on rice by banning its importation through the land borders. The adoption of social media as a communication strategy has become familiar with established political institutions that provide political content on their platforms. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) identify political institutions as politicians, political parties, and political foundations.

In light of this social media technology, institutions that seek to persuade the public must utilise persuasive techniques on social media to promote their policies. Available literature (Odukoya, 2020; Obi-Egbedi et al., 2012; Oparaugo, 2021; Mustapha et al., 2016) supports the view that social media are valuable tools for

marketing agricultural products. The form of communication used by the Nigerian government in framing the rice policy on social media, however, remains a bone of contention. It is against this background that the researcher attempted to analyse the form of communication the Nigerian government used to frame the rice policy on Facebook, an open social media platform used mainly by Nigerians (NapoleonCat, 2023) for social interactions.

Public Policy

The Nigerian government's rice policy is a public policy. Oni (2016) observes that public policy involves a purposive course of action, characterised by the patterns by which government officials take action to address a particular problem. Postcolonial Nigeria has witnessed agricultural policies that were geared towards important crops such as rice. These policies were made up of actions (trade embargoes, tariffs, and border closure) used to solve a defined problem - capital flight, poor local rice production, etc. (Allen & Ogbe, 2020).

A foremost pioneer of policy science, Harold Lasswell, was the first to categorise the policy process. Lasswell (1956) identified seven stages of the policy process, each with a specific policy-making function. These include intelligence, recommendation, prescription, invocation, application, appraisal, and termination. This contribution to the policy debate stemmed from the functions Lasswell (1956) thought public policy-making should perform to identify five or six stages of the policy process: agenda setting, where the problem is identified; policy formulation, where a solution is proposed; decision-making, where the solution is concluded and legalised; implementation, in which actions follows the solution; evaluation, or the monitoring of the outcomes; and in some instances, the choice to either maintain, replace or terminate the policy.

Based on this selective approach to issues, McCombs and Shaw (1972) proposed the idea of agenda-setting theory (Wanta & Alkazemi, 2017). The ideas of McCombs & Shaw were based on the powers of specific individuals, what Wanta and Alkazemi (2017), citing Lang & Lang (1983), referred to as sources of the media agenda, have a greater influence on others. Hence, it is easier for them to get their demands placed on an agenda than for others. The emphasis of McCombs and Shaw (1972) was on decision makers – the Nigerian government. They argue that for an issue to reach agenda status, it must be influenced by key decision-makers, also known as agenda builders (Lang & Lang, 1983, in Wanta & Alkazemi, 2017). They support their arguments by noting that some opinion leaders can facilitate media coverage (the framing of the rice policy on Facebook) of a particular issue (rice).

Facebook and Policy Discourse

Facebook has become a critical social media platform for political actors, policy,

and political communication (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Many government ministries, political actors and political parties now have Facebook profiles for political communication. Facebook allows registered users to post long and short messages referred to as posts. Most posts on Facebook are text, video, photo, or audio files. This study intends to investigate the textual aspect of the framing of rice policy on Facebook.

A Facebook user begins using the platform after registering their biometric data with Meta, Facebook's parent company. Facebook was established by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 (Conger, 2022). By registering and creating a status, a Facebook user can build a network of contacts by following accounts they are interested in. Such accounts have profiles created by friends, family, institutions, or public figures. There could be accounts created to represent political groups and government officials. Hence, a network of accounts comes into existence and grows in number because of the following that is garnered by such accounts.

Another important feature on Facebook is the hashtag. A hashtag is part of a post that indicates a topic a user is posting about. It is preceded by the symbol "#". It is a beneficial method of labelling which draws attention to what a post is about. With this function, a conversation can emerge as a hashtag topic and be visible to anyone who searches for it. When many users are discussing a topic, Facebook aggregates their conversations into a trend. A trend can be global or local, depending on the location of users who are engaged in that topic. Facebook uses geo-location in aggregating topics. The geo-location of a post is embedded in the post information, especially when the user has location information turned on. Through Facebook, one can have unfiltered access to the accounts of very prominent individuals, such as presidents and celebrities. Extensive research has been conducted on the drivers that prompt users to share information on Facebook. A study by Alhadlaq and Alnuaim (2023) classified posts into categories. These social activities are described as social interaction with people, producing or requiring feedback as well as expressing emotions.

Empirical Review

The study by Odukoya (2020) interrogated the political economy of agricultural commercialisation in Nigeria. The author adopted three theories: the actor-narrative-policies framework of Keeley and Scoones (2003), the post-colonial state theory by Alavi (1972) and the political context and incentive frameworks by Chinsinga & Poulton (2014). The post-colonial state is assumed to be an artificial creation of colonial incursion into Africa. It is a carryover as a neo-colony serving a complicated class arrangement with competing class interests. The post-colonial state, therefore, mediates competing interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the indigenous bourgeoisie and the landed classes. The metropolitan bourgeoisie

controls the economy through the way the global economy accumulates capital. As a result, there is no separation between the public and private spheres. The bourgeoisie relies heavily on state patronage, thereby enabling corruption and kleptocracy. Policies are therefore products of elite interests in Nigeria, and the rice policies reflected this encroachment of private interest into governance. Odukoya's (2020) study indicates that the state in post-colonial Africa suffers from a governance deficit because it was structured to serve elite interests rather than the interests of the masses.

Obi-Egbedi et al. (2012) analyse the import impact of rice trade policy options, including a ban and a tariff increase, on the welfare of households in Nigeria. The research was anchored on the theory of utility. Their findings revealed disparities in welfare between rural and urban households, as rice policy affected urban households negatively but had little effect on rural households in Northern Nigeria, which experienced increased savings. The worst-hit households were urban in southern Nigeria, with little subsistence crop production. Obi-Egbedi et al. (2012) note that a substantial number of rice farmers in Nigeria were located in northern Nigeria, with 83% of farmers in that region. Therefore, they concluded that protectionist policy on rice importation benefited rural farmers in Northern Nigeria. The study by Obi-Egbedi et al (2012) provides insight into the sharp differences in welfare that accrue from the rice policy. The difference is notable in the benefits that accrue to agrarian Northern regions, compared with urban households in Southern Nigeria, populated by working-class people who are primarily not involved in agriculture.

The observations in these studies indicate that behind the rice policy lies an intricate web of elite interests, governance deficits, regional disparities in household welfare, and a continuing preference among many Nigerians for foreign rice brands. There have been notable increases in rice production and value chain improvements. However, the rice policy in a plural state like Nigeria should be the focus of food security promotion. It is imperative that, in a democratic society, the government be accountable to the people and demonstrate that it is working in the interests of the electorate in its policy-making activities. The task of persuasion and support-seeking for the rice policy requires that such policies be broadcast through the media to the broader population so that public opinion aligns with the ruling party's policies. This is where the means of such political communication come in.

Oparaugo (2021) also examine the relationship between social media and politics in Nigeria. He stated that politicians or state actors utilise social media for political communication. That Nigerian politicians would post long posts on Facebook pages about a burning public issue, stating their positions. Political officeholders use this medium to address the public about what they are doing to improve society, the state, or the country. The opposition elements within the country, on their part, use the medium to cast aspersions on those in government for their wrong policies and actions (Oparaugo, 2021).

Oparaugo (2021) further stated that the two common social media platforms used by Nigerian politicians are Facebook and X. The structure of platforms like Facebook and X allows discussion of public policy issues, unlike WhatsApp, which is restrictive. The study by Oparaugo (2021) was anchored in the theories of technological determinism and uses and gratifications. He identified political information as the content of political communication. Social media, therefore, allows for political talk among users.

Mustapha et al (2016) in another study on how social media are informing a sense of community among people and fostering political engagement. The researchers identified a knowledge gap regarding the relationship between social media use in Africa and Nigeria and political issues. Their study was anchored on social capital theory. They hypothesised that social media platforms are helpful for social structure, building networks with desirable outcomes in collectives on political participation; hence, they hypothesised that social media platforms like Facebook and X could also be used for political information, which is a strong predictor of social capital.

It was also observed that social media could facilitate the democratisation of capacity. Evidence has shown that a huge number of social media users are youths. In political participation, social media platforms are conceived as a public sphere (Baran & Davis, 2012). The researchers utilised a descriptive survey method and distributed questionnaire instruments to 335 students. Findings by Mustapha et al. (2016) revealed that WhatsApp (78.2%), Facebook (69.9%), and X (34.3%) had the highest social media presence and usage. The average number of social media visits per week was 4. The findings also revealed that social media usage was a predictor of social capital. ($R^2 = 0.221$, $P<0.001$). Social media also predicted political participation, and social media use explained 25% of the variance in political participation, just as social capital did. The study by Mustapha et al. (2016) introduced the intervening variable of social capital in the relationship between social media and political participation. What this translates to is that social media fosters social networks with social capital that consequently leads to political participation.

Technological Determinism Theory

Technological determinism theory (TDT) is a reductionist theory that holds that technological advancement drives the development of society's social structure and cultural values. Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929), an American sociologist and economist, was renowned for developing the theory of the TDT. Suffice it to say that Nigeria is a developing country in Sub-Saharan Africa whose economy is dominated by oil and agriculture. It is also a statement of fact that, in terms of technological advancements, the country has not achieved much. However, Nigeria

has a reasonable population of citizens who are educated and knowledgeable in technology. A large number of these people are youths who are technologically oriented. These youths also fit well into the post-modernism economic narrative, which is mainly driven by technology. This is why some studies divided Nigerians into the technological-rich and the technological-poor. This has shaped the Nigerian society.

It is within this frame that Facebook, which is within the scope of this study, was put to the test to determine how it has helped shape, or otherwise, the government's policy direction on rice. The fact that the government used Facebook to frame its rice policy indicates that it is aware of the impact on the populace, which suggests that the people are technologically rich. Such a population is needed to push the rice policy (Guanah, Obi, Egbra & Akumabor, 2018). When the government used social media to frame rice, it was only a pointer to the effectiveness of social media in disseminating information to the people.

Methodology

This study used content analysis to elicit data. Twenty-five textual posts on rice formed the sample for the study, drawn from a population of forty-eight posts on the Facebook accounts of these government handles: Aso Rock Villa; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development/Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security; and Muhammadu Buhari, from April to December 2016. In 2016, the Nigerian government, led by the late President Buhari, announced a more stringent rice policy by banning its importation through land borders (Faleye, 2019). These government handles were selected because they were the official social media platforms for disseminating government activities and were active on Facebook during the period under review. Also, some of the handles belong to the country's ministry in charge of agriculture. The content category for the collected data was the number of text-based Facebook posts about rice. To accomplish this, the researcher identified text-based posts. Twenty-five textual posts were identified after the counting in the period under review. The unit of analysis (the things that were counted) for the content analysis was texts on rice from April 2016 to December 2016, on the Facebook accounts of the selected government institutions. The method of data collection was the use of the search button on the pages of selected government institutions, with the keyword "Rice 2016". Bruns and Stieglitz (2014) note that keyword search can reveal communication and engagement patterns in user metrics or temporal metrics for a given theme.

Data Presentation

The government handles, dates, and the textual communication on the rice posts are presented below:

1. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: April 25, 2016: Agric Minister tours Kebbi **rice** farms.

2. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: May 6, 2016: Local **Rice** Production Targets: Chief Audu Ogbeh holds meeting with Zamfara state governor – Abdul-aziz Yari.

3. Aso Rock Villa: June 7, 2016: Office of the Vice President Press Release: FG sets up national task force on **rice.**

4. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: June 9, 2016: Agric mechanisation: Agric minister flags off distribution of 500 threshers to rice farmers. This generated a comment from one of the users asking for the states. The account handler responded by listing the 12 states that benefited. Also, a user asked if local **rice** is better than foreign **rice**. The handler responded that local **rice** is better than foreign **rice**, as most foreign rice has low nutritional value, while some rice had been stored for close to 15 years before being shipped into Nigeria.

5. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: June 11, 2016: Local **Rice** Boost: Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development – Chief Audu Ogbeh on a working visit to Olam Rice Processing Facility in Nasarawa State.

6. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: July 14, 2016: Taraba state governor, Darius Ishaku, visits Minister of Agriculture and shares his state's plans to boost its **rice** production

7. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: June 16, 2016: Ebonyi State seeks collaboration to boost local **rice** production …

8. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Sept 5, 2016: We are determined to reclaim our rating as the highest **rice-producing** state in Nigeria … - Ebonyi State Gov. Dave Umahi

9. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Sept 15, 2016: I did not say **rice** is expensive because Nigerians eat too much **rice** – Ogbeh

10. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Sept 20, 2016: Dry season farming: Jigawa targets 150,000 hectares of **rice** …

11. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development: Oct 1, 2016: Snippets on President Buhari's address on the 56th independence anniversary… No. 23. At the same time, the federal ministry of Agriculture and the central bank have been mobilised to encourage local production of **rice** …

12. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Oct 10, 2016: The good news is the private sector is responding to agriculture in a way we have never seen in this country, they own the major **rice** mills … - Hon. Minister – Chief Audu Ogbeh

13. Aso Rock Villa: December 5, 2016: Aso Rock Villa: October 16, 2016: Nigeria Customs Service Press Release: The restriction on the importation of vehicles follows that of **rice**, whose imports have been banned through the land borders since April 2016

14. Aso Rock Villa: October 16, 2016: Nigeria Custom Service Press Release: **Rice** imports remain banned through the land borders

15. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Oct 21, 2016: In the News: We remain focused on achieving self-sufficiency in **rice** by 2018 … - Ogbeh

16. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: October 27, 2016: Earlier Today: Hon. Minister – Chief Audu Igbeh arrived Bida, Niger state, with CBN Gov., and Kebbi state Gov. on tour to anchor borrowers **rice** farms in the state

17. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Oct 27, 2016: The Hon. Minister – Chief Audu Ogbeh was in the field to interact with the **rice** farmers …

18. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Nov 11, 2016: Inspection of **Rice** Farms in Jigawa: Hon. Minister – Chief Audu Ogbeh, CBN Gov. Kebbi state Gov., Jigawa Gov. and Emir of Hadejia during the inspection of **rice** plantations under the anchor borrowers programme in Jigawa

19. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development: Nov 18, 2016: The focus of the 2016/2017 dry season GES is on four major crops: **rice**, wheat, maize and groundnuts – Perm. Sec. Dr Ahmed Shehu

20. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Nov 30, 2016: Despite the challenges, we are making some progress; we have acquired **rice** mills of varying capacities for distribution to **rice** farmers … - Ogbeh

21. Aso Rock Villa: Dec 14, 2016: President Buhari commends CBN efforts in boosting self-sufficiency in **rice** production in Nigeria

22. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Dec 16, 2016: Hon. Minister – Chief Audu Igbeh and entourage being taken round on tour of Olam Nigerian Farms and **Rice** milling facilities in Ondorie, Nasarawa state …

23. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Dec 16, 2016: We are developing a 10,000-hectare, fully integrated paddy farm on the Greenfield site with an expected yield of 10MT per hectare over two annual crop cycles. This is based on four varieties of high-yield **rice**… - OLAM Farms

24. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security: Dec 16, 2016: In Kebbi State, we are stocking **rice** now and we encourage other states to do the same … - Gov. Bagudu of Kebbi State

25. Muhammadu Buhari: Dec 23, 2016: I am proud of the successful agricultural partnership between Lagos and Kebbi states, which has produced LAKE (Lagos-Kebbi) **Rice**. I commend Governors Akinwumi Ambode and Atiku Bagudu for fulfilling the MOU they signed in March 2016, to boost **rice** production

Discussion of Findings

The textual posts above showed how the Nigerian government used social media to frame its rice policy. The fact that the Nigerian government used social media to drive its rice policy complements the positions of Inegbedion et al. (2021) that the use of social media for marketing agricultural products in Nigeria often improves efficiency and farmers' sales turnover. Also, the use of textual communication by the Nigerian government to drive its rice policy on Facebook was supported by the study by Gkikas et al. (2022), which highlighted the important role of texts in users' engagement and awareness. The researcher opines that several significant relationships exist between text-based posts on social media and users' performance metrics. They added that when a post's text is more straightforward to comprehend, longer, and has many hashtags, it will get more engagement and awareness from social media users. Jackson (2020) also supported the findings of this study, noting that posts with over 80 characters seem to achieve higher levels of user engagement on social media.

From April to December 2016, 25 textual posts on rice policy on the government's Facebook page were analysed. One of the posts showed that the then Agriculture Minister, now late, Chief Audu Ogbeh, toured rice farms in Kebbi State. After the government announced a ban on rice imports through land borders (Faleye, 2019), it commenced the Anchor Borrowers' Programme (Odukoya, 2020), which supported rice farmers in parts of the country where rice is grown. Kebbi State is one of those states. The minister visiting the farms showed the importance the government placed on achieving local rice production. The minister also toured Zamfara State, where he met the then-Governor, Abdul-aziz Yari, to discuss ways of reaching local rice production targets. In another post generated from a press

release by the office of the then Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo, the federal government was reported to be setting up a national task force on rice. This indicates that the government was intentional in its rice policy. The task force is expected to work towards actualising the government's local rice production. This is why Faleye (2019) sees the rice policy and border closure as a public policy that went side by side with restrictions on the importation of rice, which finds justification by state actors to convince the public that such a policy was in the interest of the public by indicating that the trans-border space constitutes a threat to the state.

Also, in one of the posts, the late Chief Ogbeh was on a working visit to the Olam rice processing facility in Nasarawa State. The Olam facility is a private firm which is known for rice processing. This firm is strategic in its approach to achieving local rice production through the federal government. The Minister of Agriculture's visit was further evidence that the government sees the private sector as a major stakeholder in food sustainability. Moreover, one of the challenges with the rice policy is the production of high-quality rice, as identified by Abbas et al. (2018). This is what the government sought to achieve by empowering private firms like Olam to produce high-quality rice for Nigerians.

In another post on rice that was content analysed, "the agriculture minister flagged off distribution of 500 threshers to rice farmers towards encouraging agriculture mechanisation." This generated a comment from one of the Facebook users asking for the states. The account handler responded by listing the 12 states that benefited. Also, a user asked if local rice is better than foreign rice. The handler responded that local rice is better than foreign rice, as most foreign rice has low nutritional value, while some rice had been stored for close to 15 years before being shipped into Nigeria. This was also the view of Abbas et al (2018).

Also, in another post, the governments of Niger, Taraba, and Ebonyi were reported to be interested in rice production. This indicates that the federal government also encouraged states to pursue food sustainability by providing credit support through the Anchor Borrowers' Programme, supervised by the Central Bank of Nigeria. Aremu and Akinwamide (2018), in their study on prospects and challenges of sustainable rice production in Igbemo Ekiti, Southwest Nigeria, encouraged the government to revive rice production in the country.

In one of the posts, the then Ebonyi State governor, Dave Umahi, in tandem with the recommendations of Aremu and Akinwamide (2018), noted that the state was determined to reclaim its rating as the highest rice-producing state in Nigeria. Another post also showed that the Jigawa State government, in preparation for the dry season farming, noted that it would target 150,000 hectares of rice. This was also in line with the recommendations of Aremu and Akinwamide (2018) to states in Nigeria as part of measures aimed at achieving local rice production. However, in another post, the agriculture minister, late Chief Ogbeh, was forced to issue a press

statement to defend an allegation against him that he said rice was expensive because Nigerians eat too much rice. Rice became expensive after the government announced a ban on its import via land borders. The official reason for the ban was to enhance rice production capacity and increase self-sufficiency (Allen & Ogbe, 2020). Self-sufficiency in the production of local rice has inadvertently raised its price, making rice an expensive meal for many households in Nigeria (Johnson et al., 2013; Ogunleke, 2020).

The technological determinism theory (TDT) by Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) was used to test the theoretical framework of this study and was aptly supported by the findings regarding textual communication. TDT suggested that societies with greater exposure to technological advancements would be better off than those without such exposure. It suffices that Nigeria, the scope of this study, is part of one of the world's technological economies. Thus, the government's use of textual communications on Facebook, a platform that is accessible through technological means, is essential to drive the rice policy, since those who are exposed to the messages are Nigerians, who are familiar with the posts about the rice policy on Facebook, due to their high exposure to technological advancements.

Conclusion

The government's use of text messaging as a communication channel indicates that the message of the rice policy reached the people, who have been defined as technologically rich. The government was intentional about its rice policy, introducing farm mechanisation and providing credit support to rice farmers. The government also partnered with a private firm to mill rice. This will not only ensure food sustainability but also improve the quality of rice processing.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:
i.   The Nigerian government should continue to make use of social media to drive policies that are geared towards impacting the lives of the people. Social media handlers who are knowledgeable about the use of user-generated content should be assigned this onerous task.
ii.   The framing of the rice policy by the Nigerian government should not be limited to Facebook. Other social media platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Instagram, should also be explored. Also, other forms of communication should be explored.

The use of video and graphic content is an alternative to textual communication.

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The Impact of Migration on Language Development: A Paedolinguistics Study of Child Language Acquisition among African Families in Diaspora

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Abstract

African migration has become a notable development in the modern age. With the increasing movement of African families to various parts of the world in search of greener pastures, children are often raised in a multicultural context, leading to linguistic hybridity. Specifically, this research studied some online content via selected social media: Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, with a view to examining the linguistic utterances of African children in the diaspora, aged 4-12years old. It focused on how migration shaped their language acquisition, its use, and the formation of their linguistic abilities. Using Fishman's (1968) and Labov's (1972) theories of language contact and sociolinguistic variation, this research examined the proficiency and linguistic patterns of ten selected second-generation children of African origin in America and Europe. The study examined how they navigate linguistic spaces and negotiate their identities amid language contact. In addition to the social media data, some diaspora children were also studied through phone conversations, including audio and video calls, to enable more accurate and contextual analysis. It employed empirical case studies and a comprehensive review of the existing literature to investigate factors influencing language use among Nigerian children in the diaspora. However, the study found that language shift is common, with many migrants abandoning their native languages in favour of dominant languages such as English or French. This act is driven by social and cultural factors, leading to the creation of new linguistic forms and identities, such as a hybrid accent. Consequently, this results in a blend of migrants' native accents with those of their host communities.

Keywords: Migration, Paedolinguistics, Language Acquisition, Language Shift, Language Use, Child Development.

Introduction

In recent years, African migration to Europe, North America, and other parts of the world has become a prominent global phenomenon. This development is largely driven by economic aspirations, educational opportunities, and political instability (Adepoju, 2021; IOM, 2023; Adepoju, 2018). However, this migratory trend has led to multicultural environments in which children are frequently exposed to multiple languages and cultural practices from an early age. Such settings intensely influence language development, as children navigate between their native languages and the dominant languages of their host countries. The process of language acquisition in migrant children is complex, shaped by various social, cultural, and linguistic factors. This, however, is a vital area of study within paedolinguistics; a branch of linguistics which focuses on language development in children (Kirk, 2020).

African migrant children often grow up in linguistically and culturally hybrid

environments, where their acquisition and use of language are shaped by both their native language and the dominant language(s) of the host country. Language development is expressly critical during childhood, as it is intricately connected to cognitive growth, identity formation, social integration, and academic performance (Paradis, 2016). Paedolinguistics, a branch of linguistics, studies child language and how young children acquire, adapt to, and negotiate language in diasporic settings.

Despite the expanding body of literature on bilingualism and multilingualism, little empirical attention has been paid to language development among African children in the diaspora and how migration influences their linguistic trajectories. Many migrant children often neglect their native languages, adopting the host country's main language, which consequently leads to language attrition and loss of cultural identity (Omonijo & Oluwadare, 2021). This neglect raises questions about the implications for their linguistic proficiency and identity formation. Also, the influence of social media and online interactions as contemporary platforms for language use among children remains underexplored, yet it plays a crucial role in shaping their linguistic skills and identities. Hence, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the influence of migration on the language development of the African migrant children in the diaspora. This study is significant because language is central to culture and identity. Hence, understanding how migrant children navigate linguistic spaces is crucial for promoting inclusive language practices and preserving linguistic heritage (De Houwer, 2020).

Research Objectives

This study addresses the linguistic consequences of migration on second-generation African children, particularly those aged 4–12 years, and how their exposure to multicultural environments leads to phenomena such as language shift, hybrid accents, and identity reformation. The study seeks to answer the following question: How do these children sustain or abandon their native languages? What role does the dominant societal language, like English, play in their linguistic development? These questions will guide the study's objectives and inquiry. However, the objectives are:

    i.   to examine how migration affects language acquisition among African children in diaspora.

    ii.   to investigate the degree of language shift or maintenance among the African migrant children in the diaspora.

    iii.   to explore how multicultural contexts influence the children's linguistic identities.

Theoretical Framework

Joshua Fishman's theory of language contact (1968) and William Labov's sociolinguistic variation theory (1972) is foundational in understanding how language acquisition and usage are influenced by social contexts, particularly among second-generation immigrant children. Fishman's Theory of Language Contact emphasised

the dynamics of language maintenance and shift within multilingual societies. He introduced the concept of "domains of language use," illustrating how different languages are employed in specific social contexts, such as home, school, or religious settings. This framework is pivotal in paedolinguistics, as it sheds light on how children navigate multiple languages based on context. Fishman's work is particularly relevant to second-generation children who often balance their heritage language at home with the dominant language of their host country in public spheres.

Labov's Sociolinguistic Variation Theory focused on the systematic variation of language within speech communities. He introduced the concept of the "sociolinguistic variable," demonstrating that linguistic features vary systematically with social factors like class, age, and gender. Labov's studies, such as his work on the Lower East Side of New York City, revealed that language change often originates from the middle socioeconomic classes; a concept known as the "curvilinear principle". In the context of language acquisition, Labov's findings suggest that children learn not only the grammatical rules of a language but also its social nuances, adapting their speech based on their social environment.

Both theories underscore the importance of social context in language development. Fishman's emphasis on domains highlights how children's language use is compartmentalised based on social settings, influencing their proficiency in each language. Labov's insights into sociolinguistic variation reveal that children are sensitive to social cues and adjust their language accordingly, a process that begins early in life. Together, these two theories provide a comprehensive understanding of how second-generation children acquire and use language, balancing their heritage and host country languages in response to social factors.

Literature Review

Global Trends in African Migration

Recent global trends in African migration reveal a dynamic, varied landscape shaped by economic, political, environmental, and social factors (Akpuokwe, Eneh, Adeniyi, and Bakare, 2024). African migration is increasingly marked by both intracontinental and intercontinental movements. Over 80% of African migrants remain on the continent, drawn by opportunities in neighbouring countries (IOM, 2024). However, migration to Europe, North America, and the Gulf States has increased due to continuing inequities, violence, and climate change (UNHCR, 2023).

Economic aspirations and the search for better livelihoods remain primary motivators. Moreover, climate-induced displacement is rising, with the Sahel region particularly affected by desertification and food insecurity (World Bank, 2023).

Additionally, restrictive visa policies in the Global North have contributed to irregular migration and the rise of human smuggling networks (Migration Policy Institute, 2024). Notably, African migration is not solely composed of low-skilled labourers; there is an increasing trend of highly educated professionals leaving the continent, contributing to the so-called "brain drain" (OECD & IOM, 2023). However, African migratory patterns have generally exhibited both systemic issues and resilience, necessitating multinational policy responses that balance human rights, security, and development.

Migration and Childhood Language Development

Migration plays a critical role in shaping childhood language development, especially within the field of paedolinguistics. When children migrate either with families or as unaccompanied minors, they often experience a shift in linguistic environments that can significantly impact both first and second language acquisition. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2023), migrant children frequently face challenges in maintaining their mother tongue while simultaneously learning the dominant language of the host country, which can lead to bilingualism and identity tension.

Research shows that early exposure to multiple languages can enhance cognitive flexibility, but only if linguistic support is available (European Commission, 2022). In many cases, however, migrant children struggle academically due to insufficient support in their first language, which can delay literacy development and impede educational outcomes (Cummins, 2021). Paedolinguistic studies emphasise the importance of maintaining the home language to support identity formation and facilitate additive bilingualism, where the second language enhances rather than replaces the first. Nevertheless, effective language policies in schools and communities, such as mother tongue-based multilingual education, are essential for ensuring positive linguistic and developmental outcomes for migrant children.

Paedolinguistics and Diaspora Linguistic Behaviour

The study of how children learn and use language is known as paedolinguistics. Children from diaspora communities frequently grow up in bilingual settings, navigating between the society and their heritage language or languages. Their identity, cognitive results, and language development are all greatly influenced by this dynamic. According to studies, diaspora children frequently encounter a diglossia scenario in which the societal language, such as English, French, or Dutch, dominates public and educational contexts, while the home language, such as Yoruba, Igbo, or Amharic, is used in private settings (Anderson et al., 2022). If heritage language maintenance is not encouraged, this may lead to bilingualism, which can cause language change or even loss. De Houwer (2021) emphasises that sustained input in both languages is critical to achieving additive bilingualism, in which the second language is acquired without loss of the first.

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From a paedolinguistic perspective, language acquisition among diaspora children is not only cognitive, but also social and emotional. Heritage language proficiency reinforces cultural identity and family bonds, while a lack of proficiency can create intergenerational communication gaps (Aronin & Singleton, 2018). For African diaspora communities, maintaining indigenous languages is particularly challenging due to limited institutional support and societal pressure to assimilate linguistically. However, linguistic behaviour in diaspora children is often adaptive. Research indicates that children may engage in code-switching and translanguaging fluidly, drawing from both linguistic repertoires depending on context and interlocutor (Canagarajah, 2018). These practices are not signs of confusion, but of linguistic competence and identity negotiation. Cummins (2021) argues that bilingual education and culturally relevant pedagogy are essential tools for promoting balanced bilingualism. Without such frameworks, diaspora children risk academic underachievement and identity dislocation.

Digital Spaces and the Promotion of Indigenous Languages

Contemporary paedolinguistic research increasingly recognises the role of digital spaces as supplementary sites for heritage language acquisition and maintenance (Obojska & Vaiouli, 2023; Nikolopoulou, 2024; Mütterlein, J., & Fuchs, C., 2019). Although ethnographic studies have observed families sharing videos, music, and language-learning apps online, few platforms have been systematically evaluated in academic research. For example, Botangen and Yu (2018) analysed Facebook groups among the Igorot community in North America, finding that migrants use social media to exchange, revitalise, and practice indigenous cultural and linguistic knowledge, thereby reinforcing identity and bridging intergenerational gaps. Similarly, digital storytelling workshops involving First Nations communities in Canada have been shown to enhance both language learning and cultural engagement through interactive multimedia productions. Ryan's (2016) MA thesis examined how digital storytelling can function both as a creative learning tool and a repository of cultural knowledge. She found that participants in Indigenous communities experienced increased confidence, improved literacy skills, and deeper emotional connections to their heritage languages.

Although systematic quantitative research on heritage language social media use remains limited, surveys of family language practices suggest that digital communication tools such as messaging apps and online story-sharing are being integrated alongside traditional home-based teaching, especially in-migrant families where formal language instruction is limited. Also, Wang & Hamid (2022) demonstrate that microlearning formats such as short, contextualised video modules support retention and motivation among diaspora children, often outperforming

traditional classroom-only approaches. They note that Short-form, thematic media content, such as a 60-second rhyme or conversational clip, provides heritage learners with high-density exposure without cognitive overload. Although academic evaluations of specific channels, such as "Akan Twi with Nana" or "@TalesFromNaija," remain sparse, user-generated testimonials and community feedback suggest their effectiveness. For example, social-media users often remark that Twi-learning YouTube channels in story-and-song formats make language acquisition feel "super relaxed" and culturally rooted. This, however, supports broader findings that culturally immersive, narrative-based digital content aligns closely with what is known about effective childhood language learning. As Cummins (2021) and De Houwer (2023) argue, heritage language development thrives not just on exposure but on meaningful, identity-linked interaction, which these platforms sometimes actively promote.

While traditional heritage-language research emphasises family language policy and home-based transmission (Fishman, 1989; Wang & Hamid, 2022), recent work highlights the transformative role of digital platforms. Technology-enabled tools are increasingly recognised as effective resources for heritage language maintenance and revitalisation, particularly among diaspora communities (Salazar et al., 2021; Wang & Hatoss, 2024). A study on Yoruba–English bilingual immigrants in the U.S. demonstrates the centrality of heritage language within digital and social media spheres (Wang, 2023). Similarly, research conducted with Ukrainian-Macedonian diaspora learners identifies interactive digital formats, especially gamified learning, as effective in maintaining linguistic skills among young children abroad.

Diving into specific cases, platforms such as @IgboChildrenZone on Instagram leverage bilingual (Igbo–English) nursery rhymes, cultural facts, and interactive content. These mirror the benefits of heritage-language exposure among children, enhancing lexical recall and cultural identity (Dash, 2024). Akan Twi with Nana, a Ghanaian YouTube channel, uses illustrated storytelling and songs to support the acquisition of the Twi language. Such audiovisual immersion aligns with documented optimal conditions for paedolinguistic development: repeated, meaningful exposure in relatable contexts (Salazar et al., 2021).

The African Language Project, spanning Facebook and YouTube, offers materials in Yoruba, Hausa, Swahili, Zulu, and others. This aligns with current heritage-language policy literature, which advocates for multilingual digital toolkits to support intergenerational language maintenance in diaspora settings (Wang & Hatoss, 2024). @SwahiliShule on Instagram and TikTok uses microlearning videos and interactive skits to teach Swahili conversational skills. This mode has been praised for its motivational and memory-enhancing benefits, core strengths of digital informal learning formats (Salazar et al., 2021). @TalesFromNaija utilises TikTok to share Nigerian folktales, proverbs, and riddles in languages like Edo, Efik, and Yoruba. Folkloric content broadcast digitally supports paedolinguistic outcomes in oral

narrative competence, reinforcing cultural literacy among diaspora children (Salazar et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2023). Together, these platforms transform heritage language engagement from passive reception to interactive participation. The trend aligns with research advocating digital strategies in Indigenous and endangered-language contexts, such as those documented in Latin American, North American, and Australian settings, validating the positive impact of digital resources on language retention and emotional identity (Dash, 2024).

Digital strategies also help mitigate common factors driving the diaspora language shift by offering structured, engaging indigenous-language content that complements family-driven approaches. This contributes to additive bilingualism, helping children maintain a strong heritage-language foundation while integrating into the dominant-language society (Cummins, 2021; De Houwer, 2021).

From the foregoing examples of digital space engagement, it is evident that digital space has become a powerful tool for the promotion and revitalisation of indigenous languages, especially among diaspora communities where face-to-face transmission is often weakened by distance and assimilation pressures. Such spaces provide informal but impactful opportunities for children to hear, use, and interact with their native languages in real-world scenarios beyond the home. Studies focusing on African diaspora contexts further illustrate these dynamics. For example, Kupolati (2024) documents Yoruba–English bilingual immigrants in the United States, showing how digital and social media spaces (e.g., Facebook groups, YouTube channels) become critical domains for Yoruba maintenance. One notable exemplary platform is the Masoyinbo page on Facebook, a unique language challenge forum that immerses participants in real-time Yoruba language use (Masoyinbo, 2024). On this platform, the host presents questions in Yoruba and participants are required to respond entirely in Yoruba throughout the session. A strict rule governs the challenge: any use of English, even a single word, results in a monetary deduction from the contestant's potential reward. This format gamifies language learning and use, encouraging fluency, quick thinking, and pride in proficiency in an indigenous language. Notably, *Masoyinbo* functions not only as entertainment but as a digital language immersion model that supports active recall and functional usage, especially among young speakers and diaspora audiences who may not use Yoruba as their dominant language. These practices echo wider global findings that multimedia, narrative-based content strengthens children's lexical recall, cultural literacy, and engagement with oral traditions (Salazar et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

Previous Studies on African Children in the Diaspora

Previous studies on African children in the diaspora highlight the complex interplay amidst migration, language acquisition, and identity development, particularly within the field of paedolinguistics. African migrant children often grow up in multilingual

settings, switching between their native languages and the main languages of their host countries. This dual linguistic environment presents both opportunities and challenges for language development and educational achievement.

A key theme in the literature is the tension between language maintenance and language shift. Research by De Houwer (2021) notes that African diaspora families often face difficulties in transmitting their home languages to children due to dominant societal pressures and institutional neglect of minority languages. Similarly, a study by Aronin and Singleton (2018) finds that many African children in Europe and North America experience subtractive bilingualism, where proficiency in their first language diminishes as they acquire the host country's language.

Language loss has significant implications for identity, as language is deeply tied to cultural heritage (Ajala, Adeyanju and Adebagbo, 2025). Studies such as those by Cummins (2021) argue for the importance of additive bilingualism, in which maintaining the first language alongside the second language enhances cognitive, academic, and emotional development. African parents in the diaspora often seek to reinforce language transmission through community schools, cultural events, and faith-based institutions, although these efforts vary widely in success (Judge, 2025)

In educational settings, African migrant children may be misidentified as having learning difficulties due to limited proficiency in the dominant language, despite strong cognitive abilities in their home language (UNESCO, 2023). Paedolinguistic research emphasises that early and consistent exposure to both languages, with appropriate scaffolding, supports balanced bilingualism and long-term academic success.

Methods and Materials

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design, drawing on digital ethnography and longitudinal case studies to explore how migration affects language acquisition and identity among African children in the diaspora. Guided by Fishman's (1989) Language Contact Theory and Labov's (1972) Sociolinguistic Variation Theory, the study investigates how migrant experiences and multicultural exposures influence linguistic outcomes, particularly focusing on language shift, hybridisation, and identity negotiation.

Data Collection and Sources

Data for this study were sourced from two complementary streams, viz, online content (digital ethnography) and case studies (via telephone conversations). The first source consists of observational data from social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. The data were publicly accessible and involved

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African children (ages 4–12) in diaspora contexts (particularly North America and Europe), which were purposively selected for their relevance to this study. Emphasis was placed on videos and posts where children speak informally, engage with peers, or interact with family in multilingual contexts. This allowed for the identification of language patterns such as code-switching, code-mixing, lexical borrowing, and pronunciation shifts indicative of hybrid accents or language attrition. The second source involves two sets of migrant children from Nigeria who relocated with their families to North America under different historical and developmental contexts:

Set A (Canada, 2021): Two children, aged 1 and 3 at the time of migration, were observed over regular telephone conversations with the researcher for over two months. These interactions provided current, naturalistic insights into their language usage, comprehension patterns, and negotiation between Nigerian language(s) and Canadian English. Set B (United States, 2002): Three children, aged 12, 15, and 17 at the time of migration, are now young adults and also engaged in bi-weekly telephone conversations over a two-month period. Despite their adult status, their migration occurred during a linguistically formative stage, before full language fossilisation. Their reflections on past and present language use, accent retention, and shifting cultural identities provided retrospective yet relevant data to complement the primary focus on younger children. In both cases, no formal interviews were conducted; instead, the researcher engaged participants in open-ended, organic conversations that were not recorded but meticulously documented in post-conversation field notes and reflective memos.

Sampling Criteria

The online data were sourced purposively with five children selected from digital content based on clear indicators of African heritage, diaspora residency, and linguistic performance in either English or native African languages. The case study participants were selected using convenience sampling. Five participants across the two migration cohorts were selected based on accessibility, willingness to engage, and parental consent (for minors in Set A).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis, focusing on recurring linguistic features such as:
Frequency and function of code-switching and code-mixing, pronunciation and intonation patterns indicating hybrid accents, language choice in varying contexts (home vs. school vs. online), evidence of language shift, attrition, or maintenance and expressions of identity through language use. Both direct linguistic performance

(observed in digital content and telephone interactions) and meta-linguistic commentary (such as comments, captions, or participant reflections) were coded and categorised. Comparative analysis was conducted between the two sets of migrant children to identify generational or situational variations in language retention and adaptation.

Ethical Considerations
All online content used in this study was publicly accessible and anonymised for ethical compliance. For the telephone-based case studies, parental consent was obtained for minors, and assent was sought from the children. No personally identifying information is included in this research. Field notes were securely stored in a password-protected online archive and used solely for academic analysis.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participant ID	Data Source	Location	Age at Migration	Current Age	Gender	Migration Year	Observation Period	Notes
D1–D5	Digital Ethnography	North America/Europe	1–12 (approximate)	4–12	Mixed	Not specified	Based on social media content	Observed via social media; anonymised; linguistic behaviour inferred from public videos/posts
C1	Case Study (Set A)	Canada	1	5 (approximate)	Male	2020	2 months (2025)	Regular phone conversations; naturalistic language use
C2	Case Study (Set A)	Canada	3	7 (approximate)	Male	2020	2 months (2025)	Regular phone conversations;

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Partici pant ID	Data Source	Location	Age at Migratio n	Current Age	Gen der	Migrat ion Year	Observa tion Period	Notes
								naturalisti c language use
C3	Case Study (Set B)	United States	12	34 (approxi mate)	Fem ale	2002	2 months (2025)	Adult reflection on childhoo d migration and language shift
C4	Case Study (Set B)	United States	15	37 (approxi mate)	Fem ale	2002	2 months (2025)	Adult reflection on childhoo d migration and language shift
C5	Case Study (Set B)	United States	17	39 (approxi mate)	Male	2002	2 months (2025)	Adult reflection on childhoo d migration and language shift

Source: Authors' Construction

The study's participants are organised into two main groups based on the nature of data collection: digital ethnography and case studies. Participants D1–D5 are anonymised individuals selected from publicly accessible digital content on social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. These children, aged approximately 4 to 12, were observed in informal, naturalistic interactions that revealed patterns of bilingual expression, code-switching, code

mixing and accent variation. Because they were not directly contacted or formally profiled, their demographic details, such as age, location, and linguistic background, were estimated through contextual and visual cues present in the videos. This approach ensured observational validity while maintaining ethical distance.

Participants C1–C5 were drawn from two purposefully selected case study cohorts, both involving Nigerian children who migrated to North America but under different historical circumstances. Set A includes two recent child migrants (C1 and C2) who moved to Canada in 2020 and were observed through regular phone conversations with the researcher over a two-month period. Set B includes three individuals (C3–C5) who migrated to the United States as adolescents in 2002 and, now adults, reflected on their earlier language adaptation experiences. While the conversations were not recorded, detailed field notes were taken to capture linguistic and identity-related insights. In both groups, gender has been deliberately left unspecified to preserve anonymity, and current ages, when referenced, are approximated solely to aid contextual interpretation and may be omitted in formal reporting if necessary.

The inclusion of adolescent participants aged 12 to 17 in this study is justified within the scope of paedolinguistics, particularly given the transitional and formative nature of language development at this stage. Although paedolinguistics is traditionally associated with early childhood (0–12 years), the discipline also encompasses the linguistic experiences of adolescents, particularly during significant developmental, social, or environmental changes. In migration contexts, adolescents are especially susceptible to shifts in linguistic behaviour, identity negotiation, and bilingual adaptation, all of which fall squarely within the domain of paedolinguistic inquiry.

In the present study, the three adolescent participants migrated during their teenage years, a period marked by ongoing cognitive and linguistic development. Their inclusion is crucial for examining how language acquisition and usage are influenced not only by age but also by the sociocultural upheaval associated with relocation. Unlike younger children, adolescents possess the cognitive maturity to reflect on their language experiences, offering meta-linguistic commentary that enriches the qualitative data. These reflections provide insight into both the retention of native linguistic structures and the adaptation to dominant languages in host countries, thereby offering a more comprehensive view of the dynamics of language shift and identity formation across age groups.

Therefore, while adolescents may sit at the upper boundary of paedolinguistics, their role in this study is not only valid but essential. Their developmental stage offers a unique lens for understanding the long-term impact of migration on language use, including processes of attrition, hybridisation, and cultural alignment. By bridging early childhood experiences with adult linguistic identity, these participants contribute meaningfully to the broader aims of paedolinguistic research.

Data Analysis

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The Data Collection and Sources presented in section 4.1 build on the demographic profile of the selected African children in the diaspora previously outlined. Guided by a qualitative, interpretive methodology, the analysis draws on digital ethnography and case-study cohorts to provide insight into linguistic adaptation and identity negotiation in multicultural contexts. The data comprises publicly available social media content and some field notes from open-ended telephone conversations with migrant children from four distinct cohorts. Thematic content analysis was employed to identify patterns such as bilingualism, code-switching and code mixing, phonological variation (hybrid accents), language shift, and expressions of cultural identity. By comparing linguistic behaviours across different age groups and migration timelines, this section highlights the complex, evolving interplay between language and identity in diasporic experiences.

Table 2: Comparative Linguistic Profiles of Yoruba–English Migrants from Digital Ethnography and Case Studies

ID	Age	Observation Type	Code Switching/ Mixing	Phonetic Re[prese ntation	Phonology /Morph ology	Syntax/Se mantics	Identity Markers
D1-D5	1–12 (approx.)	Social media	Frequent English–Yoruba switching; conversational shifts	Hybrid accents, especially diphthongs; influence of host language phonetics	Use of simplified Yoruba morphemes; English affixation on Yoruba roots	Occasional syntactic transfer (e.g., subject-verb-object inversion); limited semantic range in Yoruba	Use of English for abstract ideas, Yoruba for emotion; clear identity negotiation visible
C1	1	Case Study (Set A)	Basic Yoruba with embedded English phrases	Softened Yoruba consonants (e.g., /gb/, /ṣ/)	English morphological structures dominate	Grammar errors in Yoruba (tense, negation)	Strong preference for English; Yoruba linked to home/family
C2	3	Case Study (Set A)	Alternates per context; English	Signs of accent levelling;	Yoruba words truncate	Switching between English and	Emerging bilingua

			dominates in narrative speech	vowel shifts	d or anglicize d	Yoruba syntax mid-sentence	l identity; playful use of Yoruba
C 3	12	Case Study (Set B)	Reports initial dominance of Yoruba, now rare	English L1 accent with residual Yoruba intonation	Occasio nal Yoruba compou nd forms used metapho rically	Syntactic fluency in English; Yoruba more formulaic	Identity shift to Canadia n English user; nostalgi c ties to Yoruba
C 4	15	Case Study (Set B)	Conscious avoidance of Yoruba; uses select expressions	North American accent; Yoruba tonal loss	Morphol ogical loss in Yoruba; retains greetings	Predominan tly English syntax; Yoruba used for familial roles	Views Yoruba as "cultura l" but not "functi onal"
C 5	17	Case Study (Set B)	Rare Yoruba usage; more reflective use	Strong English phonetic influence; Yoruba phonemes weakened	Loss of morphol ogical producti vity in Yoruba	Very limited Yoruba syntax; semantically vague	Bilingua l but identifie s primaril y with English

Source: Authors' construction

Bilingualism, the ability to use two languages with varying degrees of proficiency (Ajala & Adeniji, 2025), is a core feature among all participants, though with varying degrees of dominance. The study vividly demonstrates that second-generation African children in diaspora typically acquire bilingual competencies, albeit unevenly. Children who migrated at an early age (such as participants D1–D5 and C1–C2) exhibit dynamic bilingualism, often using English and Yoruba interchangeably. Participants D1–D5 (aged 1–12 at migration) demonstrate active bilingualism, using both English and Yoruba across informal digital spaces such as social media. This context encourages a dynamic, fluid use of language, where both languages coexist naturally: their parents speak to them in their native language, and they respond, switching to English intermittently.

In contrast, case study participants such as C3 (age 12) and C5 (age 17) exhibit signs of recessive bilingualism, in which the minority language (Yoruba) gradually gives way to the dominant language (English) under environmental and social pressures. For example, C3 initially spoke Yoruba fluently but now only uses it metaphorically

or nostalgically, indicating a loss of functional fluency. Younger case study participants, such as C1 (age 1) and C2 (age 3), demonstrate emergent bilingualism, in which English becomes the dominant language from early childhood, while Yoruba is learned only in family contexts. C1's language use reflects early acquisition of English structures, with limited yet meaningful Yoruba insertions.

Code-switching (alternating between languages) and code-mixing (blending elements from different languages within a sentence or phrase) are also central to the linguistic behaviour of all participants, though with different functions and frequencies. For participants D1–D5, code-switching between English and Yoruba is frequent and situational, especially in digital conversations. An example is a social media post in which a participant told his illiterate grandmother over the phone, "Grandma, mo pe yin, mo pe yin, e check phone yin, you will see that I called." This sentence fluidly mixes English and Yoruba. C2 (age 3) exemplifies context-sensitive code-switching: English dominates narrative and public speech, but Yoruba surfaces during private interactions. For instance, C2 once told me on the phone, "Aunty, mo n play video game mi" (meaning "I am playing my video game" in Yoruba).

Labov's sociolinguistic theory is evident in how diaspora children adjust their language to the setting. The data shows frequent and situational code-switching. I witnessed another instance when I was on a video call with the mother of one of my participants, C2 (age 7 now) uses English during play with peers (a video recording in his school) but switches to Yoruba during conversational exchanges at home: "Mummy, I want popcorn… e jọ̀, give me some." This fusion of politeness markers in Yoruba ("e jọ̀") into English speech illustrates children's capacity to respond to social cues. C5 (age 17 at the time of migration), on the other hand, rarely switches when I am in a phone conversation with her. Back then in Nigeria, we communicated mostly in Yoruba. Presently, she uses Yoruba language for reflective or symbolic purposes, suggesting diminished practical use. These patterns reflect not confusion but social pragmatism. This is because children align language with context and interlocutors, an adaptive linguistic behaviour often seen in multicultural settings.

The study also highlighted phonological development among the participants. There were phonological restructurings that display significant influence from host-country phonetics, resulting in hybrid accents. D1–D5 exhibit diphthong simplification. For instance, Yoruba words like "àìní" (lack) become "ay-nee" or even "eh-ee-nee," flattening the tonal richness. C1, despite being born in Nigeria, now softens Yoruba consonants like /ṣ/ (as in "ṣé") into more English-friendly sounds like /s/, making "ṣé o wa dada?" (Hope you are very fine) sound like "se'o wa dada?"

This phonetic restructuring is linked to limited exposure to native pronunciation in home environments and a dominant use of English at school. Tonal loss among older participants, such as C4, has led to semantic confusion, reducing communication

effectiveness in the heritage language. Phonological features, especially hybrid accents, reflect how the host language reshapes speech patterns. For D1–D5, hybrid accents emerge through diphthong simplification and vowel shifting, influenced by the host country's phonetic system. For example, the Yoruba diphthong "ai" in "àìní" (lack) is pronounced with a flatter vowel as in "eh-ee-nee," showing phonetic compromise.

The participants exhibited language shift, a process in which a community gradually transitions from using one language to another, often due to social, economic, or cultural influences. This is particularly evident among participants who migrated at older ages (C3–C5). C3's narrative shows an initial dominance in Yoruba, which faded over time, replaced by English fluency and only residual Yoruba use, often in formulaic expressions. C4 and C5 show an even more pronounced shift. C4 consciously avoids Yoruba except for culturally "appropriate" expressions like greetings ("ẹ káàrọ̀" for "good morning"), indicating a shift toward viewing Yoruba as symbolic rather than functional. C5 rarely uses Yoruba and struggles with basic syntax and semantics, highlighting an advanced stage of language shift. Meanwhile, D1–D5, though bilingual, show signs of slow language shift in grammatical structures: simplified Yoruba morphology and occasional syntactic errors, such as "mo go school" (I went to school), which reflects English influence on Yoruba sentence construction.

Some participants shifted from their traditional or ancestral language to a more dominant language within the region, leading to the decline or even loss of the original language over time. This phenomenon is typically driven by factors such as increased integration into mainstream society, educational policies, employment opportunities, or the desire for social mobility. As a result, the community's linguistic landscape changes, potentially impacting cultural identity and heritage. The shift may also influence intergenerational communication, with younger generations becoming less fluent in their ancestral language, thereby affecting the preservation of cultural traditions and practices associated with it.

Lastly, the language use among participants serves as a marker of cultural identity and belonging. D1–D5 use English for abstract or academic ideas but revert to Yoruba when expressing emotion or cultural sentiment, e.g., "I miss grandma jare!" ("jare" softens or adds familiarity to a statement in Yoruba). C1 and C2 associate Yoruba with familial and domestic contexts. For example, Yoruba is spoken with grandparents, during prayer, or when eating traditional food, thus sustaining cultural continuity. C2's playful use of Yoruba, even in truncated or anglicised form, suggests an emerging bilingual identity that embraces both cultural worlds.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings provides a comprehensive interpretation of the linguistic behaviours exhibited by African children in the diaspora, drawing from digital

ethnography and case studies. Key areas such as linguistic hybridity, code-switching and code mixing, identity formation, and language shift are analysed within the framework of paedolinguistics and sociolinguistics. Paedolinguistics examines the cognitive and social processes by which children acquire language. In diasporic contexts, language acquisition is not merely developmental but also heavily influenced by sociocultural variables such as environment, exposure, and identity pressures. The data from both digital observations and telephone case studies reveal that migrant children often operate in bilingual environments in public domains and heritage languages such as Yoruba at home. This dual exposure shapes a linguistic repertoire that is simultaneously flexible and fragmented. Children like participants C1 and C2 demonstrate the early acquisition of dominant language structures while relegating Yoruba to affective or symbolic usage. As De Houwer (2021) explains, such bilingualism is typical among diaspora children, in which dominant societal pressures encourage additive bilingualism only if deliberate input in both languages is maintained.

Moreover, diaspora children often develop language in fragmented domains, as Fishman (1989) argues through his theory of "domains of language use." For instance, children might employ Yoruba for prayers, greetings, or cultural rituals but switch to English for schooling and digital communication. This functional compartmentalisation reflects the dynamic interplay of language, identity, and social context (Anderson et al., 2022). One of the striking findings in the dataset is the emergence of linguistic hybridity; a blending of phonological, morphological, and semantic features of the native language with those of the dominant host language. Children such as D1–D5 showcase frequent English–Yoruba code-switching, hybrid accents, and syntactic borrowings. For instance, constructions like "mo go school" or the softening of Yoruba phonemes ("ṣ" to "s") demonstrate linguistic blending. This phenomenon aligns with Canagarajah's (2018) concept of translingual practice, where language users fluidly navigate multiple linguistic systems to construct meaning and assert identity.

The development of hybrid linguistic identities, in which children are neither fully aligned with their parents' heritage nor wholly assimilated into the host culture, is evident. The phrase "I miss grandma jare!" exemplifies this hybrid identity. The emotive Yoruba word "jare" is integrated into an English sentence, indicating not linguistic confusion but the child's nuanced expression of emotional attachment through multiple linguistic codes (Cummins, 2021).

The data also highlight age-related patterns of acquisition and retention. Children who migrated before age 5 (C1, C2, and D1–D5) tend to acquire English with greater fluency and phonological accuracy, while their heritage language skills remain limited to basic, often affective expressions. This confirms the Critical Period Hypothesis, which posits that early childhood is the optimal window for acquiring native-like

fluency in a second language (Kirk, 2020). In contrast, older migrants (C3–C5), who had already acquired a foundation in Yoruba before migration, display patterns of attrition. For example, C4 uses Yoruba mainly for cultural expressions such as greetings, but demonstrates tonal loss and syntactic simplification. This is consistent with Paradis (2016), who asserts that second-language dominance can erode L1 grammatical competence when consistent reinforcement is absent. Notably, while younger children adapt quickly to dominant languages, they often do so at the expense of native-language proficiency unless parental or community reinforcement is strong (De Houwer, 2021).

Dominant language proficiency is visibly strong across the dataset, especially among children attending school in the host country. However, this proficiency often correlates with a decline in the use and complexity of the heritage language. For example, C3, who migrated at age 12, now uses Yoruba mostly for metaphorical or nostalgic purposes. In contrast, C1, who migrated as a toddler, uses English almost exclusively in narrative contexts. This pattern underscores Omonijo and Oluwadare's (2021) assertion that language shift is a common trend among African migrants, driven by the institutionalisation of dominant languages in schools and media. Without intentional heritage language instruction, children lose both linguistic and cultural fluency.

The findings offer strong evidence of linguistic hybridity. Children blend accents and vocabulary, producing what Labov (1972) refers to as "sociolinguistic variables", linguistic features that vary by age, class, and peer group. The diphthong simplification in Yoruba, for example, and the fusion of Yoruba lexical items within English sentence frames are prominent. Such hybridity is not a defect but a form of creative linguistic adaptation that enables children to communicate across cultures.

Participants D1–D5 exemplify this hybridity through their use of digital platforms, where English serves as the medium of broader social interaction and Yoruba surfaces for humour or emphasis. This reflects what Aronin and Singleton (2018) term multicompetence, the dynamic ability to negotiate multiple linguistic norms. Several factors contribute to language shift among participants. These include peer influence, school curricula, media exposure, and parental language strategy. Schools in North America and Europe generally operate in English or French, making these the de facto languages of instruction and peer interaction. Consequently, even when children hear Yoruba at home, the absence of structured reinforcement leads to erosion (UNESCO, 2023).

The media also plays a critical role. As observed in digital ethnography, children's consumption of English-language games, cartoons, and YouTube content fosters dominant-language acquisition at the expense of heritage-language retention (European Commission, 2022). Parental influence is a double-edged sword. Some parents enforce Yoruba at home, as seen with C1 and C2, while others adopt English to help children assimilate. Anderson et al. (2022) emphasise that parental language policies significantly shape linguistic outcomes. Where parents consistently use the

heritage language and contextualise it within rituals, food, and family routines, children are more likely to retain fluency.

The findings highlight that language use is a tool for identity construction. Children draw on their linguistic repertoires to express a sense of belonging. For example, C2's use of "Aunty, mo n play video game mi" reflects a deliberate switch that reinforces familial bonds and cultural identity while remaining anchored in the host country's linguistic environment. Language here is performative. It signals group membership, emotional proximity, and even rebellion. C4's view of Yoruba as "cultural" but not "functional" reflects a shift in identity; while the heritage language carries symbolic weight, it lacks utility in everyday life. This aligns with Cummins' (2021) theory of identity texts, which posits that children express their evolving identities through language practices shaped by environment, ideology, and self-perception.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how migration influences language acquisition and development among African children in the diaspora, with a particular focus on second-generation children aged 4 to 12. Drawing on data from social media observations and telephone-based case studies, the research uncovered significant evidence of bilingual development, linguistic hybridity, and identity negotiation shaped by the complex interplay of environmental, social, and familial factors. Findings indicate that children of African descent in North America and Europe are active participants in multilingual ecologies, yet their linguistic trajectories are not uniform. Age at migration played a critical role: younger children tended to acquire dominant languages such as English more fluently, often at the expense of their heritage language, while older children displayed varying degrees of language retention and attrition. Across all age groups, however, heritage language usage was often limited to home or cultural settings, leading to functional compartmentalisation of language domains.

The study also documented widespread code-switching and code-mixing practices, along with hybrid accent features, which emerged as natural outcomes of prolonged contact between home and host languages. These linguistic behaviours were not indicative of confusion but reflected a high degree of adaptability and communicative competence. Children strategically selected languages based on context and interlocutor, reinforcing Fishman's (1989) theory of domain-specific language use and Labov's (1972) principle of sociolinguistic variation.

Importantly, language use among these children was deeply intertwined with issues of identity. While dominant languages were often used for academic and peer interaction, heritage languages retained emotional and symbolic significance. Children used hybrid speech forms to express dual cultural belonging, suggesting that

language is not only a communicative tool but also a means of negotiating diasporic identities.

Ultimately, the findings affirm that migration has a profound and multifaceted impact on child language development. Without deliberate efforts from families, educational institutions, and host societies, there is a significant risk of heritage language loss, cultural dislocation, and identity fragmentation among African children in the diaspora.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and their implications, several recommendations are proposed to guide parents, educators, policymakers, and researchers in enhancing inclusive and sustainable language practices among African children in diaspora communities. First, it is essential to promote additive bilingualism both at home and in educational settings. Parents should be encouraged to consistently speak their heritage languages with their children, thereby creating a solid linguistic foundation in the first language. At the same time, schools should adopt bilingual education frameworks that not only facilitate the acquisition of the dominant language but also affirm the legitimacy and value of minority languages. Unlike subtractive bilingualism, which replaces the first language with the second, additive bilingualism enables children to expand their linguistic repertoire without displacing their cultural identity. This dual-language competence fosters cognitive flexibility, emotional stability, and a deeper sense of belonging (Cummins, 2021).

Another important recommendation is the development of structured heritage language support programs within diaspora communities. Community leaders, cultural organisations, and faith-based institutions can collaborate to establish weekend language schools, holiday workshops, and online platforms dedicated to teaching African languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Amharic. These initiatives serve dual purposes: they provide formal instruction in heritage languages and create social spaces that reinforce cultural practices. For children with limited exposure to native speakers, such initiatives are especially crucial in maintaining linguistic fluency and intergenerational communication.

Educators in multicultural environments must also be trained in culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers often misinterpret code-switching or mixed language use as indicators of linguistic deficiency, when in fact these behaviours reflect strategic linguistic choices and adaptability. Professional development programs should equip teachers with the knowledge to support children's full linguistic repertoires, acknowledging both their dominant and heritage languages as valid modes of expression. This approach promotes inclusivity in the classroom and recognises the diverse identities that children bring into the learning space.

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In today's digital age, digital media offer powerful tools for revitalising and sustaining minority languages. Educational stakeholders and content creators should harness technology to produce culturally relevant and linguistically rich materials in African languages. This can include animated stories, mobile apps, interactive games, and YouTube channels tailored for young audiences. Given children's high engagement with digital platforms, these resources can supplement traditional instruction, making language learning both accessible and enjoyable. Bridging the gap between cultural tradition and modern technology enhances the likelihood of language retention in younger generations.

Equally important is the need to encourage positive attitudes toward language within families and communities. Children are highly sensitive to the implicit and explicit messages they receive about their heritage languages. When parents or educators devalue native accents or prioritise English or French at the expense of local languages, children may internalise a sense of inferiority linked to their cultural identity. Therefore, it is critical that parents, caregivers, and community figures model pride in using their heritage language. By framing language as a cultural asset rather than a communicative barrier, children are more likely to value and maintain their linguistic heritage.

At the policy level, linguistic diversity must be recognised and incorporated into the frameworks that govern education and integration in host countries. Governments and educational ministries should implement inclusive language policies that reflect the multilingual realities of their populations. Where feasible, mother tongue-based multilingual education should be supported, especially in early childhood and foundational learning stages. UNESCO (2023) advocates for such policies to uphold linguistic rights and promote equitable educational outcomes for minority-language speakers. Policies that protect and promote language diversity are instrumental in countering the forces driving language shift and cultural erosion.

Finally, longitudinal research on diaspora language development is necessary to deepen our understanding of how linguistic competence and identity evolve over time. Most current studies capture language behaviour at a single point in time, missing the long-term effects of migration on language retention and transformation. Longitudinal designs would allow researchers to trace children's trajectories across different developmental stages, providing insight into when and why language attrition occurs and what interventions might be most effective in reversing or mitigating it. Such research is invaluable for shaping future educational models and community programs.

Implementing these recommendations can help counteract the adverse effects of language shift, encourage sustainable multilingualism, and support the linguistic,

cognitive, and cultural development of African children in diaspora. Beyond preserving heritage languages, these efforts are foundational to cultivating a generation of globally competent, culturally grounded, and linguistically versatile individuals capable of navigating the complexities of multicultural societies.

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Elections, Electoral Systems, and Election Administration in Nigeria 1999-2015: An Analysis of Democratic Path

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Abstract

Every country's democratic process, including Nigeria's, must include elections, electoral procedures, and election management. Elections play a crucial role in the peaceful transfer of power, accountability, and political representation. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has a diverse political landscape and has made significant strides towards democratic governance since the military regime was overthrown in 1999. With an emphasis on understanding Nigeria's democratic path, this article offers a critical analysis of Nigerian elections, electoral administration, and electoral institutions. It examines electoral systems and procedures, explores the historical context of Nigeria's democratic journey and evaluates the contribution of election administration to the growth of the democratic environment. The study also examines how election administration and electoral processes support political stability, accountability, and inclusivity in Nigeria. The essay also discusses Nigeria's issues and opportunities to improve its democratic processes. The data for this study were collected from a secondary source: a review of literature, including journals, articles on elections and electoral systems, monographs, textbooks, and other periodicals. Through a thorough analysis, this essay aims to shed light on the crucial elements that have contributed to Nigeria's democratic path's success as well as potential areas for development.

Keywords: Elections, Election Administration, Electoral Process, Democracy, Electoral Reforms and Electoral Systems.

Introduction

Nigeria's democratic journey reached a turning point in the late 1990s. The country started its shift to multi-party democracy after years of military rule. After the first democratic elections in 1999, the military government was peacefully replaced by a civilian government. This occasion marked a turning point in Nigeria's democratic journey and demonstrated the nation's dedication to democratic principles and the rule of law. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has made great strides towards building democracy since leaving military rule in 1999. Elections play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape. According to Bormann and Golder (2013), elections are essential to modern democratic governance. In every nation, elections play a role in determining the course of democratic governance. While highlighting the challenges and developments the country has experienced during its democratic transition, this article provides a comprehensive analysis of Nigerian elections, electoral procedures, and election administration.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous and economically prosperous nation, has had a difficult transition to a stable democratic administration due to its complex past. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, the country has seen a tumultuous political climate characterised by military coups and under-coups, civil unrest, and rigged elections. Unufe (2019) reaffirmed

that an apparent lack of confidence in the official declaration of results and the subsequent rejection of those results have marked the Nigerian elections. Hardly had there been an election at any level without resultant electoral litigation. The only exception was the 2015 presidential election, in which the incumbent hastily congratulated the winner before the official declaration of results. However, the congratulatory message could also be viewed from another perspective as a way of dousing the palpable tension that had emerged amid prevailing ideas that the results would be rigged as usual. The author also postulates that the history of democratic experiments in Nigeria demonstrates that elections and electoral politics have generated so much animosity that the country's corporate existence is under serious threat.

Ekundayo (2015) expressed a similar viewpoint, claiming that Nigeria's election history has been turbulent because the way elections are held has always been tainted by malpractice. According to Ogbeidi (2015), Nigerian elections have historically been violent and tense. This scholar believes that violence, fraud, intimidation, manipulation by electoral officials, and falsification of results marred all of the nation's prior elections. According to the records currently available, this scholar went on to say that credible elections are the greatest threat to democracy. The country's democratic process has been severely hampered by the inability to hold elections that meet globally recognised standards (Ogbeidi, 2010). However, Nigeria has made significant strides in recent years towards solidifying its democratic path through a series of electoral reforms and improvements in election administration. To shed light on the challenges faced and the actions taken to support a more robust democratic process, this article explores the evolution of electoral procedures, electoral systems, and election administration in Nigeria.

Historical Overview of Nigerian Elections

Understanding the historical backdrop of Nigerian elections is crucial before getting into the current scenario. Nigeria had passed through periods of democratic administration interspersed with protracted military dictatorships after obtaining independence from British colonial authority in 1960. The general elections of December 12, 1959, could be described as the elections that ushered the country into independence and into rigorous political and democratic practice. Of the 26 registered political parties, three emerged as dominant. The parties were the Northern People's Party (NPC), the Action Group (AG) and the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The

elections administration body at the time of independence was the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC). The electoral process was abused and, at the same time, characterised by electoral violence. These consequently created constitutional crises which undermined the legitimacy of the new civilian government (Ogbeidi, 2010). The 1964 federal election and the 1965 regional elections both ended in controversy, which was accompanied by violence. The FEC, which was expected to be an unbiased umpire, was enmeshed in crises of partiality: the crises that followed and the attendant worsening of socioeconomic conditions led to military intervention.

This first military incursion into politics was barely six years after the celebrated independence. The military later lifted the ban on political activities after 13 years of ruling on 21st September 1978. A new electoral body, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), was established. To ensure a smooth transition, specific electoral reforms were implemented that required a presidential candidate to poll 25% of the vote in at least 2/3 of the 19 states. During the commencement of the Second Republic, five political parties were registered. The parties were the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), the People's Redemption Party (PRP), and the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP). Though the 1979 presidential election was adjudged peaceful, it was not crisis-free. It was marred by a high level of political apathy, with 25-35% of registered voters participating in the voting exercise (Ogbeidi, 2010). The 1983 general elections were marred by crises, and the electoral body was considered incompetent due to widespread electoral malpractices. This consequently led to military intervention and the end of the Second Republic. The third republic spanned between 1989 and 1993, in which the results of the presidential election were annulled overnight. There were national and international pressures on the military dictator to declare the election winner and subsequently hand over power to that person. Instead of handing over to a democratically elected president, the military Junta headed by General Ibrahim Babangida opted for an Interim Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. General Sanni Abacha, who had already taken an interest, swiftly removed the Interim Government barely six months after its installation. Up until 1999, when the Fourth Republic took office and ushered in a new age of democracy, the nation's political landscape was tarnished by frequent coups and authoritarian administrations.

After gaining independence, Nigeria struggled to maintain stable civilian rule, with numerous military coups undermining democratic transitions and fostering a mistrust of the electoral process. The country's early elections were marked by fraud, voter intimidation, and a lack of transparency, which fuelled a cycle of ineffective institutions and political violence. Majekodunmi and

Adejuwon (2012) stated unequivocally that past elections were marked by controversy because their results faced crises of legitimacy and credibility. Additionally, it was claimed that since the country's independence in 1960, numerous elections have shown signs of violence, corrupt inducements, fraud, and other widespread state manipulations. These authors went further, stating that the history of elections and democracy in Nigeria represents an open confrontation with the manoeuvres of a repressive and unscrupulous elite. To monetise the electoral process, the political class exploits the socioeconomic conditions of those already severely impoverished.

Electoral Systems in Nigeria

The electoral system, which encompasses the laws governing the process of electing political officials, is regarded as essential to democratic functioning. It refers to any set of regulations in which citizens' votes are used to choose legislators and/or executives. According to academics, there is not a single best electoral system (Bowler et al., 2005). In this sense, a nation's selection of voting systems should take sufficient account of historical, cultural, and other unique endogenous elements. The first step in evaluating any electoral system is to understand its political objectives while considering the nation's unique political and cultural landscape. Horowitz (2003) asserts that no electoral system takes into account voter preferences, political party configurations, or political divisions. The electoral system's only purpose is to compile preferences and produce outcomes. Horowitz (2003) emphasised that the inherent biases in any election system make it impossible for any election system to convert individual choices into collective ones. Nigeria has utilised a variety of election techniques throughout the years. A majoritarian electoral system, also known as first-past-the-post voting, was used in the early years, and the candidate who received the most votes in a constituency was declared the victor. A majoritarian electoral system is one in which the candidate or party with the most votes wins, according to Bormann and Golder (2013). Although this approach was simple, it frequently led to biased representation and hindered minor parties from making a substantial political impact.

In 1979, Nigeria changed to a mixed voting system to promote representation and inclusivity. This method combined elements of first-past-the-post and proportional representation by allocating seats to parties according to their overall vote share. However, this hybrid paradigm did not fully meet the nation's complicated and fragmented political landscape. This is consistent with Ray's (2004) hypothesis that while a nation's electoral laws clearly play a

role in defining its political system, they are not the sole determinant. In addition, a nation's citizens and democratic processes are impacted by other socioeconomic and political issues. Majoritarian and proportional representation are the two main categories for the vast and confusing range of election systems found in modern political systems. Nigeria has a federal system of government, and state and federal elections are held either concurrently or at different times. The majoritarian first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system is used in most of the country's elections, including the presidential, gubernatorial, and legislative ones. Under this method, seats are won by the candidates who receive the most votes, regardless of whether they have an absolute majority.

The FPTP system is criticised for favouring powerful parties, which may occasionally result in the under-representation of minority viewpoints. Additionally, when leaders prioritise winning over their ethnic or regional community over addressing global issues, this may encourage regionalism. Mohammed (2013) noted that the country's electoral system is a contributing cause to the failure of governance in most of the federation's states. The researcher goes on to say that most of the nation's political issues were caused by the voting system in place (Mohammed, 2013). As a result, it is necessary to implement an election system that is acceptable in all operations, free of electoral fraud, and promotes openness and trustworthiness. Such an electoral system may be made more credible by incorporating contemporary technology. Electronic voting is the way of the future and has the potential to increase political engagement, claim Okediran and Ganiyu (2015).

Analysis of the General Elections in Nigeria's Democratic Path: The Missing Gap.

General Elections in Nigeria, the Democratic Path, and "The Missing Gap" — identifying key successes, persistent challenges, and the structural "gaps" that hinder Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Nigeria has held elections regularly since 1999; however, the quality of these elections is sometimes questioned. Nigerian elections frequently fall short of international standards due to a number of anomalies, including vote buying, result fabrication, and overvoting. This study examined how organisational characteristics of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) contribute to the general integrity of Nigerian electoral processes, with a primary focus on the 2023 presidential election. It evaluated INEC's organisational efficiency using information from documents, the Internet, and interviews. We discovered that corruption, disregard for INEC's regulations, and lack of independence are its main obstacles. INEC's operations remain heavily impacted by political

meddling, making it difficult for the organisation to hold credible elections, even though the new Electoral Act, which the Nigerian president signed into law in 2022, should strengthen the organisation's capacity and independence. Nigeria would be able to institutionalise free, fair, and credible elections if this issue is resolved.

Nigeria has regularly hosted federal and state general elections since the end of military rule in 1999. On paper, competitive elections are a good indicator of democratic practice. However, a key point in conversations about Nigeria's democratic trajectory is that elections alone do not ensure substantive democracy. Elections must be free, fair, and credible, and institutional frameworks must cooperate to uphold democratic ideals. This is the main contention in many scholarly and policy assessments. Election fraud, manipulation, and subpar results continue to be serious problems, including: Election rigging, irregularities, and violence have frequently occurred, undermining credibility and public confidence; technical issues (such as delays and BVAS glitches) have damaged trust and resulted in legal challenges, fuelling perceptions of systemic failure; and post-election disputes and tribunal rulings have occasionally exacerbated discontent rather than resolving conflict. As a result, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is crucial to the management of elections. However, analyses show that Frequent delays and logistical issues that interfere with the electoral schedule, along with technical and planning inefficiencies, undermine timely, credible election conduct and undermine institutional capacity and autonomy. Weak institutions compromise fairness and foster mistrust. Through rent-seeking, candidate imposition, godfatherism, and the monetisation of politics, political actors frequently control elections. Political competition is shallow in the absence of internal party democracy and accountability, and executive defections and elite consolidation undermine opposition and reduce popular choice, undermining representative democracy.

The literature on election administration pays close attention to the role of EMBs in electoral integrity, but it has not examined closely enough how the quality of Nigeria's EMBs affects unfavourable election results. Vote buying (Nwagwu et al., 2022; Olaniyan, 2020; Stockemer & Amaechi, 2023), electoral violence (Orji, 2023; Okpotor, 2020), ethnoreligious factor (Babalola, 2020), and technology (Tunmibi & Olatokun, 2021; Onyekwelu, 2023; Fatai, 2020) and their effects on the integrity of Nigerian elections. Few studies have examined the difficulties the Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC) faces in conducting elections in Nigeria (Onapajo, 2020; Campion & Jega, 2023; Ezeador, 2023). As established by Rose and Shin (2021) and Mozaffar and Schedler (2022), electoral democracies are built on sophisticated institutions (such as EMBs). An effective and efficient electoral umpire, the rule of law, a thriving civil society, a free press, and an impenetrable judiciary are all essential to the institutionalisation of a democracy. Strong institutions in democracies uphold these pillars through norms and legislation. By comprehensively examining how different organisational characteristics of the INEC impact its ability to conduct credible elections with a focus on the 2023 presidential election, this study adds to the body of existing work. In light of the aforementioned, the following research question is put out in this article: In what ways do INEC's organisational characteristics support its ability to conduct credible elections in 2023? The goal of this study is to contribute to the expanding body of knowledge regarding election integrity and management in postcolonial governments.

Since then, a number of electoral reforms have been implemented to raise the standard of elections in the nation. In 2015, an election that was widely hailed as free and fair was held because of these measures (Orji, 2023). For a number of reasons, the election was praised by many Nigerian political watchers. First, the election was mainly judged to be free and fair.5 Secondly, it was the first time an opposition candidate had won a Nigerian presidential election. In a continent where many politicians remain in office even after losing legitimacy, it was surprising how quickly the departing president, Goodluck Jonathan, admitted defeat and called the victorious candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, to congratulate him. Many people welcomed the departing President Jonathan as the hero of Nigeria's democracy, and Nigeria emerged as a new example of democratic transition in Africa. Additionally, Nigeria's score on the Economic Intelligence Unit's democracy index increased from 3.76 in 2014 to 4.62 in 2015. However, by failing to address the nation's economic and security issues, the Muhammadu Buhari government that resulted from the legitimately held 2015 presidential election dashed the dreams of those who backed it (Punch Editorial Board 2023). Young Nigerians, who made up the majority of voters, were particularly dissatisfied with Buhari's presidency (Herald, 2024; Asaba, 2024). They had high hopes and expectations for the 2023 presidential election, but the way it was conducted disappointed them. A number of anomalies plagued the 2023 elections. The authority in charge of organising fair elections faced considerable criticisms, including allegations that the election was "unforgivably flawed" and "deliberately rigged" (Adichie, 2023).

The EMB was charged with conspiring to rig the elections with aspirational

politicians. Only Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the major opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) stood out among the eighteen contenders on the presidential ballot. In the Nigerian presidential election, the conventional two-horse contest was disrupted by the emergence of Peter Obi's Labour Party as a third force. The majority of young people, who constituted the largest demographic in the 2023 electoral registration, strongly supported Obi's candidacy (Ayinla, 2023b). Often referred to as "the Obidients," Obi's fans believed Peter Obi was the most honourable of all the presidential candidates.

Former vice president Atiku Abubakar, who was seeking the presidency for the sixth time, was one of the other two strong candidates. According to several Nigerian news outlets, including Sahara Reporters (2022a), he bought off party delegates with thousands of dollars to secure the PDP's primary opposition candidate slot. Bola Tinubu, the national leader of the ruling APC, was the other contender. Additionally, he served as governor of Lagos State, Nigeria's economic hub, for eight years. Even after leaving power in 2007, Tinubu remains Lagos State's godfather, influencing the state's government. Tinubu's integrity is frequently questioned. For instance, he took two bullion vans full of cash to his Lagos home on the eve of the 2019 election (Sahara Reporters, 2023). Many think the funds were used to buy votes. In 1993, Tinubu was also accused of forfeiting USD 460,000 to the US government related to heroin trafficking. In court, Tinubu's witness acknowledged that he had really forfeited the money. The school he attended and the date of his birth are likewise contentious. Obi was supported by many young people who considered him the cleanest of the three. Bloomberg (Clowes, 2023), Nextier Polls (Wahab, 2023), and more sources.

Election Administration and Challenges

Elections are an essential part of democracy because they give voters the chance to exercise their right to vote and give decision-makers some credibility. Compared with other approaches, it fosters political awareness and sensitivity to political rights. The thousands of people who volunteer their time to administer this vital public service are essential to the administration of elections, according to Clark and James (2021). For electoral laws to be administered and implemented effectively, electoral officials are essential (Clark & James, 2021). There are frequent issues that compromise the conduct, administration, and execution of elections. These issues centre on

electoral integrity and malfeasance, which typically lead to legal disputes. Election administration is therefore essential to maintaining democratic practices and preventing voter apathy in every nation.

The framework and procedures used by an impartial electoral authority to choose candidates for public office comprise election administration (Osabiya, 2014). While processes refer to the rules and procedures set forth in electoral legislation, structure refers to the electoral body primarily responsible for conducting elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the body responsible for planning and supervising elections in Nigeria. INEC is vital to the transparency and integrity of the election process. To administer elections, electoral administration entails adhering to electoral regulations and hiring and training specialists and non-specialists on a permanent or ad hoc basis. Additionally, polling places must be identified and provided with sufficient voting materials, and the electoral register must be compliant and kept current. The counting and tabulation process is carried out safely and openly, although the election administration is not complete until the polls shut (Clark, 2016). Election administration is the art of maintaining election integrity and advancing transparency to deter potential manipulation. It was unequivocally stated that amid stressful political circumstances, the electoral process's impartiality, integrity, and transparency may be questioned (Clark, 2016). Over the years, INEC has attempted to enhance its operations and boost public trust through a variety of election reforms. However, the political class's schemes and dishonest election officials have prevented the electoral reforms from producing the desired outcomes. Majekodunmi and Adejuwon (2012) believe that Nigeria's democratic consolidation is hindered by the election administration body's (INEC) evident misconduct. Essentially, the sustainability of democracy depends on the management of elections.

INEC also faces several challenges, such as budgetary constraints, political interference, and logistical issues. These challenges have occasionally compromised the legitimacy and efficacy of the electoral process. According to Osabiya (2014), the history of election administration and the failure to establish democracy are linearly related. This is an intriguing topic that requires more investigation. Nigerians' sensitivity to tribal and ethnic politics has been exacerbated by the nation's cultural variety, undermining the electoral process and weakening the administration. Nigeria's electoral administration has faced numerous challenges over the years, notwithstanding its accomplishments. Electoral malpractices, such as voter fraud, ballot box theft, and vote manipulation, have long harmed the integrity of elections. Election violence and irregularities are among the significant problems Nigeria's voting institutions face. Vote rigging, ballot stuffing, and voter intimidation incidents

have been documented in several elections, which have caused residents' confidence in the democratic process to decline.

Furthermore, questions have been raised about the political process's impartiality and inclusivity, due to the prominence of money politics and the influence of affluent individuals in elections. Unufe (2019) alluded to factors such as irregularities during the electoral process, imposition of candidates, and complicity by security agencies. There is frequently an unfair advantage for wealthy political candidates over their less wealthy rivals, creating an unlevel playing field. Furthermore, insufficient electoral infrastructure, a lack of voter education, and logistical challenges in holding elections across wide, diverse areas have all posed substantial obstacles to the democratic process. Furthermore, other issues were noted by Bello-Imam (2010), Dahida & Akangbe (2013), in Okibe and Mokuye (2019) as the cause of the country's democratisation process' underdevelopment. These include a long period of military rule, a lack of credible elections, a lack of freedom of speech and publication, a refusal to accept defeat (in an election) by political gladiators, corruption and the attitude of some political office holders to corner the nation's wealth for themselves, and a disregard for the rule of law. In all honesty, Nigeria is one of the top nations in this rubble. The majority of these recurring problems are electoral reform topics covered in the Report of the Uwais' Commission on Electoral Reforms in Nigeria. It acknowledges that free, fair, and credible elections are the cornerstone of democracy, lending legitimacy to a ruling government, instilling value in national public institutions, and lending credibility to the leadership succession process. Nigeria is far from implementing the suggested reform, nonetheless.

Poor Conduct of Elections
Parties compete in elections, and only one wins a certain office. Leaders in Nigeria follow the rules of the game and seldom accept defeat. That is a component of the country's military vices, which placed a high value on creating a cult of loyalists among the civil class, supporting them in running for office and winning by any means necessary. It influences a nation's political development and encourages corruption.

Corruption, the Bane of Democracy in Nigeria
The type, extent, issue, causes, and difficulties of corruption in Nigeria are described in a brief analysis of the relationship between corruption and development (Bello-Imam, 2010; Dahida & Akangbe, 2023). From an analytical perspective, it presents corruption and development as a clear

context for understanding the connection between corruption and a country's political and socioeconomic advancement. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other religious organisations' National Ethics Program, which is meant to be a tool for character development and a weapon against recurrent instances of corruption, may be questioned in light of the matrix and prevalence of corrupt practices. According to Ayinla (2023), corruption, particularly the kind that has been pervasive in Nigeria over the years, makes it impossible for government and development initiatives to be transparent and accountable. Development initiatives are often derailed by corruption. Claims, accusations, and counter-allegations against alleged former regimes and individuals have been devastating and, for the most part, unsupported. These accusations do not absolve or absolve any accuser of corrupt activities of their sins. Through the institutions of accountability in stewardship, openness in the administration of public affairs, and inclusivity in the creation and execution of policies, democracy detests corruption. Ayinla (2023a) goes on to say that corruption creates major obstacles to growth. It weakens political processes, which is detrimental to democracy and good government. Election corruption undermines representation and accountability in policymaking; it suspends the rule of law in the courts and leads to unequal allocation of public services. It is implied that corruption has become so widespread in our society that it appears to be nearly universal. Police officers on the road, EFCC, ICPC, FRSC, customs officers, immigration officers, and local government rate collectors.

Prospects of Democratisation in Nigeria
Nigeria possesses all the necessary elements to be both an international power and a developed, thriving democracy. Its ranking among the world's poorest countries poses a problem. If there is no paradigm change, those who extol the virtues of democracy but detest its methods of government will only benefit from the current state of affairs. Democratisation is hampered by some of the country's leaders and other public servants who exploit the country's resources to profit themselves. In their entirety, that idea and practice are dishonest, immoral, and undemocratic. Serving the public interest is the aim of democracy. It encapsulates the core of the social compact that binds the governed and the governors together in the pursuit of a society's common good.

Electoral Reforms
The political class and other stakeholders in Nigeria have long been deeply concerned about the possibility of manipulation and the integrity of the election process. After realising the need for comprehensive election changes,

the Nigerian government and many stakeholders have taken action to improve the democratic process. An important step towards enhancing the independence and legitimacy of election administration was the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1998. INEC was to oversee and regulate all Nigerian election procedures. Electoral reform was implemented in 2010 in response to the untrustworthy 2007 elections, leading to significant changes to the voting process. Biometric voter registration, electronic voter card scanners, and result collation technologies were implemented to improve transparency and reduce election fraud. There were many irregularities and violence during the 2007 and 2011 general elections. According to Omotola (2011), there was a perception that the quality of Nigeria's elections was steadily declining. Electoral changes encourage real political competition and political leaders' accountability. Without a commitment to implement electoral changes, the number of electoral lawsuits could rise, undermining public confidence in the electoral process and raising concerns about the sustainability of Nigeria's democracy. Nigeria has dramatically improved its voting processes despite the challenges. With the introduction of electronic voter cards and biometric identification, which have reduced incidents of multiple voting and impersonation, election legitimacy has been somewhat enhanced. Additionally, there were encouraging signs that the 2015 and 2019 general elections were conducted differently. Most of the polls were peaceful, and INEC should be commended for its efforts to inform and involve voters. With the expectation that results will be transmitted electronically in real-time, the 2023 general election was expected to avoid the anomalies that marked the previous elections. Many Nigerians praised INEC's innovations as significant improvements to the electoral process. Nigerians' hopes were dashed when it became clear that the electoral authority was not committed to following the rules correctly. According to Omotola (2011), electoral reform increases public confidence in the voting system. Therefore, to increase public trust, a comparable shift in mindset should accompany electoral reform. To improve the election process, reforms must continue. Promoting civic education, reducing voter apathy, and strengthening INEC's independence are among the concerns that require immediate attention.

The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, introduced the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BIVAS), which is an electronic device designed to read permanent voter cards. Additionally, initiatives have been undertaken to improve civic participation and voter education, enabling residents to take an active role in the election process and hold politicians

responsible. Greater openness and scrutiny have also resulted from increased participation by media outlets, foreign observers, and civil society groups in election monitoring. The innovations introduced into the electoral process were intended to increase voter confidence. However, it remains a long journey to improve the quality and depth of the electoral process in Nigeria, due to the prevalence of open intimidation of voters and the high level of vote-buying.

Conclusion

Elections, electoral processes, and election management are essential elements of Nigeria's democratic development. Since gaining its independence, the nation has made significant progress, and the current advancements are admirable. To guarantee free, fair, and credible elections in the nation, problems still exist; thus, further efforts are required. Nigeria may develop a stronger democratic foundation by addressing concerns with election violence, money politics, and political meddling, ensuring that the people's will continues to be the primary factor informing its government. The active involvement of individuals, a dedication to democratic ideals, and a sincere desire to enhance the election process will be crucial in determining Nigeria's democratic course for the better as the country continues to develop.

Nigeria's path towards a stable and strong democratic government has been difficult, fraught with obstacles and failures. Nevertheless, the nation has made substantial strides recently due to the adoption of electoral reforms, enhanced election administration, and a commitment to bolstering democratic institutions. The government and the populace must not waver in their efforts to safeguard the values of democracy, the rule of law, and good governance, even as Nigeria continues to experience challenges on its route to democracy. Only by ongoing discussion, inclusion, and the shared commitment to build a stronger, more open, and more responsible democratic Nigeria will lasting progress be made. Steps must be taken to develop a functional electoral system that promotes competitiveness, participation, inclusiveness, and confidence-building, with a focus on democratic sustainability through free, fair, and credible elections.

It is undeniable that a country needs considerable time to achieve a stable, advanced democracy. America, the current paradigm of modern democracy, endured hardships in the past, but it persisted, concentrated, and was resolved to do things correctly. Nigeria's democratisation project is being challenged by numerous forces. The system is not trusted even by its operators. A typical American is motivated by national interest and considers what he would do for the country. Nigerians still don't think that way. The things that separate us appear to be given more weight than the things that bring us together. This

covers things like language, religion, race, and ownership claims to resources. Most Nigerians nowadays aspire to travel abroad in search of better opportunities. They usually relocate to the Americas, Europe, Australia, the United Arab Emirates, and even neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Ghana, and Gabon. However, the governments and citizens of those nations had to be wise, make sacrifices, and work hard to instil democracy and good governance in their systems. Nigeria's democratisation process makes it quite clear that the nation is not headed towards democratic advancement. Regardless of how such desperation might impact the system, it appears from every angle that everyone is eager to seize the national cake.

Recommendations

To move from the simple conceptual fascination with democracy as a fantastical system to real action in day-to-day administration and endeavours in national integration, corporate life, and nation-building, the study offers a range of recommendations.

Based on the findings of the discussion, there should be a reorientation of values. Nigerians will develop a sense of moral rectitude through value reorientation. Additionally, because of the large benefits that come from corruption, it will make politics less profitable and discourage professionals such as doctors, engineers, architects, accountants, estate surveyors, and university professors from engaging in politics.

All eligible persons who wish to vote or be voted for in an election should have equal opportunity, internal party democracy, and widespread engagement. They should be independent and not emasculated by hidden agendas in all the organisations that oversee the daily management of public policy.

The importance of ethnicity, religion, tribe, and dialect should be diminished. Instead of discriminating against anyone, democracy brings people together in order to achieve justice, equity, and fairness in a political system. The concept and practice of democracy are supported by national identity, which is not fostered by such particularistic identification patterns.

To ensure democratic practice and sound governance, elections should be strengthened. Election procedures should be transparent, and the election management body should be independent. Both winners and losers should accept the election results without filing a lawsuit when they are announced.

Leadership ought to be outstanding. It ought to provide the standard for others to follow. Followers should also consider how they may support the development of their country.

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Nigerians don't hate their country: Exploring Nostalgia, Belonging and Diasporic Agency among Nigerians in the Diaspora

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex relationship between Nigerians in the diaspora and their perceptions of national identity and patriotism. Despite persistent socio-political challenges in Nigeria, many Nigerians abroad maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to their homeland. Using transnationalism as a theoretical framework, the study examines how diasporic Nigerians reconcile their love for their country with frustrations about governance and infrastructure deficits. This study, based on qualitative interviews with returnee migrants, examines expressions of national pride and identity preservation, as well as the influence of distance on identity. Findings reveal a layered form of patriotism: diasporic Nigerians often express deep affection for Nigeria through nostalgia, remittances, and advocacy, even as they remain critically aware of the nation's systemic failures. This duality challenges simplistic notions of patriotism as either loyalty or disloyalty, showing instead that critique and commitment can coexist. The study further highlights the agency of diaspora Nigerians as cultural ambassadors, political critics, and development actors. Their lived experiences and contributions reflect a dynamic engagement with the homeland that extends beyond economic support. As such, the paper argues for a reimagining of Nigeria's approach to diaspora relations. Rather than treating the diaspora merely as remittance senders, the Nigerian government should recognise them as essential partners in national development and global representation. Through this effort, Nigeria can harness the diaspora's transformative potential to rebuild trust, support reforms, and shape a more inclusive national narrative.

Keywords: Trans-border Migration, Diaspora, National identity, Patriotism, Homeland, Transnationalism

Introduction

This paper explores the paradoxical relationship between Nigerian migrants and their perceptions of national identity and patriotism. While the decision to migrate is often motivated by push and pull factors such as the pursuit of education, safety, and economic opportunity (Castelli, 2018; Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022; Zaman et al., 2023), these migrants do not always sever their bonds with Nigeria (Oluwasanmi, 2026). Instead, they inhabit a transnational space in which both national pride and identity crisis coexist. Through this dual engagement, diasporic Nigerians act not only as cultural ambassadors but also as political agents of critique, using their

trans-border experiences to reflect on the conditions within their home country (Hamidu-Yakubu, 2021; Ojo, 2022).

The Nigerian diaspora represents a dynamic and influential transnational community whose ties to the homeland are marked by deep emotional, cultural, and political connections (Oluwasanmi & Fagbadebo, 2025). Nigerians in the diaspora represent one of the largest diasporan populations worldwide, with about 17 million people as of 2024 (Ekanem, 2024, August 25; Osuyi, 2024, August 13). The figure represents 7.46% of Nigerians in that year. This puts Nigeria fourth among African populations in the diaspora, with the highest estimated remittances of $23 billion in 2023. In the face of persistent governance challenges, systemic corruption, insecurity, and socio-economic instability, Nigeria continues to experience significant levels of emigration (Adegbami & Osungboye, 2024; Ikonne, 2024). Yet, as this study reflects, many Nigerians abroad sustain a keen connection to their country, navigating their identity through complex intersections of loyalty, critique, and cultural preservation. Existing studies premised migrants' attachment on either the adaptation strategies to the host country, or feeling of alienation, in exile, as a panacea to homeland nationalism, quest for socio-economic and political development, as well as infrastructural development, to the home country (Akinrinade & Ogen, 2011; Asekun et al., 2020; Bolaji, 2022; Olaoluwa, 2017). For Nigerians in the diaspora, they straddle transnational space despite the socio-economic dynamics at home.

With regard to the above, Nigeria stands a chance to harness the diaspora potential, especially in an era where Nigeria's foreign policy increasingly recognises the importance of the diaspora community, particularly under its "4-D" strategy (Democracy, Development, Diaspora, and Demography). Given this, the role of Nigerians abroad becomes central to national discourse. Their remittances support families and local economies (Didia & Tahir, 2022; Osili, 2019), their activism influences global perceptions (Lu, 2022; Oloyede, 2024), and their lived experiences generate critical narratives that challenge simplistic notions of patriotism (Apata, 2024; Kperogi, 2020). Using transnationalism as a theoretical framework, this study interrogates the affective and political dimensions of diasporic belonging. It draws on qualitative data from returned migrants to examine how feelings of nostalgia, symbolic identity, and diasporic agency are negotiated amidst a backdrop of governance failures.

While some existing literature has agreed on the possibility of severing identity connections among migrants, given the socio-economic dynamics at home (Buijs, 2024; Dawson & Rapport, 2021; Hack-Polay et al., 2021), others have identified evidence of diaspora attachment to their homeland, as noted above. However, there is a dearth of literature on how the Nigerian diaspora embraces cultural pride while remaining alert to structural inadequacies at home. This study, therefore, contributes to the broader discourse on diasporic identity, nationalism and

migration by highlighting the multifaceted ways Nigerians in the diaspora continue to shape, challenge and affirm their connection to the nation-state. Hence, this study examines the paradoxical relationship between Nigeria and its diasporan population.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between the Nigerian diaspora and their perceptions of national identity
2. To explore how diasporic agency is negotiated amidst governance deficit in Nigeria
3. To interrogate expressions of nostalgia and identity preservation among Nigerians in the diaspora

Transnationalism and Diasporic Identity and Agency

This study adopts transnationalism as its theoretical underpinning to explore the complex interplay between Nigerian diasporic identities, nostalgia, and diasporic agency. Transnationalism refers to the multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states (Pries, 2022; Tedeschi et al., 2022). In the context of migration studies, it captures how migrants sustain strong social, cultural, political, and economic connections to their countries of origin while simultaneously integrating into host societies (Caglar, 2022; Tedeschi et al., 2022). Transnationalism is particularly useful for understanding the dual positionality of Nigerians in the diaspora, individuals who, despite physical distance and critical awareness of systemic failures at home, maintain emotional and symbolic attachments to Nigeria (Adebayo & Njoku, 2023; Ogbuagu, 2025). This framework helps explain how diasporic Nigerians negotiate identity, belonging, and patriotic sentiment through trans-border activities such as remittances, cultural reproduction, political critique, and diasporic solidarity.

The narratives explored in this study show that while Nigeria's governance deficits, such as insecurity, corruption, and institutional failure, often erode trust and patriotic attachment, many Nigerians abroad continue to express a profound connection to their homeland. These expressions manifest in language use, cultural practices, community building, and even political participation. Through transnational practices, such as supporting Nigerian communities abroad, participating in national discourse, and preserving Nigerian cultural values in foreign settings, diaspora Nigerians act as both advocates and critics of the Nigerian state. Furthermore, transnationalism allows for the analysis of diasporic agency, the ability of migrants to exert influence on both home and host societies (Lacroix, 2022; Toivanen & Baser, 2020). This is evident in how respondents navigate their

identities by compartmentalising cultural values, building support networks and asserting pride in their Nigerian heritage despite external stigmatisation and internal disillusionment. This study, by adopting a transnational lens, interrogates the assumption that national loyalty must be geographically fixed or politically uncritical. Instead, it illustrates that diasporic patriotism can be dynamic, conditional and rooted in both affective ties and rational evaluation of national conditions. In doing so, it contributes to the broader scholarship that reconceptualises nationalism and citizenship in the age of global migration and transborder engagement.

Conceptualising Diaspora Identity and Agency

The concepts of diaspora identity and agency speak to the lived experiences of individuals and communities who, despite being far away from their ancestral homelands, remain deeply connected to them (Bhandari, 2021; Clifford, 2020). These emotional, cultural, political and economic ties shape how diasporic people understand themselves and interact with the world around them (Bhandari, 2021; Bhat & Rajeshwari, 2022). Diaspora identity is shaped by memories, traditions, and new environments. It is complex and fluid (Jacob, 2024; McLeod, 2020). For instance, migrants may carry memories of home, adopt norms of the host society and forge something entirely new in between. Identity is formed through the tension between belonging and exclusion, memory and reinvention, loss and resilience (Baker, 2012). For many, it involves constantly balancing cultural preservation with adaptation and navigating between the pressures of assimilation and the desire for authenticity (Faiz, 2024; Mazurkevych et al., 2024; Mohyeddin, 2024). However, identity alone does not define the diasporic experience. Equally, agency is vital in this narrative. *Agency, in this context,* means the capacity to make choices, act and influence one's environment despite external constraints (Donald et al., 2020; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Diaspora agency appears in many forms: culturally, in the preservation of languages, rituals and faiths; politically, in activism and transnational advocacy; economically, in entrepreneurship, remittances, and the flow of skills and capital (Cohen, 2022; Cohen & Fischer, 2018; Ferdous & Das, 2025). It also thrives in creative expressions, such as storytelling, literature, film, and music, that challenge stereotypes and reclaim narratives (Ladzekpo et al., 2024).

The relationship between identity and agency is not always harmonious. Diasporic individuals may face fragmentation or discrimination that limits their ability to fully participate in public life (Arkilic, 2022; Georgiou, 2010). Identity can also become contested over who belongs, whose voices are heard, and how much of the homeland one can retain without being seen as an outsider (Combs & Johnston-Guerrero, 2022; Dabbs, 2024; Kaiser, 2003). Yet these challenges do not diminish diasporic power. In fact, agency often emerges from such struggles and negotiations. Conceptualising diaspora identity and agency means recognising that diasporic people are not merely victims of displacement. They are culture-makers,

change-agents, and bridge builders. They shape both their host societies and the homelands they remain connected to, crafting meaningful lives across borders.

Contested Patriotism, Nostalgia and Nigeria Governance Crisis

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and one of its most resource-rich nations, has long struggled with issues of governance, institutional failure and political legitimacy (Fagbadebo, 2025; Fagbadebo & Dorasamy, 2022). In this context, public expressions of love for the nation, what is broadly referred to as patriotism, have become increasingly complex and contested (Erez & Laborde, 2020). Far from being a universally shared sentiment, patriotism in Nigeria is fractured, challenged by persistent breach of trust in leadership, and often refracted through the lens of nostalgia and national memory (Dasylva, 2023). Patriotism, often defined as loyalty or devotion to one's country, is typically seen as a unifying force. However, in Nigeria, it has taken on a more fragmented and ambiguous character. Scholars such as Ekeh (1975) and Osaghae (1998) have argued that Nigeria's post-colonial state has struggled to command genuine allegiance from its citizens, due largely to the weak performance of its institutions and the enduring salience of ethnic, religious, and regional identities. As a result, patriotism is often conditional and selective, expressed during international success (e.g., in sports or cultural exports) but muted or even inverted during political crises.

What emerges, then, is a form of contested patriotism *in which* citizens oscillate between symbolic loyalty and practical disengagement from the state. This tension is especially pronounced among young Nigerians, many of whom express frustration through protests, satire, music, and the viral use of the term "*japa*" (to flee the country in search of a better life). These actions reflect not a lack of love for country, but rather deep dissatisfaction with how the country is run (Negedu & Atabor, 2015; Urien, 2024). In the face of ongoing hardship, many Nigerians in the diaspora retreat into nostalgia, a longing for a perceived stable, prosperous or hopeful homeland. This is rooted in memories of their family ties, food, cultural identity and language (Barcus & Shugatai, 2023). However, scholars warn that nostalgia can be a double-edged sword. While it can inspire hope and a sense of identity, it can also distort historical realities, discourage present engagement, or foster cynicism about the future (Bradbury, 2012; Youvan, 2024).

At the heart of both contested patriotism and national nostalgia lies Nigeria's enduring governance crisis. This crisis is characterised by widespread corruption, weak institutions, insecurity, unemployment and a widening trust deficit between the government and its people (Fagbadebo, 2007, 2019). While various administrations have promised reform, the failure to deliver tangible results has eroded the state's legitimacy in the eyes of many citizens (Akuche & Akindoyin,

2024). This erosion of trust affects not only how people engage with the state but also how they understand their own national identity. As Agbiboa (2022) notes, when governance becomes a site of frustration rather than empowerment, patriotism becomes performative, and citizenship is stripped of its civic power, reduced to mere survival or strategic withdrawal.

In a nutshell, contested patriotism and nostalgia are not signs of apathy or betrayal; rather, they are symptoms of a deeper structural malaise in Nigeria's governance landscape. For patriotism to be reclaimed as a genuine civic virtue, the Nigerian state must demonstrate accountability, deliver public goods, and actively rebuild trust. Until then, patriotic feeling will remain fragmented, nostalgia will continue to fill the void left by disappointment, and youth may increasingly choose to exit, physically, emotionally, or ideologically.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the perspectives of Nigerians in the diaspora regarding national identity, nostalgia, and political agency. The research was guided by the transnationalism theoretical framework, which provides a lens for understanding how migrants maintain simultaneous connections with both their country of origin and their host countries. The study involved nine Nigerian returnee migrants who had previously lived abroad for extended periods and later returned to Nigeria. These individuals were purposively selected using convenience and snowball sampling, based on their diasporic experiences and willingness to engage in in-depth interviews. The diversity of participants' geographic locations abroad, as well as their varied disciplinary fields and occupational backgrounds, yielded rich, layered insights into the diasporic experience.

Table 1: List of Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Academic Qualification	Country Visited	Years Spent in the Diaspora	Mode of Interview
P1	Male	57	PhD	South Africa	3	Zoom
P2	Male	47	PhD	South Africa	9	Face-to-Face
P3	Female	45	PhD	South Africa	8	Phone Call
P4	Male	38	PhD	United Kingdom	1	Zoom
P5	Male	43	PhD	Cote D'Iviore and South Africa	20	Zoom
P6	Male	53	PhD	South Africa	5	Face-to-Face
P7	Male	44	PhD	South Africa	10	Face-to-Face
P8	Male	49	PhD	Uganda, Sierra Leone and Canada	9	Zoom
P9	Male	37	PhD	United Kingdom	4	Zoom

Source: Authors' Compilation, 2025

Data was generated through an in-depth interview conducted between December 2024 and February 2025. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was guided by an interview schedule designed to elicit narratives about migration motivations, feelings of nostalgia, expressions of patriotism, identity preservation, and perceptions of Nigeria's governance structures. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2...) were used to identify their responses. Interviews were conducted either in person or virtually, depending on the participant's availability and location. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Content analysis was employed to analyse the transcribed interviews. This involved coding the data inductively to identify emerging patterns and themes related to diasporic identity, identity preservation, patriotism, and political critique. The analysis paid particular attention to both the affective dimensions, which involve nostalgia, pride, and alienation and the political and structural contexts, such as governance failure and institutional neglect, that shape diasporic experiences and expressions of patriotism. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. All data were stored securely, and identifying information was removed from all transcripts and reports to protect participants' identities. The interviews were conducted under the ethical approval obtained from the Durban University of Technology Institutional Research Ethics Committee, with approval number IREC 040/24

Findings

The Nigerian diaspora and their perceptions of national identity

The perceptions of Nigerians in the diaspora are vividly explored in their responses to interview questions, revealing complex and often mixed feelings toward their homeland. From the data analysed, it is evident that members of the Nigerian diaspora grapple with a sense of national belonging shaped by both affection and disillusionment. Educational aspiration emerged as a key motivation for migration. As P1 noted, the *"need to have further education"* (P1, 20-12-2024) was central to his decision to leave, while P2 echoed this sentiment, lamenting that *"there were no facilities to do a complex study in engineering"* (P2, 25-12-2024). These academic limitations were compounded by concerns over national security. P1 observed that *"the level of insecurity in the country... affects the rate of migration,"* while P2 added that *"the roads to travel on... were unsafe for fear of being kidnapped"* (P2, 25-12-2024).

Economic difficulties further drove migration choices. P8 explained, *"if you work and get paid [in Nigeria], the money can't sustain yourself… no electricity, no value for your work"* (P8, 17-01-2025). Similarly, P9 described his return home as disheartening, stating that his salary could not adequately support his dependents. *"I just couldn't cope... because it's been five years since I last taught in a Nigerian classroom,"* he explained, concluding, *"the sense of attachment has drastically reduced. I see myself more now, primarily as a UK resident than Nigerian"* (P9, 23-2-2025). His disillusionment reflects a broader trend of emotional detachment among returnees who initially harboured intentions of making national contributions but later became disenchanted.

Corruption and the lack of meritocracy also discouraged diaspora engagement. Participant 2 noted that while scholarships and funding for postgraduate studies exist, they are far more accessible abroad than in Nigeria (Ogunode & Musa, 2020;

Nigerians don't hate their country

Oladipo, 2024; Omeje & Abugu, 2015). Participant 7 highlighted the challenge in Nigeria: *"You need to know someone who will help you,"* suggesting that systemic corruption limits meritocracy (P7, 25-12-2024). He believed the scholarship he received in South Africa *"might not have been possible"* in Nigeria. Furthermore, he criticised the weak legal framework, asserting, *"In Nigeria, we do not have high regard for the rule of law."* These deficiencies have contributed to a decline in patriotic sentiment among migrants. Despite lingering feelings of loyalty, many respondents reported a steady decline in patriotic attachment. Participant 3 observed that while some Nigerians in the diaspora are *"always patriotic,"* this sentiment is *"gradually going down"* (P3, 21-12-2024). Participant 9 admitted, *"When things happen in Nigeria... you just want to de-link, detach yourself from the reality of the country,"* and confessed, *"the only reason why I'm here is official. Nothing else. My mind is not here"* (P9, 23-2-2025). This emotional withdrawal reflects a sense of unreciprocated national loyalty. As P3 poignantly stated, *"I love my country... but my nation never offered me such opportunities,"* which has led her to consider alternative citizenship, admitting that she *"sometimes… thinks… should just take [her] family and put them on [her] PR…"* (P3, 21-12-2024).

For some returned migrants, a strong sense of national identity initially aligned with the Nigerian state. As P9 recounted, *"When I initially travelled, everything in the head was, okay, finishing this program, then going back home to massively impact the system... Right now, even the system is struggling to keep me."* His patriotic intentions shifted over time, reflecting a broader disillusionment: *"We must fix this country. That was 2011–2012. Now, the person who used to be the big champion... migrated to Canada"* (P9, 23-2-2025). Even within Nigeria, the sense of attachment seems to have eroded. According to P9, *"Everybody who comes across you, colleagues you have always known, would ask you, what are you here to do? What is the problem?"* Including those abroad who always ask, *"What are you going there to do?"* This symbolic devaluation of identity is echoed by others. P3 reflected on her gratitude to the South African state, saying, *"Sometimes [I] want to insult South Africans... but what their government did for [me]..."* She added, *"Right from the plane... you see the type of food they offer you"* (P3, 21-12-2024), implying that national pride begins to fade when compared with other countries' hospitality and institutional care. Similarly, P4 noted that *"institutional culture wouldn't allow you to showcase yourself as Nigerian,"* admitting that his *"sense of identity... was affected by entrenched Western practices"* (P4, 13-12-2024).

Despite these challenges, not all respondents expressed negative views about Nigerian identity. Participant 6 maintained a strong sense of pride, describing himself as *"pro-Nigeria"* and highlighting the country's international recognition: *"Nigeria is recognisable beyond what we think... even in the international community."* He concluded with a strong affirmation of national belonging: *"There's no country like one's own"* (P6, 20-12-2024). This sentiment was shared by P7, who asserted, *"I have always considered myself a full-fledged Nigerian"* (P7, 25-12-2024). His dedication to

Nigerian identity led him to found the Nigerian Students Association in the diaspora to address challenges faced by Nigerians abroad. P7 and P8 proudly display the Nigerian flag wherever they go. Remarkably, P7 even noted, *"I had the opportunity to marry a South African woman... but I married from Nigeria,"* underscoring his commitment to Nigerian identity.

P6 rooted his positive perception of Nigeria in the belief that other countries had also faced difficult times but found ways to resolve them: *"Those countries that we so much want to travel to... had some problems... they rallied around and solved the problems."* He advised that wherever Nigerians find themselves, *"they should not forget their country and contribute whatever quota they have..."* (P6, 20-12-2024). P7 similarly noted that he guarded his national identity by *"compartmentalising values,"* a coping strategy that allowed him to function abroad without losing his cultural grounding.

Interestingly, host country perceptions often mirrored those of Nigerians in the diaspora. Participant 7 explained that foreigners tend to see Nigerians as *"very loud... clever... educated"* (P7, 25-12-2024) but also face negative stereotyping. Some, for instance, wrongly assumed he was involved in drug trafficking. However, as studies later confirmed, only *"an insignificant number [of Nigerians were] involved in the illegal economy."* P9 captured the emotional weight of these biases, stating, *"Discrimination is better sensed than experienced."* Such encounters contributed to a sense of being institutionally *"othered,"* where Nigerians were often treated as *"some sort of secondary"* or simply *"different."*

Nevertheless, national pride endured for some. Participant 8 declared, *"Even when people don't see anything good in Nigeria, I still associate,"* revealing persistent loyalty despite external stigma. P6 also noted a paradox: while Nigerians are *"well-endowed,"* some people perceive them as dangerous *because of the intelligence they carry."* He lamented that *"it's only Nigerians that don't really value what we have."* In fact, travel itself was an eye-opener for P8, who concluded that *"travelling made [me] realise Nigeria is blessed"* (P8, 17-01-2025).

Diaspora Agency and Nigeria's Governance Deficit

The persistent crisis of governance constitutes a significant albatross around Nigerians in the diaspora's sustained patriotic disposition (Wapmuk et al., 2014). Many diasporans attribute their waning national allegiance to systemic leadership failures at home. For instance, P6 emphatically remarked, *"It is leadership that is our problem. So, we are supposed to have been bigger than this"* (P6, 20-12-2024). This perception of underachievement due to poor governance is widespread and fuels growing disconnection among Nigerians abroad.

This disenchantment has had a direct impact on patriotic attachment. Participant 3 reflected that while she was *"always patriotic... gradually that patriotism is going down"* (P3,

21-12-2024). The erosion of this sentiment is often driven by comparisons between opportunities abroad and those lacking in Nigeria. Participant 3 illustrated this contrast by stating, *"The opportunity South Africa offered me, Nigeria never offered me such..."* She further critiqued the Nigerian system for its exclusionary tendencies: *"All those bursaries... they will never allow it to get to the ends of the commoners,"* adding that she had *"never received any of such things from [her] government before."* The lack of institutional support was also evident in her academic journey: *"When it comes to your academic work... nothing is being provided"* (P3, 21-12-2024).

Similarly, P4 expressed diminishing confidence in Nigeria due to the nation's chronic leadership challenges. Although he asserted, *"I strongly believe in the Nigeria project,"* he simultaneously acknowledged that *"the leadership crisis"* remains a deterrent to progress. Migration, for him, became *"an opportunity to escape economic hardship"* (P4, 13-12-2024). His experiences abroad fostered a sense of stability that contrasted sharply with his life in Nigeria. This transformation was succinctly captured in his remark: *"My prayer points changed... because normal things there are miracles here."* Despite his emotional attachment to Nigeria, he concluded, *"Even though I love my country... foreign systems work better"* (P4, 13-12-2024).

Amid the failure of formal institutions to support their citizens abroad, Nigerians in the diaspora have turned to informal networks for community and resilience. P5 illustrated this point when he observed, *"There is no community support... but we found strength among Nigerians"* (P5, 22-12-2024). These informal structures serve as alternative sources of belonging and support, helping Nigerians in the diaspora to navigate their disconnection from the homeland. P8 underscored this point, noting that *"[ethnic] segregation fades in diaspora,"* suggesting that diasporic identity can transcend domestic divisions when individuals are united by shared national experiences and challenges abroad.

Nostalgia and Identity Preservation among Nigerians in the Diaspora

Despite the structural and emotional challenges faced abroad, many Nigerians in the diaspora maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to their homeland. This resilience is reflected in their efforts to preserve their Nigerian identity, even in the face of external pressures. P2 articulates a deliberate commitment to resisting cultural assimilation, stating, *"…what one allows his mind to process… [he] didn't allow any external influence,"* and affirming that he *"…never had any identity crisis in Nigeria"* (P2, 25-12-2024). Although he often experiences disconnection due to racial discrimination, language barriers, and xenophobic harassment, he chooses to preserve his cultural practices. For instance, he proudly notes that he *"never compromised [his] food culture... bought from African shops"* (P2, 25-12-2024). Similarly, P5

described a balance between adaptation and cultural retention: *"I was eating their food… but visited Nigerian joints,"* illustrating a conscious effort to remain connected to Nigerian culture despite living in a different environment. P8 further demonstrated cultural continuity through family practices, stating that he and his family *"wear our Nigerian clothes… speak Yoruba to our children..."* (P8, 17-01-2025). These day-to-day choices reflect intentional preservation of national identity within the domestic space.

Cultural preservation also extends to relationships and community engagement. P7 noted that despite having *"the opportunity to marry a South African woman... [he] married from Nigeria"* because he *"was deliberate in upholding [his] values…"* (P7, 25-12-2024). This decision, alongside *"wearing [Nigerian] clothes... [and engaging in Nigerian] cultural displays,"* reflects how marriage and lifestyle choices serve as mechanisms for sustaining identity abroad. Participant 9 also illustrated this cultural fidelity in the context of family and community: *"In our home, in the UK, 24-7, we eat Nigerian food... we made attempts to speak Yoruba to our children."* One particularly symbolic form of cultural preservation is the continuation of Nigerian celebrations, particularly the iconic *owambe* parties. According to P9, *"there is a growing sense of Nigerian party (owambe) in the UK... When you enter the venue... you would barely remember that you were outside Nigeria."* These vibrant gatherings serve not only as social outlets but as re-creations of Nigerian cultural space within the diaspora.

Even in the face of psychological and systemic pressures, Nigerians in the diaspora continue to anchor their identity in their cultural roots. P4 reflected on how *a "constructed inferiority complex… in physical appearance"* might erode one's cultural confidence. Yet, he reaffirmed the value of Nigerian identity, noting that *"Nigeria gave [him] a strong sense of identity"* and declaring, *"there is no superior culture... every culture has its own uniqueness"* (P4, 13-12-2024). Such reflections highlight how nostalgic connections and intentional cultural practices are central to the preservation of identity among Nigerians in the diaspora. P3 affirms an enduring emotional connection to her homeland, stating that *"no matter how… your family [at home] will still recognise you"* (P3, 21-12-2024). This sentiment is deeply rooted in nostalgia and familial bonds. For many in the diaspora, cultural preservation is intentional and embedded in daily practices. P3 shares that she *"often speak[s] Yoruba to [her] children,"* engages with Nigerian films via social media, and frequently buys and enjoys Nigerian cuisine. These actions reflect active efforts to retain cultural identity and reinforce a sense of belonging to the homeland through language, media, and food.

P4 similarly takes pride in preserving his national identity. He asserts, *"I never tried to sound like oyinbo[English]… I feel proud about that,"* adding that he *"proudly says [he is] from Nigeria"* and has never abandoned his *"dialect or culture"* despite living abroad. This deliberate maintenance of cultural roots signals a resistance to cultural assimilation and a strong attachment to one's heritage. Identity preservation is particularly pronounced among second-generation Nigerians born outside the

country. P5 notes, *"We were born there… but always saw ourselves as Nigerians"* (P5, 22-12-2024). This enduring identification with Nigeria is often instilled through parental influence, as he explains: *"Our parents made [us] to know… this is not your country."* Here, national identity is not merely experiential but inherited through socialisation within the family. P5 further recalls that they were *"always happy to hear anything about Nigeria,"* and during international sports events, *"even when Nigeria played their country, we supported Nigeria."* These expressions of loyalty, especially through support for Nigerian football, illustrate the emotional dimensions of diasporic nationalism and the power of cultural transmission across generations.

Beyond the family unit, communal structures such as diaspora networks and religious organisations play a vital role in nurturing patriotic and nostalgic sentiments. Nigerian churches, in particular, are a cornerstone of community life abroad. As P8 recounts, *"My church everywhere I go is like home,"* underscoring the role of religious spaces in sustaining emotional and cultural continuity. Similarly, P2 highlights the effectiveness of the Nigerian community in South Africa, noting its active role in providing support during personal milestones, such as when *"the church sent Nigerian doctors to assist… when giving birth"* (P2, 25-12-2024). These communal engagements promote a sense of solidarity and collective identity. P5 articulates this shared experience, stating, *"We all become brother and sister… once you are Nigerian,"* a powerful expression of emotional unity that transcends geography. He further adds, *"Nigerians support each other abroad… [as] brothers and sisters,"* reflecting the strength of diasporic bonds and the central role of mutual support in maintaining identity and belonging far from home.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide insights into how Nigerians in the diaspora navigate national identity, belonging, and political agency amidst systemic challenges in their home country. Contrary to reductionist portrayals of diasporic disconnection or apathy (Eshalomi, 2022; Nititham, 2020), this research reveals a complex interplay between emotional attachment, critical engagement, and transnational loyalty among the diasporans. Three key themes emerge: contested patriotism, identity preservation, and diasporic agency in response to Nigeria's governance deficit.

A major finding is the persistence of patriotic sentiment among diasporic Nigerians, even amid Nigeria's deep-seated governance crisis. Participants expressed love for their homeland, often rooted in familial ties, cultural pride, and nostalgic memories. This is in line with the assumptions of Barcus and Shugatai (2023), Batcho (2021), and Kevers et al. (2024). However, this attachment is increasingly conditional. For many, patriotism has become contingent on their perception of state performance

and the availability of opportunities. Respondents such as P3 and P9 described a steady erosion of patriotic feelings due to corruption, insecurity, and institutional neglect. Their statements, *"my nation never offered me such opportunities"* and *"the system is struggling to keep me"*, highlight how unreciprocated national loyalty can diminish diasporic identification over time.

Despite their geographical distance, many respondents actively preserve their Nigerian identity. This is evidenced in their socio-cultural practices such as language use, cuisine, religious affiliation, clothing, and even marriage choices. For instance, P4 proudly rejected Western assimilation, insisting, *"I never tried to sound like oyinbo [English],"* while P8 and P5 emphasised the deliberate transmission of Nigerian culture to their children. The recreation of *"owambe"* parties and the symbolism of the green-white-green flag in foreign spaces reflect a strong collective effort to maintain cultural continuity. *Owambe* has its origin in the Yoruba language. It simply means that "a party is happening there". It is a vibrant, lavish, and often extravagant social party, typically marked by music, colourful fashion, dancing, and feasting, and is common among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. These acts of identity preservation function as both personal expressions of belonging and symbolic resistance to the erasure of Nigerian identity in the diaspora.

A further significant finding is the way diasporic Nigerians exercise agency both in critiquing their homeland and fostering alternative forms of nationalism. Participants described how, in the absence of state support, diasporic communities created informal networks of solidarity. As P5 noted, *"we found strength among Nigerians,"* and P8 observed that *"[ethnic] segregation fades in diaspora."* These networks serve not only as social safety nets but also as platforms for fostering a sense of shared purpose and national pride outside state institutions. Additionally, the ability to compartmentalise cultural values, as highlighted by P7 as noted above, suggests a form of strategic identity management. This enables migrants to navigate host cultures while remaining anchored in Nigerian heritage. The concept of "diasporic compartmentalisation" could be understood as a survival mechanism that blends cultural adaptability with ideological resistance. Moreover, the founding of student associations, churches, and community organisations reflects how diasporic Nigerians proactively shape their environments and assert influence, both locally and transnationally.

These findings support the relevance of transnationalism as a theoretical lens. Nigerian migrants are not suspended between two worlds but rather embedded in a network of trans-border practices that include remittances, advocacy, and identity reproduction. The interviews analysed above illustrate how many migrants remain emotionally and materially invested in Nigeria while simultaneously holding critical views of the state. This dual engagement enables a form of participatory, evaluative, and dynamic nationalism. Respondents such as P6 exemplify this attitude, expressing strong national pride while advocating for reform and diasporic contribution to national development. In all, the findings challenge simplistic

dichotomies between loyalty and disloyalty, or between assimilation and alienation. Nigerian diasporic identity is revealed as multi-layered, adaptive, and deeply relational. While governance failures undoubtedly influence sentiments of disconnection, they do not erase national belonging. Rather, Nigerians in the diaspora continue to negotiate their identity through cultural assertion, community solidarity, and critical patriotism. Their narratives affirm that diasporic engagement is not about rejecting the homeland but about reimagining it from afar.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study explored the relationship between Nigerians in the diaspora and their perceptions of national identity, nostalgia, and political agency. Contrary to assumptions that migration weakens identity ties to the home country, the findings reveal that many Nigerians abroad maintain strong emotional and identity ties to their homeland, despite systemic failures and personal disappointment with successive governments. Using the framework of transnationalism, the study demonstrates that diasporic patriotism is neither static nor unconditional; rather, it is a dynamic engagement shaped by both affective loyalty and critical evaluation of Nigeria's governance landscape. While some migrants express declining patriotic fervour due to corruption, insecurity, and institutional neglect, others maintain a vibrant connection through cultural practices, community networks, and personal advocacy.

Participants illustrated that cultural identity is actively preserved through language, family traditions, religious affiliations, food, and symbolic acts like celebrating Nigerian events abroad. Moreover, the agency exercised by diasporic Nigerians, through remittances, community building, and critical discourse, constitutes a powerful yet underutilised resource for Nigeria's national development. This paper ultimately challenges simplistic dichotomies of patriotism versus alienation, highlighting that national loyalty can coexist with critique. The diaspora represents not a group that has abandoned Nigeria, but one that continuously renegotiates its identity and involvement from afar, often driven by a strong desire to contribute meaningfully to their homeland. The study hence put forward the following recommendations:

Through policy consultations, development programmes, and diaspora voting rights, especially in foreign policy formulation, as the current administration is embarking on, the Nigerian government could institutionalise and strengthen platforms for diaspora engagement beyond remittance payments. However, this should be beyond political games and symbolism, but actual engagement that will facilitate a robust relationship between the diaspora and home. The government should be intentional about reducing deficits at home. This will facilitate the

sustenance of patriotic commitment. Urgent attention should be given to addressing endemic corruption, insecurity and infrastructural decay. A responsive government will inspire more diaspora members to contribute actively and return home.

Given the diaspora's role as cultural ambassadors, Nigerian embassies and consulates should support diaspora initiatives that promote Nigerian culture and identity abroad, such as language schools, festivals, and media collaborations. There should be a robust reintegration policy at home. Many returnees face disconnection due to the mismatch between expectations and Nigeria's systemic realities. Tailored reintegration support, such as access to funding, academic collaboration, and mentorship, can help harness their skills and experiences. Government and private stakeholders should work with prominent diaspora members to reshape global perceptions of Nigeria and promote positive narratives, countering stereotypes and enhancing the country's image. Academic institutions and policymakers should invest in long-term research on diaspora communities to inform data-driven strategies for inclusion and development. Through the above initiatives, Nigeria can transform diasporic agency into a catalyst for sustainable national transformation by acknowledging its people not only as remittance senders but also as critical stakeholders in nation-building.

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Integrating Public Policy Responses to Emerging Security Threats in South-West Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the nature of emerging security threats in South-West Nigeria. Specifically, it evaluates public policy responses to the escalating security challenges in South-West Nigeria, including banditry, kidnapping, herder-farmer conflicts, and political violence. Existing security strategies have revealed significant gaps in the region's public policy responses, which have often been fragmented, reactive, and insufficiently integrated, failing to address the complexity of these emerging threats effectively. The research utilises a qualitative approach, drawing on primary and secondary data, including interviews with security personnel, government officials, and community leaders, as well as content analysis of security-related policy documents. The paper is anchored on the Policy Integration Theory (PIT), which emphasises the importance of multi-level governance, inter-agency coordination, and adaptive policy frameworks in addressing complex challenges. The findings reveal significant fragmentation in security responses, with weak institutional coordination among federal, state, and local actors and limited integration of community-based initiatives. The paper concludes that sustainable strategies, including a convergent policy agenda, are pivotal to enhancing security in Nigeria's South-West region. It proposes strengthening inter-agency coordination, institutionalising regional security initiatives such as Amotekun, fostering community engagement, adapting policies to emerging threats, and leveraging technology in security governance across the region. A very important ancillary to these functional strategies is a sweeping constitutional reform that prioritises clearer provisions on the control, funding and management of the country's security architecture, and must also define the boundaries of power and responsibilities between the levels of government in the federation.

Keywords: Amotekun, Constitutional Reforms, Policy Integration, Security Governance, South-West Nigeria.

Introduction

Security remains the bedrock upon which sustainable development, democratic governance, and societal stability are built. Without an enabling and secure environment, political institutions falter, economic growth stagnates, and social cohesion disintegrates (Adebayo, 2021). In recent years, Nigeria's South-West geopolitical zone, historically regarded as relatively peaceful compared to the country's North-East or North-West, has experienced a notable surge in security threats. Emerging issues such as banditry, kidnapping for ransom, herder-farmer conflicts, cybercriminal activities, cult-related violence, and political unrest have deeply unsettled communities across states like Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti, and

Lagos. These dynamic threats have exposed deep-rooted structural weaknesses in Nigeria's security architecture, pointing to the urgent need for integrated, adaptive, and community-centred public policy responses (Ezeibe, Osakwe, & Ezeibe, 2022).

Historically, Nigeria's approach to internal security has been heavily centralised, with the federal government holding monopolistic control over law enforcement and security apparatus. The 1999 Constitution vests policing responsibility solely at the federal level, limiting subnational entities' roles to peripheral security functions (Adebanwi, 2022). However, the South-West's recent security crisis revealed the profound inadequacies of a centralised model in effectively responding to localised and emerging threats. Poor inter-agency coordination, fragmented interventions, jurisdictional tensions, and weak community engagement have characterised federal security efforts, leaving many communities vulnerable (Ojo & Afolabi, 2021). The rigidity of the state-centric security framework has proven grossly insufficient in addressing the fluid and often localised nature of the new threats.

The situation has, however, catalysed significant policy innovation at the subnational level. In a notable move towards regional collaboration, the six states of the South-West established the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN), popularly known as Amotekun, in 2020. This initiative marked a groundbreaking moment in Nigeria's federalism discourse by asserting regional agency in security governance while remaining within constitutional limits (Omitola & Adebisi, 2023). While Amotekun has demonstrated some capacity to deter and respond to local criminalities, questions persist regarding its institutionalisation, sustainability, operational synergy with federal forces, and legal robustness. Despite the enthusiasm surrounding Amotekun, critics argue that it remains reactive, under-resourced, and insufficiently integrated with broader public security policies (Nwagboso, 2020).

Beyond Amotekun, various state-level interventions have been introduced. For example, Lagos State enhanced its Neighbourhood Safety Corps to bolster grassroots surveillance, while Ekiti and Ondo states created anti-kidnapping task forces. Nevertheless, these efforts often suffer from poor horizontal and vertical integration, leading to fragmented operations and inconsistent impact. This pattern reflects broader challenges within Nigeria's public policy processes, particularly in the security sector, where overlapping mandates, lack of strategic coordination, and politicisation frequently undermine effective service delivery (Akinola, 2020). Moreover, most interventions have largely marginalised community participation, thus forfeiting critical opportunities to build local ownership and trust, which constitute essential ingredients for sustainable security governance.

Given these dynamics, the need for an integrated, coherent, and sustainable security framework in South-West Nigeria has become undeniable. Integration here implies not just coordination among different state-led initiatives but also harmonisation with federal operations, the incorporation of traditional institutions, the engagement of civil society, and the embedding of adaptive strategies that reflect the rapidly changing nature of threats (Shehu & Adesote, 2022). Integration must also encompass vertical coordination between federal, state, and local governments as well as horizontal collaboration across sectors such as justice, education, and social welfare. Furthermore, security governance must evolve beyond reactive law enforcement towards proactive risk management. The growing prevalence of cybercrime, for instance, demands forward-looking strategies that combine technological investment, youth engagement, and public awareness, which traditional policing models are ill-equipped to provide. Similarly, the persistence of herder-farmer conflicts necessitates not only policing but also policy interventions in land management, agricultural reform, and climate change adaptation (Adedire, 2022). In this light, the usual practice of a conventional militarised response is not only inappropriate but counterproductive.

This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the complex nature of emerging security threats in South-West Nigeria and assess the effectiveness and limitations of existing public policy responses. Ultimately, the objective is not only crucial but timely. This is because, as security deteriorates, lives are lost, communities are displaced, and public trust in government erodes. Building effective security systems is, therefore, both a developmental imperative and a democratic necessity. If the region, and by extension the entire country, is to achieve its socio-economic aspirations and consolidate its democratic gains, then rethinking, integrating, and localising security policies must be prioritised urgently and strategically. This research offers a step in that critical direction. To achieve this, the paper is organised into five parts. Part one is the foregoing introduction. The second part examines the extant literature and explicates the theoretical framework relevant to the research problem and purpose. Part three discusses the research methodology. The fourth part presents the study's findings and discusses their implications for policy integration, while the last part concludes the paper with proposals for integrating policy responses to emerging security threats in the South-West region and across the nation.

Literature Review

This section examines the major themes of policy responses to emerging security threats in the South-West region to unpack the structural inadequacies of Nigeria's current security architecture and identify the gaps this paper seeks to address.

Structural Inadequacies of Existing Policy Responses to Security Threats

Public Policy Responses

Security is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development, democratic consolidation, and good governance. In recent years, Nigeria's South-West region has witnessed a sharp escalation in security threats, ranging from banditry, kidnapping, herder-farmer conflicts, cybercrime, cultism, and political violence. These evolving threats have exposed significant gaps in public policy responses, including fragmented interventions, poor inter-agency coordination, and the limited integration of local communities into formal security frameworks (Adebayo, 2021). The rising complexity of security challenges has rendered conventional state-centred responses insufficient. While the federal government remains constitutionally empowered to manage internal security, subnational actors, including state governments, have increasingly taken proactive roles, as evidenced by the creation of regional initiatives such as the Amotekun security network. However, a major concern persists: the absence of a fully integrated, coherent, and sustainable policy framework to address the evolving security dynamics.

Security governance in Nigeria's South-West has been extensively explored in recent scholarship, particularly focusing on the interplay between federal authority and subnational security initiatives. Scholars such as Oladeji and Folami (2020) emphasise the emergence of regional security outfits, such as Amotekun, as a response to perceived inadequacies at the federal level. Their study highlights that while regional security agencies have successfully improved localised intelligence-gathering and community trust, they face legal ambiguities and coordination challenges with federally controlled security forces. Similarly, Akinyemi and Adegoke (2021) argue that these outfits enhance rapid response to threats but operate without a fully harmonised policy framework, leading to jurisdictional tensions. The strengths of these studies lie in their ability to capture the grassroots legitimacy of regional interventions, but they often lack a critical exploration of how these initiatives can be structurally integrated into Nigeria's national security architecture.

Other scholars focus on the evolving nature of threats rather than the security apparatus itself. For instance, Salawu and Hassan (2022) interrogate the rising spate of cybercrime, cultism, and political violence in South-West Nigeria, arguing that these new threats require non-traditional, adaptive policy responses. They commend existing community policing strategies but criticise the piecemeal nature of interventions, highlighting a reactive rather than proactive policy stance. In contrast, Adebanwi (2021) critiques the heavy militarisation of public safety initiatives, arguing that security policies rely too heavily on force rather than addressing socio-economic root causes. These works provide valuable insights into the multidimensional nature of insecurity but tend to treat policy failures in isolation rather than as systemic issues requiring integrated responses.

In examining public policy integration more broadly, scholars such as Ojo and Olagunju (2023) advocate for multi-level governance approaches in which local, state, and federal agencies collaborate to share intelligence, resources, and strategic frameworks. They highlight successful examples from comparative contexts, such as South Africa's hybrid security models, but note that Nigeria's federalism complicates seamless integration due to political competition and trust deficits among actors. In a similar vein, Ajayi and Olumide (2022) underscore the need for policy coherence, arguing that fragmented policymaking has rendered many security reforms unsustainable. They propose institutional reforms to improve coordination but acknowledge the difficulty of building intergovernmental trust. While these studies commendably address the need for collaboration, they often underestimate the deep-seated political rivalries that obstruct integrated security governance in Nigeria.

A related body of work explores community engagement in security management. Scholars like Adedeji et al. (2021) emphasise that the exclusion of local communities from formal security planning undermines the legitimacy and sustainability of security initiatives. Their study shows that security architectures that incorporate traditional institutions, vigilante groups, and civil society organisations tend to be more resilient. However, critiques such as those by Olatunji and Ogundele (2023) warn against the potential for local elites to hijack community security mechanisms for political gain. Thus, while community-based models have participatory strengths, they also face vulnerabilities to politicisation and informality.

Critical Pillars for Policy Convergence in the Nigerian Security Sector

The literature on public policy and security governance in Nigeria reflects an increasing concern with the fragmentation and inadequacy of policy responses to dynamic threats (Adebayo, 2021; Ezeibe et al., 2022). Historically, Nigeria's security architecture has been heavily centralised and modelled on a federal policing system that often lacks local responsiveness. Scholars such as Olanrewaju (2020) argue that the unitary command structure undermines effective community policing, particularly in culturally diverse regions like the South-West. More recent studies emphasise the role of multi-level governance and subnational innovation in addressing security challenges (Ojo & Afolabi, 2021). The creation of Amotekun is cited as a critical example of bottom-up regional security policymaking. However, Omitola and Adebisi (2023) highlight that while such initiatives demonstrate political will, they often lack legislative backing, inter-agency synergy, and integration with federal security operations, limiting their effectiveness.

Compared with the best international practices in integrated security policymaking, these emphasise community engagement, intelligence-led policing, and cross-sectoral collaboration (Shearing & Loader, 2019). Nigerian policies, however, often

remain reactive, militarised, and disconnected from local realities, calling for urgent and sweeping reforms to the country's security governance. At the heart of these necessary reforms lies the principle of multi-level governance as a critical tool for policy integration. As posited by scholars such as Akinrinade and Ukeje (2021), effective security governance in complex federations like Nigeria requires the devolution of responsibilities and resources to subnational units, alongside mechanisms for collaboration and accountability. The South-West's experience demonstrates that when states are empowered, they can innovate context-specific solutions. However, for such initiatives to be effective and sustainable, they must be nested within broader policy frameworks that ensure alignment with national objectives while respecting local autonomy.

Community engagement is another critical pillar. Security cannot be achieved without the active involvement of local populations. Traditional rulers, community development associations, youth groups, religious leaders, and other grassroots actors possess invaluable local knowledge and influence that formal security agencies often lack. Yet, current policies often treat communities as passive recipients of security services rather than active partners. This disconnection not only reduces policy effectiveness but can inadvertently exacerbate mistrust, making communities less willing to cooperate with authorities (Edeh & Chukwuma, 2021).

Another essential dimension is adaptability. In an era marked by rapidly evolving threats from technological disruptions to transnational organised crime, security policies must be dynamic. Static policy frameworks risk obsolescence. Adaptive governance entails continuous monitoring, policy learning, scenario planning, and flexible resource allocation mechanisms that can respond swiftly to new challenges (Shearing & Loader, 2019). Unfortunately, many existing policies in South-West Nigeria remain rigid, failing to anticipate or adjust to emerging risks. From the foregoing, it is evident that the literature agrees on the need for integrated frameworks but differs on implementation strategies. Some advocate constitutional restructuring to enable state policing (Adebanwi, 2022), while others propose enhanced coordination within the current federal structure (Nwagboso, 2020).

Despite the breadth of these contributions, a critical gap remains largely unaddressed: the lack of a systematic, integrated public policy framework that aligns regional innovations like Amotekun with national security priorities while also addressing emerging non-traditional threats. Most studies either focus on specific security outfits, particular types of threats, or isolated policy critiques without offering a holistic view of an integrated policy architecture that is adaptable, collaborative, and sustainable. There is a need to rethink and localise security policies through a convergent agenda that prioritises the structural integration of local and regional initiatives into Nigeria's national security architecture. This paper

seeks to fill this gap by proposing a model of policy integration that not only institutionalises regional security initiatives within Nigeria's constitutional framework but also mainstreams adaptive policy innovations to address cybercrime, political violence, and socio-economic security threats. The paper argues that focusing on multi-level governance, participatory frameworks, and proactive policy design offers a more comprehensive roadmap for sustainable security governance in South-West Nigeria.

Theoretical Explications

This study draws from Policy Integration Theory (PIT) to interrogate the effectiveness of public policy responses to emerging security threats in South-West Nigeria. PIT is grounded in the understanding that policy processes at the local, regional, and national levels must be aligned and integrated to achieve coherent, sustainable outcomes, particularly in complex governance environments (Borrás & Edquist, 2019). There is no single group that can be credited as the proponent of the PIT, but scholars from various fields and disciplines, such as marine studies, environment, policy design and governance, have, over the years, contributed to its usage and growth. Scholars like Schout and Jordan (2008) and Cairney (2012; 2013) pioneered the theoretical construct of PIT to policy and governance while others, such as Howlett, McConnell and Perl (2016), Weible and Sabatier (2018) and Howlett (2019) later extended its usage by advocating for the integration of multiple policy theories for better understanding of complex policymaking.

The theory advocates for the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, inter-agency collaboration, and adaptability within policy frameworks. In the context of security governance, PIT suggests that effective responses to multi-dimensional threats require an integrated approach that accounts for local needs, regional capacities, and national priorities, fostering collaboration across various levels of government and society. PIT's core constructs include multi-level governance, policy coherence, and participatory engagement. Multi-level governance refers to the interaction and cooperation between different levels of government, such as federal, state, and local, in policymaking and implementation. In the context of security, this involves ensuring that the federal government's national security policies align with and support regional and local security initiatives, such as Amotekun. Policy coherence is the alignment of policies across sectors and government levels, ensuring they do not conflict but rather complement and support the government's broader strategic goals. Similarly, participatory engagement highlights the importance of involving local communities, civil society organisations, and other non-state actors in policymaking and implementation processes, which is particularly relevant for security policies that affect local populations (Adebanwi, 2012; Ojo & Olagunju, 2023). These constructs are crucial for understanding how security threats in South-West Nigeria, such as banditry, kidnapping, and farmer-herder conflicts, require an integrated policy approach. Given the decentralised nature of Nigeria's federal

system, security initiatives like Amotekun must be effectively coordinated with federal security agencies like the Nigerian Police Force and the Nigerian Army. Furthermore, integrating community-based efforts and local knowledge into formal security structures can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of security policies.

One of the primary strengths of PIT is its ability to highlight the need for coordination and synergy among different government levels and sectors. In a country like Nigeria, where security challenges are diverse and multifaceted, the theory provides a robust framework for understanding how different actors, including local, state, and federal agencies, can collaborate to develop a cohesive, comprehensive security policy. For instance, Amotekun, a regional security initiative in South-West Nigeria, works alongside the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies to address local security challenges. PIT possesses intrinsic insights for explaining how such initiatives can be integrated into the broader national security architecture, ensuring that they are not isolated but part of a larger, coordinated effort (Akinyemi & Adegoke, 2021).

Moreover, PIT emphasises adaptive policy design, an essential aspect in a dynamic security environment. As security threats evolve, PIT's emphasis on flexibility enables policymakers to adjust strategies and responses to emerging challenges. This is crucial for addressing the changing nature of security threats in South-West Nigeria, such as the increasing sophistication of cybercrime or the shifting dynamics of inter-communal violence (Salawu & Hassan, 2022). Also, the theory's focus on participatory governance resonates strongly with the Nigerian context, where local community involvement is critical for ensuring the legitimacy of security measures. Community engagement fosters trust, provides local insights, and ensures that policies are responsive to the specific needs of affected populations. As noted by Adedeji et al. (2021), integrating local security strategies has proven more effective in reducing crime and improving security, as communities are better positioned to identify and respond to threats.

Despite the valuable insights it offers, PIT is not without its limitations. One significant weakness is that the theory may oversimplify the challenges of intergovernmental coordination in highly polarised political environments. In Nigeria, political rivalries, party competition, and mistrust between federal and state governments can hinder effective policy integration. For example, the introduction of Amotekun faced significant opposition from federal authorities, who were concerned about the potential implications for national unity and control over security matters (Oladeji & Folami, 2020). PIT's emphasis on cooperation and collaboration might not adequately account for these political dynamics, which can impede the smooth integration of regional initiatives into national frameworks.

In addition, PIT's focus on policy coherence and alignment may underestimate the capacity constraints of local governments and regional security agencies. While integration and coherence are essential, states like Ondo and Oyo in the South-West region may lack the resources, manpower, and institutional capacity to fully implement sophisticated policy frameworks. In such cases, PIT's expectation of seamless coordination might be unrealistic, as local governments may struggle with limited resources or administrative capacity (Akinyemi & Adegoke, 2021). More so, PIT does not always account for informal power structures that shape policy outcomes, especially in developing democracies like Nigeria. These power structures, often based on ethnic, religious, or political allegiances, can influence the design and implementation of security policies. The inclusion of informal networks in security decision-making, though critical, is often overlooked in traditional policy integration models.

Despite its weaknesses, the policy integration theory is highly applicable to this study of emerging security threats in South-West Nigeria. The dynamic nature of the security landscape in the region, marked by growing communal violence, criminality, and the rise of non-state actors like Amotekun, necessitates an integrated approach that aligns local, regional, and national security responses. PIT's emphasis on multi-level governance offers a critical framework for understanding how the federal government, state governments, and local communities can collaborate to address these emerging threats. The theory can be used to understand how regional security initiatives like Amotekun can be integrated into the broader national security framework. Its emphasis on adaptive policy design is especially relevant in the Southwest region, where new and evolving threats, such as cybercrime and kidnapping, demand responsive, flexible policy frameworks. This integration requires coordination between various security actors, including federal security agencies, state-level security outfits, and local community leaders. The theory provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for examining how security policies in the region can be integrated and adapted to address emerging security threats. Therefore, it remains contextually relevant for unpacking the complexities of intergovernmental coordination, resource sharing, and community engagement for security governance in a highly atomised context such as Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilising a combination of document analysis and in-depth interviews with key informants to critically assess public policy responses to emerging security threats in South-West Nigeria. The choice of a qualitative approach stems from the need to explore the intricate, contextual, and institutional factors influencing security governance, which quantitative methods may inadequately capture (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed flexibility and depth in capturing

participants' perspectives. Both face-to-face and remote interviews were conducted with 35 key stakeholders, including policymakers, security officials, members of regional security outfits such as Amotekun, and community leaders, in the last quarter of 2025 across the states of Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, and Ekiti. Participants were purposively sampled based on their roles and experiences in security policymaking and enforcement. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly adhered to in accordance with standard qualitative research protocols.

Secondary data were obtained through a rigorous review of government policy documents, legislative frameworks and security strategy reports between 2018 and 2024. Sources included official documents from the Western Nigeria Governors' Forum, Amotekun operational guidelines, and state security policies over the same period. Document analysis focused on identifying themes related to policy integration, multi-level governance, and community engagement. Data from interviews and documents were analysed thematically, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, contradictions, and policy gaps. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in handling complex qualitative data and its capacity to link empirical findings to theoretical constructs, particularly those within the policy integration theory (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This methodological combination ensures a comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of the security policy landscape in the southwest region of Nigeria, thereby strengthening the validity of the study's findings and recommendations.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the study's findings, based on an analysis of emerging security threats in South-West Nigeria and existing policy responses. The findings highlight the nature of the security challenges, the strengths and limitations of current policy frameworks, and the gaps that need to be filled to ensure a more integrated, coordinated, and adaptive security response. The findings are contextualised within the theoretical framework of policy integration theory, emphasising multi-level governance, policy coherence, and participatory engagement, as discussed earlier.

Nature of Emerging Security Threats in South-West Nigeria

Security threats in South-West Nigeria have evolved significantly over recent years, becoming more complex and difficult to address through traditional security measures. The region has witnessed a sharp increase in criminal activities, including banditry, kidnapping, herder-farmer conflicts, cybercrime, cultism, and political violence. As findings revealed, these emerging threats have exposed vulnerabilities in existing security structures and necessitate a coordinated policy response. One of

such threats is banditry and kidnapping. Banditry, characterised by armed robbery, abduction for ransom, and violent extortion, has surged in several Southwestern states, including Ondo, Ekiti, and Oyo (Oloruntoba & Adesina, 2022). The rise in kidnappings, particularly along highways and in rural areas, has exacerbated public insecurity. Victims are often targeted for ransom, and the financial rewards incentivise further criminal activities. Despite efforts by the Police and other security agencies, these crimes have persisted due to inadequate response systems and weak inter-agency coordination (Field Study, 2025).

Another emerging security threat in the region is herder-farmer conflicts. The long-standing herder-farmer conflicts have intensified in South-West Nigeria, contributing significantly to the region's security challenges. Land disputes, coupled with competition for grazing land and water sources, have resulted in violent confrontations between indigenous farmers and Fulani herders (Oladeji & Folami, 2020). These conflicts have led to loss of life, displacement, and the destruction of farmlands, thereby exacerbating food insecurity and local tensions (Field Study, 2025). The inability of traditional security forces to manage these conflicts has led to the rise of local security initiatives like Amotekun, which seeks to protect the region's people and properties.

Cybercrime: Cybercrime has also emerged as a new dimension of security threats in the South-West, with Lagos State being a major hotspot. The proliferation of online fraud, hacking, and digital extortion has led to the creation of dedicated cybercrime units within the Nigerian Police Force (Field Study, 2025). However, the growing scale of cybercrime continues to challenge the efficacy of law enforcement agencies (Salawu & Hassan, 2022). The inadequacy of state-centred responses to these threats further underscores the need for integrated and adaptive policies to address the complexities of cybercrime. Though not recent, political violence, especially during election seasons, remains a persistent challenge in the Southwest region. The use of violence by political actors to intimidate rivals, manipulate electoral outcomes, and consolidate power continues to undermine democratic governance in the region (Field Study, 2025). Although the federal government had often deployed the military and police during elections, their actions are often viewed as politically motivated, leading to distrust in security forces (Oloruntoba & Adesina, 2022).

Existing Policy Responses to Emerging Security Threats

The responses to these security challenges in South-West Nigeria have largely been fragmented, lacking coherence, and often ineffective due to weak inter-agency coordination and insufficient resources (Field Study, 2025). A closer examination of existing policy responses reveals both strengths and weaknesses in addressing the region's diverse security threats.

Federal Government Response

The federal government's response to security threats in the southwest region has largely been state-centred, with the Nigerian Police Force, the Nigerian Army, and the Department of State Services (DSS) playing primary roles. However, these institutions have been criticised for inefficiency, corruption, and insufficient resources to effectively manage the region's security challenges (Field Study, 2025). The security forces often rely on reactive rather than proactive measures, deploying troops or police in response to crises, rather than preventing them through intelligence gathering and community policing (Oloruntoba & Adesina, 2022). While federal security agencies have been involved in efforts to combat insurgency, organised crime, and electoral violence, their operations have often been perceived as politically motivated or ineffective. For example, during elections, the use of federal forces has led to accusations of partisanship, undermining trust in the security system (Field Study, 2025). Furthermore, the federal government's top-down approach often conflicts with regional initiatives like Amotekun, leading to coordination challenges and duplication of efforts.

State-level and Local Government Responses

At the state and local levels, various government policies have focused on community policing, intelligence gathering, and youth employment programmes. Some states have established youth empowerment initiatives to reduce unemployment and discourage youth involvement in criminal activities (Field Study, 2025). While these measures have had some success, they remain underfunded and lack the comprehensive reach required to address the growing security threats in the region. On a large scale, the most significant responses to security threats in Nigeria's Southwest region have been the creation of the Western Nigeria Security Network (Amotekun), as a regional security initiative to combat emerging threats to lives and property in the region's six states. As stated earlier, Amotekun was established in 2020 by the governors of the South-West states to tackle issues such as banditry, kidnapping, and the herder-farmer conflicts that had become prevalent in the region (Adedeji et al., 2021). The initiative sought to provide a regional solution to security problems by involving local communities, creating employment opportunities, and utilising local knowledge to tackle criminal activities.

The strength of Amotekun lies in its community-based approach and local engagement, which have made it more responsive to regional security dynamics. Unlike federal security agencies, which are often seen as distant and disconnected from local communities, Amotekun personnel are drawn from local populations, fostering trust and legitimacy (Field Study, 2025). Furthermore, Amotekun has demonstrated the capacity to adapt to emerging threats, such as the rise in

kidnappings, by focusing on intelligence gathering and crime prevention. However, Amotekun's weaknesses are notable. While the regional security network has made strides in addressing local security issues, it lacks formal legal backing and operational capacity to fully integrate with federal security frameworks (Oladeji & Folami, 2020). The lack of adequate resources, equipment, and training for Amotekun operatives limits its effectiveness, especially when confronted with well-armed and organised criminal groups (Field Study, 2025). Moreover, there has been considerable resistance from the federal government, which raised concerns about the legality of a regional security outfit operating outside the formal national security framework.

Gaps in the Existing Security Policy Framework

Despite the various policy responses discussed, several gaps remain in addressing the emerging security threats in South-West Nigeria. A key gap is the lack of integration between local, state, and federal security responses. While Amotekun has made strides in providing localised security, its inability to work seamlessly with federal security agencies undermines the overall effectiveness of the response. The federal government's reluctance to grant full operational autonomy to regional security outfits further complicates efforts to integrate policy (Field Study, 2025). Moreover, poor inter-agency coordination between security agencies at the state, regional, and federal levels continues to hamper effective responses. The lack of a central command structure to oversee security operations across the different levels of government results in duplicative efforts, misallocation of resources, and inefficient deployment of security forces (Akinyemi & Adegoke, 2021).

Also, there is a lack of comprehensive, adaptive policy frameworks capable of responding to rapidly evolving security threats in the region. Existing policies are often static, failing to anticipate new challenges such as cybercrime or urban terrorism, which require more flexible, technology-driven responses (Field Study, 2025). A more adaptive policy approach, as proposed by policy integration theory, is needed to ensure timely, effective, and sustainable responses to emerging threats. The findings of this study highlight the escalating and multifaceted security challenges facing the Southwest region of Nigeria and reveal that current policy responses are fragmented, incoherent, and often ineffective. While regional initiatives like Amotekun have shown promise, the lack of legal backing, resources, and coordination with federal agencies hinders their ability to address the full scope of security threats (Field Study, 2025). To effectively address the growing security challenges, Nigeria must move towards a more integrated, adaptive, and collaborative security framework that involves all levels of government and engages local communities. This study has demonstrated that a multi-level governance approach, as advocated by policy integration theory, can help foster coordination, coherence, and participation, ultimately leading to more sustainable and effective security policies in South-West Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the nature of emerging security threats in South-West Nigeria, the responses from various levels of government, and the policy frameworks that are put in place to address these challenges. The analysis has shown that the region faces complex, multifaceted security threats, including banditry, kidnapping, herder-farmer conflicts, cybercrime, and political violence (Field Study, 2025). These evolving threats have exposed significant gaps in the existing security structures, revealing that the responses are often fragmented, reactive, and insufficiently integrated. While both federal and state-level security agencies, as well as local initiatives such as Amotekun, have played essential roles, the lack of coordination between these bodies has been a major obstacle in effectively combating security challenges.

The findings indicate that despite the creation of Amotekun, which has attempted to address local security concerns by engaging regional forces and utilising local knowledge, its lack of full integration into the federal security framework limits its potential. Similarly, the federal government's state-centred approach, which primarily relies on the Nigerian Police, the Nigerian Army, and other federal agencies, remains insufficient, given the scale and evolving nature of security threats in the region. Moreover, the absence of a comprehensive, adaptive, and integrated policy framework further compounds these challenges. The existing policies are often reactive, fail to anticipate new security dynamics, and lack coherence across different levels of government (Field Study, 2025). Considering these findings, a more coordinated and integrated approach to security governance is needed in Nigeria's Southwest region. The challenges faced by the region call for a new direction in public policy that promotes collaboration among federal, state, and local security agencies and a stronger emphasis on local community involvement and adaptive responses. For these reasons, adopting sustainable strategies, including a convergent policy agenda, is pivotal for enhancing security in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are proposed for immediate action to strengthen security governance in South-West Nigeria and enhance the effectiveness of policy responses to emerging security threats. One of the key findings of this study is the lack of effective coordination between federal, state, and local security agencies. The fragmentation of security efforts has led to duplicated efforts, inefficient use of resources, and ineffective responses to security threats. One of the best ways to address this is for both the federal and state governments to adopt a convergent policy agenda by establishing a central command structure that integrates federal and regional security initiatives, including

Amotekun. This coordination would ensure that resources are optimally allocated and that security agencies can act more swiftly and effectively. The establishment of an integrated security framework would also foster greater cooperation among agencies, ensuring that efforts are not undermined by jurisdictional conflicts. In the context of security governance in the region, this would mean adopting a multi-level governance approach that facilitates the coordination of policies, resources, and intelligence across the three tiers of government

The Western Nigeria Security Network (Amotekun) has proven to be an essential part of the regional security response, especially in combating local crimes like kidnapping and armed robbery. However, its operational limitations stemming from a lack of legal backing and insufficient resources have hampered its full potential. Therefore, it is crucial to institutionalise Amotekun within the legal framework of the country's security architecture by passing relevant laws that confer official status and enable it to function alongside federal security agencies. This would not only enhance its legitimacy but also enable it to access federal resources, training, and intelligence-sharing systems. For this reason, a sweeping constitutional reform that prioritises clearer provisions on the control, funding and management of the country's security architecture, and that must also define the boundaries of power and responsibilities between the levels of government in the federation, is proposed. By doing so, Amotekun could become a more formidable force in addressing security threats within the region.

A significant limitation of current security policies is the insufficient involvement of local communities in decision-making processes and security interventions. Local knowledge is essential for understanding the dynamics of criminal activities, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, security strategies should prioritise community policing, intelligence gathering, and collaboration with local leaders to improve information-sharing and reduce crime rates. Community-driven security programmes would foster trust between security agencies and local populations, which is crucial for successful crime prevention. Governments at all levels should invest in initiatives that empower local communities to take an active role in preventing and reporting crimes.

One of the recurring challenges in addressing security threats in the region is the inadequacy of security personnel in terms of training, equipment, and operational capabilities. Federal and state governments must allocate more resources to training and capacity building for security forces at all levels. This includes providing officers with the necessary skills to handle emerging threats such as cybercrime, organised crime, and insurgency. Also, law enforcement agencies must be equipped with modern technologies, such as drones, surveillance cameras, and data analytics tools, to improve their response times and effectiveness. In an era of rapid technological advancement, security agencies in the region must embrace technology-driven solutions to enhance their operations. Technologies such as big

data, artificial intelligence, and geospatial mapping can play a crucial role in predicting and tracking criminal activity and improving coordination between agencies. Similarly, the use of social media and mobile applications to crowdsource security information from the public can enhance intelligence-gathering and improve citizen involvement in the fight against crime. Local governments should work with technology companies and security experts to develop digital tools that empower citizens and enhance security efforts.

The nature of security threats in the region has evolved rapidly in recent years, with cybercrime, insurgency, and political violence becoming more prevalent. However, existing security frameworks are often too rigid and reactive to address these emerging threats effectively. Security policies must be adaptive, incorporating new technological solutions, such as digital surveillance tools and cybercrime units, to deal with modern forms of criminal activity. More importantly, there should be greater emphasis on preventive measures, such as early warning systems and conflict resolution strategies, to identify and address potential threats before they escalate. Overall, the findings of this paper suggest a significant gap in the integration of security policies across governance levels, highlighting weaknesses in existing security policy responses. The proposals put forward have altogether accentuated the need for an integrated and coordinated response that involves all levels of government, security agencies, and local communities. These recommendations are designed to create a more effective, sustainable, and inclusive security governance framework that can address both the immediate and long-term challenges facing the region.

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Lagos to Joburg: Representations of Nigerian Migrants in the *Welcome to our Hillbrow*

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Lagos to Joburg
Abstract

This paper adopts a qualitative, analytic literary research approach to examine how xenophobia, rooted in South Africa's socio-economic inequalities and unresolved racial tensions, shapes the representation of Nigerian migrants in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Employing close reading, the study analyses textual narratives and character portrayals that foreground migration, exclusion, and violence in post-apartheid South Africa. Although the post-apartheid ideal of the "Rainbow Nation" is supposed to promote inclusion, the novel reveals the persistence of exclusionary attitudes, which manifest discrimination, violence, and the scapegoating of African migrants, particularly Nigerians, for unemployment, poverty, and other social anxieties. The textual analysis is guided primarily by René Girard's psychoanalytic concept of scapegoating, complemented by Marxist literary insights, especially Pierre Macherey's notions of implicit and explicit textual content. These concepts inform the close reading that examines not only overt narrative statements but also silences, omissions, and narrative deflections that reveal the socio-economic bases of xenophobia as a form of projection and displacement. Primary data consist of the selected literary text, while secondary data are drawn from relevant scholarly criticism and theoretical works. The study finds that *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* critiques xenophobic perceptions by exposing them as deflection mechanisms that mask deeper structural failures within South African society. Ultimately, the paper argues that the novel calls for honest self-reflection as a necessary condition for achieving the freedom South Africa continues to seek more than three decades after apartheid.

Keywords: Xenophobia, Scapegoating Nigerians, Migration and Exclusion, Post-Apartheid South Africa, Socio-Economic Inequality

Introduction

Migration, driven by the search for survival, economic opportunity, and a sense of belonging, has become a defining feature of contemporary African life. In post-apartheid South Africa, however, intra-African migration has been accompanied by persistent socio-economic inequalities, high unemployment, and unresolved racial tensions, producing waves of xenophobic hostility that challenge the nation's self-image as a "Rainbow Nation." Literature emerging from this context offers a critical space for interrogating how freedom, identity, and belonging are imagined, negotiated, and denied in post-apartheid society. This study is partly motivated by a long-standing scholarly fascination with the idea of freedom. As a Nigerian woman, the concept of freedom, its promises, limits, and especially its contradictions, has remained a compelling concern, particularly within African cultural realities where freedom is often proclaimed but unevenly experienced. This personal (and

intellectual) preoccupation informs the present interrogation into how freedom is represented, deferred, or displaced in narratives of migration, especially when African migrants encounter hostility within other African nations.

Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* provides a poignant fictional lens through which to explore these concerns. The novel captures the experiences of Nigerian migrants in Hillbrow, a Johannesburg suburb marked by fleetingness, cultural plurality, and moral anxiety. The movement from "Lagos to Joburg" in the novel signifies more than a physical journey in search of "greener pastures." Metaphorically, it embodies how the "foreign African" can be perceived as a threat within the South African imaginary. Through its fragmented narrative voice and its engagement with themes of xenophobia, morality, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS, the novel dramatises the tension between the expected promises of migration and the harsh lived realities of exclusion, stigmatisation, and violence.

Existing critical scholarship on *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* has extensively examined its narrative experimentation, its portrayal of HIV/AIDS, urban decay, and moral panic, and its critique of nationalism and post-apartheid disillusionment. While these studies acknowledge xenophobia as a central concern, the specific representation of Nigerian migrants is often treated symbolically or incidentally, rather than interrogated as a focal point through which socio-economic anxieties and national frustrations are displaced.

The contention in this paper is that Nigerian migrants in Mpe's novel function as scapegoats upon which South Africa's post-apartheid failures, unemployment, poverty, moral decline, and unfulfilled freedom are projected. The study, therefore, addresses a gap in existing scholarship by foregrounding the Nigerian presence as a critical site for examining how xenophobia operates as both a socio-economic and psychological strategy of deflection. To achieve this, the study adopts a qualitative, analytic literary approach informed by psychoanalytic and Marxist theory. Drawing on René Girard's concept of scapegoating (Girard, 1986) and Pierre Macherey's notions of implicit and explicit textual content (Macherey, 1978), the paper undertakes a close reading of selected narrative episodes that depict migration, violence, and social exclusion. This framework enables attention to both overt representations and narrative silences that reveal the contradictions embedded within post-apartheid notions of freedom. By situating *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* within the broader discourse of African migration literature, this paper demonstrates how the novel complicates celebratory narratives of post-apartheid multiculturalism. It ultimately argues that Mpe's text calls for critical self-reflection as a prerequisite for any meaningful realisation of freedom, one that remains an illusion more than three decades after apartheid.

Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa has consistently emphasised its deep socio-economic, political, and historical foundations. Rather than viewing xenophobia as spontaneous or irrational violence, scholars conceptualise it as a structurally produced phenomenon shaped by inequality, state discourse, and collective anxieties arising from economic precarity.

This body of work provides an essential framework for understanding how xenophobic sentiment is both normalised and reproduced in social and cultural narratives, including literary texts. One of the most influential theoretical interventions is Neocosmos's (2006, 2010) articulation of a state-centred discourse of xenophobia. Neocosmos argues that post-apartheid political rhetoric and institutional practices have constructed African migrants as threats to national security, economic stability, and social cohesion. This discourse, he contends, is internalised by citizens and reproduced through media representations and everyday interactions, thereby legitimising exclusionary practices and violence against migrants. Importantly, Neocosmos situates xenophobia within the broader failures of post-apartheid citizenship, where formal political liberation has not translated into material equality. His work is particularly relevant to literary studies, as it underscores how symbolic representations of foreigners participate in processes of othering and scapegoating. Complementing this perspective, Nyamnjoh (2006, 2015) situates xenophobia within wider African experiences of mobility, globalisation, and contested citizenship. He argues that postcolonial African states often replicate colonial hierarchies of belonging, producing what he describes as "insiders and outsiders within." According to Nyamnjoh (2006, 2015), African migrants are frequently constructed as perpetual strangers whose presence destabilises fragile national identities. This conceptualisation reinforces the understanding of xenophobia as historically embedded and structurally sustained rather than episodic. Together, Neocosmos (2006, 2010) and Nyamnjoh (2006, 2015) establish a critical framework that foregrounds the intersection of state power, citizenship, and economic inequality in shaping xenophobic hostility.

Empirical studies further substantiate these theoretical claims by linking xenophobic violence to material deprivation and social insecurity. Crush and Ramachandran (2014) demonstrate that economic competition, unemployment, and service delivery failures significantly influence negative attitudes toward migrants in urban South Africa. Similarly, Landau (2011) argues that migrants often become convenient scapegoats in moments of political frustration, particularly when the state fails to meet citizens' expectations. More recently, Susuman and Sithole (2024) contend that widening inequality, high unemployment rates, and rising crime levels have intensified hostility toward Black African immigrants, especially Nigerians. They argue that perceptions of migrant economic success, particularly among those who settled before 1994, fuel resentment and silent competition, which eventually erupts into overt xenophobic antagonism. These findings reinforce the argument that xenophobia functions as a displacement mechanism for broader socio-economic anxieties. Within literary scholarship, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* has been widely recognised as a critical intervention in debates about post-apartheid identity, urban decay, morality, and violence. Scholars such as Chapman (2006) and Samuelson (2007) read the novel as an urban narrative that exposes the fragmentation of post-apartheid society and the persistence of social exclusion.

Mustafa Mohammed Abdullah et al. (2021) further position the novel within discourses of decolonisation and neo-apartheid, arguing that Phaswane Mpe exposes the continuity of apartheid-era inequalities beneath the rhetoric of democratic liberation. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's theory of decolonisation, Abdullah et al. (2021) contend that South Africa's incomplete liberation manifests in persistent poverty, economic stagnation, and redirected aggression toward foreigners.

Abdullah et al.'s (2021) analysis emphasises that xenophobia in South Africa is predominantly directed at African migrants, who are constructed as strangers responsible for moral decay and economic decline. As they note, xenophobic violence has escalated alongside increasing intra-African migration, with hostility particularly aimed at migrants from other African countries (Abdullah et al., 2021). This reading reinforces broader scholarly claims that xenophobia is structurally produced by post-apartheid disillusionment and sustained through symbolic representations of foreignness. Despite this substantial body of scholarship, a significant gap remains in literary criticism concerning the specific representation of Nigerian migrants in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. While Nigerians are frequently depicted in the novel as emblematic of criminality, moral excess, and foreign intrusion, their function as scapegoated figures through which socio-economic frustrations are displaced has not been sufficiently theorised. Existing studies tend to focus on xenophobia in general terms, without interrogating how particular national identities are mobilised within literary narratives to absorb collective anxieties. This study seeks to address this gap by foregrounding the Nigerian migrant as a critical site for examining xenophobia as both a psychological and socio-economic mechanism. By integrating René Girard's theory of scapegoating (Girard, 1986) with Marxist concepts of implicit and explicit content (Macherey, 1978), the paper extends existing scholarship beyond descriptive accounts of xenophobia. It demonstrates how Mpe's narrative strategies expose the contradictions of post-apartheid freedom and reveal xenophobia as a symptom of unresolved structural inequality rather than an inherent hostility toward migrants.

Objectives of the Study

1.　　　Examines how xenophobia is represented in Welcome to Our Hillbrow through the portrayal of Nigerian migrants within post-apartheid South Africa.
2.　　　Analyses the ways Nigerian migrants are constructed as scapegoated figures onto whom socio-economic anxieties and post-apartheid disillusionment are projected in the novel.
3.　　　Investigate how narrative strategies, including silences and omissions, suggest xenophobic ideology, drawing on Pierre Macherey's notions of implicit and explicit textual content.
4.　　　Evaluates how Mpe's novel critiques dominant discourses of post-apartheid freedom and multiculturalism by exposing the psychological and ideological mechanisms of othering and exclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Anchored in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, this study draws on

psychoanalytic, Marxist, and postcolonial literary theories to examine the representation of Nigerian migrants in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Specifically, the framework integrates René Girard's concept of scapegoating, extracts from Pierre Macherey's Marxist Theory of Literary Production, and Edward Said's postcolonial concept of Othering. Together, these provide complementary lenses through which xenophobia is interrogated to apprehend how it is constructed, sustained, and, at moments, critically exposed within the narrative. René Girard's scapegoating offers a psychoanalytic explanation for collective violence, social exclusion, and the management of crisis within communities. In *Violence and the Sacred* (1977) and *The Scapegoat* (1986), Girard argues that societies experiencing internal conflict or instability often restore social cohesion by projecting blame onto a selected individual or group, whose symbolic or literal expulsion produces a temporary sense of order. Subsequent scholars have emphasised that scapegoating is not a random act but a socially organised mechanism that masks deeper structural contradictions (Palaver, 2013; Williams, 1996). Within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, Girard's framework is particularly useful for understanding how African migrants, especially Nigerians, are discursively positioned as responsible for unemployment, crime, and moral decay. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, scapegoating functions not merely as overt hostility but as a psychological displacement of unresolved anxieties arising from economic inequality, social fragmentation, and the failures of post-apartheid transformation. Girard thus enables the reading of xenophobia as a patterned social response to crisis rather than a spontaneous reaction to cultural difference.

Complementing Girard's psychoanalytic perspective is Pierre Macherey's Marxist implicit and explicit content, as articulated in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978). Macherey contends that literary texts are produced within specific ideological and material conditions and therefore cannot be understood as unified or transparent reflections of reality. Instead, they are marked by contradictions, silences, and absences that reveal the tensions of the socio-economic structures from which they emerge. Critics such as Eagleton (1976) and Balibar and Macherey (1991) further clarify that these textual gaps are not aesthetic failures but sites where ideology is most visible. Macherey's distinction between explicit and implicit content provides a methodological tool for examining how *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* simultaneously reveals and obscures xenophobic violence. The marginalisation of migrant voices, the indirect narration of violence, and the deflection of responsibility onto rumour and collective narration are read as ideological silences that register the limits of post-apartheid inclusion. Through Macherey's framework, the novel is interpreted as encoding the contradictions of a society that proclaims equality while reproducing exclusion.

Edward Said's concept of Othering further strengthens the framework by accounting for the cultural and linguistic processes through which marginalised groups are dehumanised. In Orientalism (1978) and Culture and Imperialism

(1993), Said conceptualises Othering as a discursive practice through which dominant groups define themselves as civilised, rational, and normative by constructing others as inferior, dangerous, or deviant. Later postcolonial scholars have extended Said's insights to African intra-continental migrations, demonstrating how Othering operates not only across racial lines but also within postcolonial societies (Mbembe, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2006). In the South African context, this process is evident in everyday language used to describe African migrants, particularly the derogatory term Makwerekwere, which transforms linguistic and cultural difference into moral suspicion and criminal stigma. Said's framework enables this study to interrogate how language in Welcome to Our Hillbrow normalises exclusion and legitimises violence by rendering Nigerian migrants perpetually foreign and threatening.

Examined together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate the interconnected psychological, ideological, and discursive processes through which xenophobia operates in the novel. Girard explains the social need for a scapegoat in moments of crisis, Macherey reveals how this need is encoded in narrative silences and ideological contradictions, and Said exposes the discursive strategies through which exclusion is normalised. By synthesising these theories, the study moves beyond surface-level representations of xenophobia to examine how literary form itself participates in both reproducing and critiquing the structural failures of post-apartheid society. This theoretical framework positions Welcome to Our Hillbrow as a text that not only depicts xenophobic violence but also interrogates the fragile foundations of post-apartheid freedom. It enables a reading of the novel as a critical intervention that challenges celebratory narratives of liberation by exposing how economic inequality, symbolic exclusion, and unresolved historical tensions continue to shape social relations in contemporary South Africa.

Conceptual Framework

An integrated literary-critical framework that draws on René Girard's theory of scapegoating, psychoanalytic notions of projection, postcolonial theories of Othering, and Pierre Macherey's Marxist concept of implicit and explicit textual content is adopted. Rather than applying these theories in isolation, the paper enters into a productive dialogue to examine how xenophobia is both represented and structurally embedded in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Girard's concept of scapegoating provides the primary lens for understanding how societies respond to internal crises by displacing blame onto a designated "other." In conditions of socio-economic instability, a community identifies a figure perceived as disruptive, whose symbolic or physical removal offers temporary relief and a sense of restored order. In this study, scapegoating is understood not as a ritualistic act alone but as a recurring social logic that informs narrative construction. The novel demonstrates how post-apartheid South Africa, faced with unemployment, inequality, and disillusionment, redirects collective frustration toward African migrants, particularly Nigerians, who become convenient repositories for anxieties about crime, moral decay, and national failure.

This scapegoating process is reinforced by the psychoanalytic mechanism of

projection, through which individuals and communities externalise refuted fears, guilt, and inadequacies. In the text, qualities such as criminality, sexual excess, and the spread of HIV/AIDS are projected onto foreign bodies, enabling the dominant group to maintain an illusion of moral superiority while evading responsibility for systemic and historical failures. The emotional satisfaction derived from this displacement explains the persistence of xenophobic attitudes even when such hostility fails to resolve the underlying conditions that generate social distress. Postcolonial theories of Othering further illuminate how scapegoating and projection are normalised through language and representation. This study draws on Edward Said's formulation of the concept of Othering in *Orientalism* (Said, 1978) as a process that fixes the self as fully human while rendering the other less than human. In this study, we examine how Nigerian migrants are discursively dehumanised in the novel. We see this in the derogatory term Makwerekwere. It functions not merely as an insult but as a linguistic strategy that consolidates in-group solidarity while legitimising exclusion and violence. As Rob Nixon observes, such terms transform linguistic difference into a marker of inferiority and threat, embedding xenophobia within everyday discourse (Nixon, 2011).

Pierre Macherey's concept of implicit and explicit textual content provides a crucial methodological tool for reading how these ideological processes operate within the novel. Macherey argues that texts often reveal their ideological tensions not only through what they openly state (the explicit) but also through silences, gaps, contradictions, and narrative absences (the implicit or "shadow areas") (Macherey, 1978). In this study, Macherey's framework enables attention to moments where xenophobia is suggested rather than directly articulated; where blame is displaced, responsibility is obscured, or violence is normalised through narrative omission. These silences are read not as narrative shortcomings but as sites where the text unconsciously registers the contradictions of post-apartheid freedom. By reading the novel through Macherey's lens, the study demonstrates how the scapegoating of Nigerians is sustained not only by overt accusations but also by what the narrative leaves unsaid. The normalisation of xenophobic assumptions, the absence of migrant interiority in certain scenes, and the indirect handling of violence all function as "shadow areas" that expose the ideological limits of post-apartheid discourse. When read alongside Girard's scapegoating (Girard, 1977, 1986) and Said's Othering (Said, 1978), these implicit moments reveal how xenophobia operates as a structural necessity within a society struggling to reconcile its ideals of freedom with persistent inequality. Through this integrated conceptual framework, the paper attempts to uncover the psychological, ideological, and textual mechanisms that sustain xenophobia. The framework thus positions *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* as a narrative intervention that exposes the contradictions of post-apartheid freedom and challenges readers to confront the silences that enable continued exclusion and violence.

Methodology

This study lies within the humanities; hence, it adopts a qualitative, analytical literary research design grounded in textual analysis. The methodology is interpretive rather than empirical and is appropriate for examining how literary narratives construct, negotiate, and critique socio-political phenomena such as xenophobia and migration. The primary objective is not to generalise social behaviour but to analyse how the text, Welcome to Our Hillbrow, represents Nigerian migrants and how these representations function within the novel's broader critique of post-apartheid South African society. The study employs close reading as its principal method of analysis. This approach is particularly suited to identifying both explicit representations of violence and exclusion, as well as implicit meanings embedded in narrative silences, omissions, and deflections. By focusing on how meaning is produced within the text, the study foregrounds literary form as a critical site for understanding the socio-economic and psychological dimensions of xenophobia.

The primary data for this study consist of Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, which is analysed as a self-contained literary text situated within its post-apartheid socio-historical context. Secondary data include relevant scholarly criticism on the novel, as well as theoretical and contextual works drawn from literary studies, migration studies, postcolonial theory, and South African socio-political scholarship. These secondary sources are used to contextualise the textual analysis and to support theoretical interpretations rather than to replace close engagement with the primary text. The textual analysis is guided primarily by René Girard's psychoanalytic concept of scapegoating, which provides a framework for interpreting how collective anxieties and social crises are displaced onto marginalised groups. This perspective enables the paper to read Nigerian migrants in the novel as symbolic figures through whom unemployment, crime, moral decay, and post-apartheid disillusionment are projected. Girard's theory is complemented by Pierre Macherey's Marxist implicit and explicit content as propounded in *A Theory of Literary Production*. Macherey's framework informs the analysis of narrative silences, contradictions, and absences, allowing an interrogation of what the text cannot fully articulate about freedom, inclusion, and social responsibility.

While not the primary analytical lens, Edward Said's concept of Othering is employed tangentially to illuminate the discursive processes through which Nigerian migrants are linguistically and culturally marked as foreign and threatening. This supplementary perspective is particularly useful for analysing the language of exclusion and everyday xenophobic naming practices represented in the novel. The analytical procedure shows how the analysis proceeds through the identification and close examination of selected narrative episodes and character portrayals that foreground migration, exclusion, and violence. Attention is paid to moments where Nigerian migrants are associated with criminality, moral excess, or social decay, as well as to narrative strategies that diffuse responsibility for xenophobic violence across the community. These episodes are analysed for both their overt narrative content and their underlying ideological implications, in line with Macherey's emphasis on textual gaps and contradictions. Interpretation is iterative and reflexive, moving between textual evidence and theoretical concepts to ensure analytical coherence. Rather than imposing theory onto the text, the study allows

theoretical insights to emerge from sustained engagement with the narrative. The focus is interpretive and analytical rather than sociological. Nevertheless, by situating *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* within broader discourses of post-apartheid freedom and African migration, the study offers insights into how literature can reflect and critique enduring structural inequalities and exclusionary practices.

Analysis and Discussion

Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* opens Johannesburg not as a glittering land of opportunity but as a turbulent urban space marked by contradiction, where dreams of "greener pastures" collide with harsh socio-economic realities. Central to this narrative are Nigerian migrants who journey from Lagos to Johannesburg in search of prosperity, belonging, and possibility, only to encounter suspicion, hostility, discrimination, and moral scrutiny. Their experiences foreground the tensions inherent in post-apartheid South Africa's promise of freedom and inclusion. We could liken their quest to The Utopian Quest as conceptualised by Adeniji (2013). Nigerian migrants in the novel are represented through multiple and often conflicting lenses: as scapegoats blamed for crime and disease, as lovers entangled in fragile and stigmatised relationships, and as figures whose presence unsettles South Africa's fragile post-apartheid identity. Characters such as Refilwe's Nigerian lover and the "under-waist bliss" peddlers, harassed by the policeman character known as Cousin, embody these tensions. Through such figures, Mpe exposes how xenophobia operates not only through overt violence but also through everyday suspicion, moral judgment, and institutional neglect.

In tracing the movement from Lagos to Johannesburg, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* does more than narrate migration; it dramatizes stigma, displacement, and the precarious search for home. This search is undertaken both by migrants seeking opportunity and by South African citizens who, paradoxically, are already "home" yet remain economically and psychologically dispossessed. Nigerians thus function as a narrative mirror through which Johannesburg confronts its post-apartheid anxieties. Their presence exposes the city as a symbol of incomplete liberation, an urban space that simultaneously welcomes and rejects, promises and withholds. Through this representation, Mpe dramatizes the fragile and uneven nature of freedom in post-apartheid South Africa.

Media headlines and public discourse play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of Nigerians in the novel. Reports such as "Three Nigerians who evaded arrest at Jan Smuts Airport were finally arrested in Pretoria Street for drug dealing" (Mpe, 2001, p. 4) establish a narrative framework in which Nigerians are immediately associated with criminality. This association is reinforced by statements like "Hillbrow had been just fine until those Nigerians came in here with all their drug dealing" (Mpe, 2001, p. 17). These explicit representations construct foreigners as responsible for social decay and moral decline. Through Refentše's observations, Mpe reveals how such prejudices become normalised. Before long, they are circulating casually between private conversations, media discourse, and state institutions. Hillbrow

thus emerges as both a literal refuge for migrants and a symbolic setting of social tension. Mpe further intensifies this critique through the character of Cousin, a law enforcement officer whose actions expose the contradiction between institutional responsibility and lived reality. As a policeman tasked with upholding justice, Cousin instead becomes an agent of corruption and discrimination:

> Together with his colleagues, he would arrest Makwerekwere, drive them around Hillbrow for an infinite period of time… 'See it for the last time, bastards,' they would tell the poor souls… Cousin and his colleagues received oceans of rands and cents from these unfortunates" (Mpe, 2001, p. 21).

This episode exemplifies how institutional power reinforces xenophobia through extortion and humiliation. The migrants' willingness to endure abuse underscores their desperation and their belief that South Africa represents a better alternative to life in Nigeria. Ill-treatment becomes a price worth paying, and the early signs of xenophobic violence go unrecognised. Cousin himself remains blind to his complicity, even as he condemns the crime and decay of Hillbrow, conditions he helps to perpetuate. Cousin's rhetoric mirrors broader societal discourse: "Cousin would always take the opportunity… to complain about the crime and grime in Hillbrow, for which he held such foreigners responsible" (Mpe, 2001, p. 17).

Here, Mpe illustrates the scapegoating mechanism described by Girard: systemic failures are displaced onto a vulnerable group, allowing perpetrators to absolve themselves of responsibility. Nigerians become convenient outlets for anxieties about unemployment, urban decay, and moral decline. This misplaced indictment is further captured in Refilwe's distorted account of Refentše's death, where she blames Lerato, whom she wrongly assumes has Nigerian roots. Her narrative draws on stereotypes of Nigerian men as wealthy drug dealers and moral corrupters: "When they love you, they simply dish out all the money they have… Drug-dealing being such a business" (Mpe, 2001, p. 44).

Through this misrepresentation, Mpe demonstrates how xenophobia thrives on rumour, misinformation, and imagined origins. The repeated association of Nigerians with drugs and crime helps explain the failure of institutions such as the police and the Department of Home Affairs to protect foreigners during outbreaks of xenophobic violence. Othering thus becomes a legitimising framework for neglect and brutality. A critical shift occurs when Refilwe travels outside South Africa and encounters institutionalised racism against Africans at Heathrow Airport. Witnessing the mistreatment of Nigerians and Algerians by British officials prompts her to reflect on South Africa's own prejudices: "She could not enjoy the bad treatment that she had witnessed the Nigerians and Algerians… receiving at the hands of the customs officials at our Heathrow" (Mpe, 2001, p. 100). By juxtaposing South African xenophobia with Western racism, Mpe expands the scope of the narrative beyond national borders. He suggests that social ills thrive on truncated and oversimplified narratives and that a global perspective is necessary to challenge prejudice. Through Macherey's lens, these moments function as implicit

critiques, silences and contrasts that expose the ideological contradictions underlying claims of freedom and moral superiority. Mpe thus represents xenophobia as a global phenomenon sustained by misinformation and reinforced stereotypes. Hillbrow becomes the entry point through which local and global prejudices intersect, revealing how exclusionary practices limit freedom not only in post-apartheid South Africa but across the world.

Conclusion

As the embodiment of a "Rainbow Nation" committed to reconciliation and diversity, post-apartheid South Africa nevertheless continues to struggle with economic inequality, social distrust, and unmet expectations of freedom. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Mpe exposes how xenophobia functions as a mechanism through which citizens displace deeper anxieties about poverty, unemployment, and the unfinished project of national transformation. Nigerians are scapegoated as a means of expressing and legitimising collective frustration. The novel's moral trajectory is embodied in Refilwe's transformation. Her movement through the narrative's spaces, culminating in Oxford, marks a shift from prejudice to self-reflection. She comes to recognise the shared humanity of migrants and the parallels between South African biases against Makwerekwere and Western racism against Africans. This awakening underscores the novel's ethical insistence on rethinking stereotypes and confronting complicity. An important implication of Mpe's representation of post-apartheid xenophobia is the suggestion of collective post-traumatic stress. Having only recently attained full citizenship and political freedom, black South Africans appear reluctant to share these hard-won gains with foreign Africans, figures who mirror their own recent past as marginalised subjects. Xenophobia thus emerges as a defensive response to fragile freedom, revealing the psychological costs of delayed and uneven liberation. Ultimately, Welcome to Our Hillbrow presents xenophobia not as an aberration but as a symptom of unresolved historical trauma and structural inequality. By exposing the mechanisms of scapegoating, othering, and narrative silence, Mpe challenges celebratory narratives of post-apartheid freedom and calls for a more inclusive, reflective, and humane understanding of belonging in Africa and beyond.

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BOOK REVIEW

Title: Representations of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Narratives,

Author:	**Ademola ADESOLA**
Publishers:	**Lexington Books/Fortress Academic.**
Year	**2024**
Chapters:	**5**
Pages:	**223**

Introduction

Most of what appears in this work concerns the inevitabilities and realities of war and African situations. It lightened up the phenomenon of the 1990s in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars, where child soldiers featured. These soldiers were influenced by their experiences before they were drafted/recruited into civil wars. Drugs and footage of Western horror or war films also influenced them. Part of the problems the book raised and sought to address include an understanding of children and childhood, soldering, African and Western writers (novelists) on these subjects, their target audiences, and the question of stereotyping. The kernel of the thoughts in the work grew out of the author's interrogation of the renditions of African war novels by African female novelists, i.e., Chimamanda Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun, 2006*) and *Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (Roses & Bullets,* 2011). Indeed, he analysed the works of these two novelists on Nigeria's civil war with the writings of their African male counterparts on the war, with a view to deciphering the gaps in their accounts/narratives on child soldiers. The book picked four novels for anchoring/interpretative purposes. The novels are Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny Mad Dog* (2005), Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is not Obliged* (2006), Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2006), and Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007). It focused critically on the agency of children in warfare through the lens of human rights, which is often hyped and/or privileged by the West. It critiques the notions of innocence, immaturity, victimhood, vulnerability and the imperative to protect, as they pertain to

child soldiers or those that are so labelled. It made a strong case against a homogenised or singular version of childhood. It tries to revise the universalist idea of a child, buttressing his standpoint with the works of David Rosen, David Mastey, Peter Singer, among others. It also discusses the nature, objectives, interpretation, and/or misrepresentation of African wars (which together form the narratives). Indeed, it contributes to knowledge about children and war.

Appraisal

The author's argument that human rights are often privileged, when talking of child soldiers, by the Western humanitarian groups, is assailable, as he wrote, "... that humanitarian and human rights discourses on child soldiers are both heavily one-sided, indifferent to contexts, and contain misleading distortions that suggest a disconnection from the experiences of children at war". It is assailable, insofar as this stance creates an impression that the child soldiers have something to gain in war, as of essence; that they desire war and their conditions, agonies and hazards faced during war do not matter. The work maintains that child soldiering is neither new nor an aberration in African wars, as (Western) humanitarian agencies like Child Soldier International, Save the Children, Action Aid, Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, the Red Crescent Movement, the International Red Cross would make us feel or believe. I am persuaded, however, that child soldiering is not desirable and should not be a glorious advertisement of (our) African culture. Indeed, I am convinced that children are not suitable for warfare, even though they have been used in various roles throughout history and across societies. The author wrote,"... child soldiers are not easily analytically graspable", yet he has done so much on the subject – dissecting and analysing.

Conclusion

Overall, the study is a nuanced and fascinating interrogation of and an essential addition to African Child Soldier Literature.

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