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# Political Economy of Development

*Public Policy Alternatives and  
Progressive Ideas in Nigeria*

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# Contents

Series Editor's Foreword	xi
Acknowledgments	xiii
Foreword	xv
Introduction	xvii
Chapter Synopsis	xxiii
<b>Chapter One · Economy</b>	<b>3</b>
1.01 Nigeria's Interest Rates/Forex Quagmire (I)	3
1.02 Nigeria's Interest Rates/Forex Quagmire (II)	5
1.03 Easing Nigeria Out of Recession	8
1.04 A Note on Foreign (Direct) Investment in Nigeria	11
1.05 Can Nigeria Ever Stop Importing Rice?	13
1.06 Diversifying or Decentralising Nigerian Economy?	16
1.07 AMCON's Dubious Economic Function	19
1.08 DMO and the Paradox of 'Debt Management'	22
1.09 The Elusive Quest for Tax Revenue	25
1.10 Crippling Cost of Borrowing; Who Cares?	27
1.11 First Law of Development	30
1.12 9Mobile: How (Not) to Resurrect Business Failure	33
1.13 Parallel Universe of the IMF and Nigerian Government	35
1.14 NNPC/Multinational Oil Contracts: Grand Bargain or Grand Larceny?	39
1.15 NNPC, FAAC, Minister of Finance, and the Missing Billions	42
1.16 High Inflation as a By-Product of High-Level Corruption	45
1.17 Nigerian Workers Deserve Living (Not Minimum) Wage	47
1.18 When a Country's Debt Becomes a 'Crisis'	50
1.19 Why Companies Go Public (I)	53

1.20	Why Companies Go Public (II)	55
1.21	Why Companies Go Bust	58
1.22	Nigeria's Unabated Stagflation: Why it Matters	62
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>· Finance/Capital Markets</b>	<b>67</b>
2.01	Sovereign Wealth Fund: Cui bono?	67
2.02	FRCN, Corporate Governance and Regulatory Overreach (I)	70
2.03	FRCN, Corporate Governance and Regulatory Overreach (II)	73
2.04	FRCN, Corporate Governance and Regulatory Overreach (III)	75
2.05	We've Had Pro-Democracy Activists, Why not Activist Investors?	78
2.06	SEC's Tepid Response to Market Infractions	80
2.07	Forex: CBN Governor's Parallel Universe	83
2.08	Forex: Nigerian Banks in the Dock	86
2.09	Budget 2017 Through the Lens of Capital Markets	88
2.10	Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Banking Services	90
2.11	Nigeria's Financial 'Intelligence' at the Crossroads	94
2.12	Stock Exchange and the Mechanics of Markets	96
2.13	US Dollar: The Power and the Glory (I)	99
2.14	US Dollar: The Power and the Glory (II)	102
2.15	US Dollar: The Power and the Glory (III)	105
2.16	Why Banks Fail	107
2.17	SEC's New "Derivatives" Platform	110
2.18	SEC's Litany of Corporate Governance Lapses	113
2.19	Painful Lesson for 9Mobile Shareholders	116
2.20	Nigeria's \$2.5bn Currency 'Swap' with China	118
2.21	Combating Corporate Greed Through Corporate Governance	122
2.22	China: Generous Lender or Loan Shark?	125
2.23	Rise of Non-Interest (Islamic) Banking	128
2.24	Bureaux de Change, Banks, and Economic Saboteurs	131
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>· Economic and Financial Crime</b>	<b>135</b>
3.01	EFCC, Courts, Stolen Funds, and Legal Technicality	135
3.02	EFCC, Transparency International, and the Game of Numbers	138
3.03	EFCC's Persistent Failure at Criminal Assets Forfeiture	141
3.04	Kleptocracy Assets Recovery Initiative: Dog that Bites!	144
3.05	Between White Collar Crime and Business Efficacy	146
3.06	EFCC and PEPs: Caught in a Cobweb of Legalism	149



<b>Chapter Four · Education</b>	153
4.01 Why Nigerian Universities are Graduating Illiterates	153
4.02 Should Academics Be Moral Agents?	156
4.03 Why “VC” Position Is Keenly Contested in Nigeria	158
4.04 NUC: Assessing the Assessors	161
<b>Chapter Five · Media</b>	165
5.01 Why Channels is in the Government’s Crosshair	165
5.02 Sorry, Servile, Supine State of Nigeria’s Media	168
5.03 Channels TV Interview (Sorry, Torture) of President Buhari	171
5.04 Why Governments Love (and Loathe) Twitter	173
<b>Chapter Six · Politics</b>	177
6.01 Why ‘Vote Buying’ Matters: Why it Does Not	177
6.02 Transition Gap: A Looters’ Charter	180
6.03 Yes, Nigeria Needs a Revolution — of the Mind	182
6.04 Nigeria: ‘Tribalism’ and the Nationality Question	185
6.05 Buhari Should Lance the Boil of Separatism	188
6.06 Round-Tripping Politicians: Blessing or Curse?	191
6.07 APC, PDP in Disarray: Is There an Alternative?	193
6.08 Taliban Victory: Morale Booster for Boko Haram	196
6.09 Is Nigeria Worth Dying For?	199
6.10 Nigeria: A Nation of Lions Led By Donkeys	202
6.11 Why Millions Join Political Parties in Nigeria	205
6.12 INEC and its ‘Independence’ Troubles . . .	208
6.13 How Religion Enables Gender-Based Violence	210
6.14 Dearth of Female Nigerian Leaders	213
6.15 How #EndSARS Was Lost	216
6.16 Imperative (and Myth) of Youth Representation	218
6.17 Warning: Parliamentary System is Brutal and Vicious	221
<b>Chapter Seven · Law</b>	225
7.01 “Panama papers”: Lawyers’ Ethical Dilemma	225
7.02 SEC: Minister’s Right to Suspend DG	227
7.03 Why Nigerian Police Relish Parading Suspects	230
7.04 Legality of P&ID/\$9.6bn award	232
7.05 Politics of P&ID \$9.6bn Award	235
7.06 Legality of Government’s Raid on Pension Funds	238
7.07 Malami’s ‘Open’ Road to Anarchy	241

<b>Chapter Eight · Military</b>	245
8.01 Nigeria: Still Under Shadows of Military	245
8.02 Nigerian Military's Conflict of Loyalties	248
8.03 AFRICOM: Buhari's White Flag of Surrender	250
8.04 Africa and the 'Corrective Coup' Syndrome	253
<b>Chapter Nine · Intra-African Affairs</b>	257
9.01 Zimbabwe: An African Tragedy	257
9.02 How Europe Underdeveloped Africa	260
9.03 How 'African Time' Is Killing Africa	263
9.04 New Scramble for Africa: Not the Chinese, Surely?	265
9.05 Who's Afraid of Africa's Free Trade Bloc?	269
9.06 Why We Celebrate (Not Jail) Corrupt Leaders In Africa (I)	272
9.07 Why We Celebrate (Not Jail) Corrupt Leaders in Africa (II)	274
9.08 What "Brexit" Means for Africa	277
9.09 South Africa: False Narrative of Xenophobic Attacks	280
9.10 Nigeria's Muddled Policy on Western Sahara	282
9.11 Adesina's Re-election: Slap in the Face for America	285
9.12 Africans Hiding Wealth in Offshore Accounts Are Traitors	288
9.13 Thomas Sankara: Africa's Finest, Gunned Down Too Soon	291
9.14 King Mswati III: Africa's Last Maximum Ruler	294
<b>Chapter Ten · International Affairs</b>	299
10.01 Hypocrisy of Foreign Election Observers	299
10.02 Why Trump Supporters Are So Wrong	302
10.03 USA: Why Trump Must (and will) Be Defeated	305
10.04 What Makes a Country 'Third World'?	307
10.05 Why G7 Disavow 'Race to Bottom' Tax Incentive	310
<b>Conclusion</b>	315
<b>Index</b>	321

## Series Editor's Foreword

The *Carolina Academic Press African World Series*, inaugurated in 2010, offers significant new works in the field of African and Black World studies. The series provides scholarly and educational texts that can serve both as reference works and as readers in college classes.

Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

Toyin Falola  
University of Texas at Austin



# Acknowledgments

This work is literally owed to dozens of friends, colleagues, and well-wishers all over the world who, in various ways, had badgered me for years, in some cases, about the need to assemble the essays on my column in a book form. It would be quite uncharitable of me to start mentioning individual names, as I am bound to leave out many for lack of space.

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Particular appreciation goes to my friends in the corridors of power in Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria, and in the various states of the federation. Many of you have expressed preference to remain anonymous, including some captains of industry who communicate with me in private, and in confidence. I am grateful to you all. I am also equally encouraged by communications from a number of foreign diplomatic missions, as well as foreign media outlets who have been in touch at various points over the years, either to disprove or commend the stance taken in my write-ups, which directly affect their interests.

My most sincere appreciation must go to Aare Afe Babalola, Founder/Chancellor, Afe Babalola University, for not only being my foremost intellectual sparring partner in the university, but for having an unshakable

belief in me, as a person with ‘untapped’ potential, which he has dedicated a considerable amount of his time to draw out. One of such potential is the writing of this book. Needless to say, Aare Babalola expects more. I pray God will grant us both the time and space to meet his expectations even halfway. “The price for excellence is even more hard work, and more burden on one’s shoulders”, he would often say. I totally agree.

Acknowledgment is also due to the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, who all tried in their objective ways to contribute to its improvement. Every single comment, and remark has been taken into account for the final product. The biggest gratitude, however, must go to my editors, as well as the avid readers of my weekly column in PUNCH, from where the raw materials for this book have been harvested. It is nigh impossible to put a finger on the exact number of the readers, but it is safe to assume that they are in their thousands, if not millions in, and outside of Nigeria. My postbag is full of your reactions and responses to particular things you have read and understood or not understood, that surprised or calmed you, or that you were incredulous about. Big thanks to you all!

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# Foreword

As the final outcome of the 2023 presidential election remains contested in Nigeria, the whole world is watching with bated breath as the political leaders in the country have not covered themselves in glory in terms of the way, and manner in which they have governed, or not governed since the return to civilian order in 1999. It has led many to start questioning the essence of democracy and the federal system of governance in operation in the country. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chapter II, Section 2 (b) and (c) state: “The Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy is that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government; and the participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution”. This, in fact, is a universal principle, which forms the basis of the “social contract” between citizens and their governments in every democratic nation. By any yardstick, the political elites in Nigeria have failed to live up to any aspect of the fundamental objectives in the Constitution. That much is clear. What is less clear, however, is why. Probing into why successive Nigerian governments have failed in their obligations under the Constitution, not just since 1999, but generally since independence in 1960, is very much like sifting through a huge pile of shredded corn husk in search of a needle.

Some attribute the failure to the Constitution itself, especially the 1999 Constitution, which has never been affirmed by the people. It was a hotchpotch of ideas, hurriedly packaged and enacted by the departing military government and falsely stated as emanating from the people. Others see the incompetence and a lack of commitment by political leaders to nation-building. Philosophers, economists, political scientists, sociologists, lawyers, and several others in the field of social science and humanities have developed theories and assumptions purporting to give us an insight into the Nigerian ‘problem’. Every angle, every

account seems to have succeeded only in expanding the parameters of the ‘problem’, rather than narrowing it. It is therefore refreshing to see a book that is not designed to offer yet another pathway based on a set of theoretical assumptions, but one that is anchored on a panoramic view of the country as it is. It is a ‘live’ commentary on events as they happen, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions. The ten chapters in the book feature ‘events’ covering every aspect of Nigeria’s public life: economics, politics, law, capital markets, media, military, etc. They are designed to inform, elucidate, and educate the masses. They are also grounded in scholarship for the more inquiring mind. Every chapter is backed up by empirical evidence, scrupulously avoiding any hint of sweeping generalisations.

The choice of the title of the book, “Political Economy of Development”, also gives the impression that it, too, is starting from a set of theoretical assumptions, but this is palpably not so. The author’s choice of the title encapsulates the chequered journey of Nigeria towards development through aspects of its politics and economics. In his incisive commentaries on Nigeria that he presents here for his readers, Professor Tayo Oke succinctly deploys his in-depth knowledge and experience of living and working in some twenty countries-in-transition around the world. This experience spans over two decades as a consultant and field staff for notable international organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, International Organisation for Migration, amongst others. Having been involved in post-conflict nation-building-related tasks in various locations across the globe, his methodological approach for this book can best be described as one of participant-observer. Rich in its breadth of analysis, unequivocal in its assertions, and evocative in its projections, each chapter in the book can best be described as a treasure trove of seminal pieces of writing that convey the socio-cultural jigsaw that Nigeria and its political economy constitute. This work is a masterful collection of writing by a committed scholar, journalist, and social science practitioner, whose experience in the global arena as a field worker, and detail-oriented lawyer, puts him a cut above the rest.

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Founder/Chancellor, Afe Babalola University,  
Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria  
March 1st 2023



# Introduction

This is a compilation of essays on a swathe of subjects: economics, politics, law, finance, education, media, military, and international relations, focusing on public policy in an emerging economy, in a key African state. Put together in one neat volume, they are as original as they are full of depth and breadth. The methodological approach to this collection was innovative in its design. It was based on a careful dissection of crucial aspects of public policy in their raw elements, and placed in the context of their conceptual and empirical groundings. It is bearing witness to a marriage between theory and practice. This is then used to critique policy choices, and proffer alternative options to fill the lacunae where necessary. The eclectic mix of theories deployed for analysis stands it out from the conventional approach seen in standard textbooks. No book on the market would have engaged with the effect of monetarism and supply-side economics versus public ownership and dependency logic; theories of democracy and pluralism versus militarism and dictatorship; distributive justice versus social justice and ‘free and fair’ election as a concept, as against ‘substantial compliance’ with legal requirements as the end results.

The intersection between theoretical assumptions and public policy is the mechanic’s workshop for this book. The essays have been written to appeal to a wide audience across different socio-economic strata, but also carefully manicured by data to raise their essence beyond a passing interest in the subject matter, to one the reader will generally find arresting, and certainly illuminating. Rather than producing a single-subject standard text in a typically isolated fashion, the approach to this volume is deliberately multidisciplinary as it is multifaceted.

Perhaps what marks out this book the most from the others in the discipline is that it does not set out in the usual manner of providing ‘the grand narrative’ to a known ‘problem’. Rather, it is a chronicle of events in real time. It unravels

a series of narratives for their effectiveness, and relevance to public policy alternatives in a major regional economy; it is a running commentary whose goal it is to deconstruct and reconstruct the differing narratives based on the evidence. It is primarily aimed at a general readership, some of whom will have no pre-conceived notion of the subject-matter, while others will already be well-informed on it. Others, still, will be specialists and experts in the field being provided with a new angle, and a new lens to wade through a familiar territory. In other words, the book is a 'one stop shop' for the less sophisticated as well as the highly sophisticated readership. In partnership with the publisher, and based on a sustained public interest, it should be updated as, and when subsequent events justify.

Africa, says Alao,<sup>1</sup> is a voice to be heard, not a problem to be solved. My approach to this book aligns with that thought. It categorically rejects the usual pathological approach to the study of Nigeria as a disease to be dissected, followed by swallowing the latest dose of remedial (if ineffectual) pills. All the known theories and ideas on the political economy of development in respect of Nigeria are tested in this work against actual policy output, then, subjected to public debate in a dedicated newspaper column in the PUNCH,<sup>2</sup> over a period of ten years. The outcome of that exercise is what is contained in this book. While efforts were made to preserve the original texts of the essays in this book as they first appeared in print, there have been minor editorial tweaks here and there for quality control, and the need to substantiate bold assertions with data. It stands to reason, therefore, that the essays have already been 'road tested', judging by the column's growing readership; domestic as well as international and by the numerous correspondence from ordinary readers, to top level individuals and various institutions, many of whom have, at one time or another, become the object of debate over the period covered in the book. Requests have, at various times, been received from interested parties to have aspects of the essays translated into Chinese, French, Spanish and other languages for additional world-wide readership. Although PUNCH provides the vehicle for publication of the essays, they are, almost invariably, gratuitously copied and pasted on rival media platforms as well as other institutions' platforms often within hours of release. This is surely an indication of the

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1. See; A. Alao. "Africa: A Voice to be heard, not a problem to be solved". An inaugural lecture at King's College, University of London, 2016. Given the divergence of Africa's regional aspirations from Cape to Cairo, it should be emphasised that the 'voice' is not monosyllabic, it is multidimensional in essence.

2. PUNCH is the widest circulating newspaper in Nigeria, and by extension, West Africa.

strong interest in them by various audiences; it is also a compelling case for having them in a book form to satisfy demand.

The essays have been written for public consumption for the past ten years. They number in their hundreds, although, only the last six years have been taken into account for this collection. Many have appeared and reappeared in unauthorised platforms, including private blogs in Nigeria and beyond. It has not been easy to reproduce and rewrite them in one volume of work of this nature. The essays cover mainly the last six years as a result of the need to make them contemporary and relevant to current discourse. There is no other book of the same genre on the market anywhere in Nigeria, or indeed, anywhere else, in the world.

The author has received numerous requests from top-level government functionaries, and captains of industry for the links to specific topics covered on the column at different times. Sadly, there is no ready-made audit of the four hundred or so essays published across a decade. Producing them in double volumes is probably what should have been done, but this one volume offers the best start. Nigeria, like many countries in Africa, does not have a well-established and practicable intellectual property protection law. Copyright is still a strange concept to many people engaged in lifting other people's work with reckless abandon. Producing a book of this nature is a good way of countering this endemic problem as it makes author identification easier, and more compelling.

After reading through many of the essays, repeatedly in some cases, a decision was made to group them under ten headings. The combined headings provide a good snapshot to the political economy of a key African state at a particular moment in time. They are "reflections" written from the vantage point of an academic with a trained eye on the specifics. In many ways, the book is a chronicle of events as they happened, how they ought to have happened, and how they may happen in the foreseeable future. The arguments presented are rich enough in their complexity to appeal to professionals in the field, yet, devoid of jargon enough to appeal to the curious mind, and the self-motivated in public policy. Many students of economics, political science, journalism, sociology, and accounting, have had cause to email the author, thanking him for simplifying a previously complex issue for them. One such correspondence came from an undergraduate accounting student who, having read a column on bonds and capital markets, wrote to express his relief that the issue had provided such a headache for him and his colleagues the whole year long, but they had finally been put out of their mystery by the write up.

Similarly, a postgraduate student in Ukraine once got in touch to clarify the treatment of 'hedge funds' and the global financial crisis. A lot more

correspondence have also come in from university professors on the crisis of education and other hot-button issues of the day. Civil servants, legislators and many others have also had cause to engage with the column. One particular avid reader, an American expatriate living in Lagos, was so livid about the column's characterisation of America under President Donald Trump, that he got in touch, first with a five-page rebuttal of the column's stance on Trump, then, swiftly entered into a bet of one hundred dollars that he (Trump) would be re-elected, with the breakdown of the states he would carry, and the ones he would lose, and the final tally from the electoral college.

Since the column had made an impassioned analysis of why and how Trump would lose the election, the author was happy to double the bet to two hundred dollars. The expatriate hurriedly insisted on exchanging bank details in advance of the election of November 2020, because he was convinced that Trump's victory at the polls was a "slam dunk", and had expected his account to be credited immediately after the expected victory. Trump, of course, lost the election by a wide margin. Not to rub salt in his wound, the author politely declined the promised payment but advised him to re-examine his near fanatical belief in Trump going forward. To his credit, he declined, and would have none of that mollycoddling sentiment from him. He insisted on paying up, like the proud American that he was, and kept badgering the author until he reluctantly accepted, but, only if he would agree to meet him in person at a coffee shop for that purpose. He did, and he let go of his hard-earned, clean two hundred dollar bills with a broad grin on his face, a hand shake, and a bear hug.

Others from within Nigeria, from time to time, have also found reasons to send in copious notes on the column's "brilliant" or "fussy" facts and figures on the financial market or the economy and politics, amongst others. When analyses of the political economy of a country become a subject of everyday conversation, then the column and this book in particular could be said to have achieved their objective. The essence of publishing a book of this nature is to acquire readership and also to tap into their consciousness. It has not been plain sailing selecting the essays to include, and the ones to cut out. There were enough materials to create four volumes of this book in one go, but that would be stretching the reader's loyalty too far. The chapters have been carefully arranged to accommodate the titles under each heading. That too, was not always as exact as was intended. Efforts have been made to cut out the professional critique and profile of individuals in the public eye to avoid distraction from the central themes of the book. Where the office of an individual is attached to their person, for instance, the Attorney General of the Federation making changes to provisions of the law, it becomes inevitable

that the minister is mentioned by name, by dint of his office, and his peculiar role as both the Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

The book consists of ten chapters, made up of ten areas of public policy, giving the reader a panoramic view of the subject-matter. Each chapter should, ideally, contain a similar number of essays, but there is an inevitable variation based on the issues, and the regularity in which they occurred during the period covered. For instance, the chapters on the economy contain the highest number of essays because the subject has been a dominant issue of governance in Nigeria as elsewhere, in the past three decades. The chapters on finance/capital markets, and politics are not too far behind. The others contain a minimum of five essays per chapter. The essays are approximately one thousand words in length each. The aim is to keep the overall length of the book within the agreed limit. The essays have been carefully selected from a bank of four hundred, all of which are pertinent to the book's mission of educating, illuminating, challenging old, as well as new assumptions for the reader. It was a wrench deciding which to include, and which to leave out. Consequently, except for the first essay on capital markets in Chapter Two (2013), all of them date from 2015 to 2021, the period covering the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. The essays that made the final list for inclusion in the book are the ones that best exemplify the chapter and period in which they appear. Moreover, priority was given to particular essays that shed new light on contentious theories in the debate on the relevant subject. As stated earlier, this book does not set out to drive home a particular theoretical assumption about the country under study. It does not set out to propagate a particular 'solution' to the 'problem with Nigeria', or proffer definitive analytical remedies to previously intractable problems. In short, as stated earlier, the chapters in the book do not contain a 'grand narrative' to sell to the reader in the usual manner of books on the market. Instead, the chapters are an encounter with public policy in real time. Conventional assumptions and old theories are tested against the reality of policy as it happens, where necessary. In other areas, a direct critique of policy is provided in a historical context. This either reinforces an established understanding or throws light on a new angle in the debate.

Finally, the book should appeal to a broad spectrum of professionals: Cabinet ministers and their advisers, policy analysts, civil servants, media analysts, journalists, scholars, students and captains of industry. It should also appeal to professionals and individuals outside Nigeria seeking a comprehensive overview of the socio-political-economy of the country that is both technical and academic in substance, in one neat package. In addition, the book serves as a pointer to various angles for those keen on conducting research on Nigeria, as many topics covered in the chapters have the potential

for expansion into journal articles singly or collectively, or even into a separate book or books. The author has been subjected to relentless prodding and goading by colleagues, friends and family for several years to undertake this rolling project. The task has now been accomplished. Over to you, the reader, to come along and enjoy.

# Chapter Synopsis

## Chapter One

Chapter One examines different aspects of economic policy, starting with the government's application of a Washington-inspired "supply-side economics" and monetarism in an emerging economy with a chronic problem of high interest rates. On this basis, a recession is never too far behind. Attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has become an article of faith for successive governments in Nigeria from the early 1990s. This is a major shift from the excessive bank borrowings of the 1970s and 1980s, which led to a pile of unpaid (and unpayable) loans. The shift in focus to FDI is therefore understandable. What is often lost in the discussion, however, is the fact that while a direct bank loan gives the borrower the latitude to spend the money as he pleases, usually based on the development priorities of his government, FDI does not allow for such luxury. The development aspiration of the host government is only incidental to the foreign investor's principal objective of maximising profit. Consequently, the foreign investment is willy-nilly channelled to the sectors that promise the maximum return at a minimal cost, and in the fastest time. Borrowing from banks is a good idea if the money so acquired was properly invested in the country's economy, but more often than not, the loans were frittered away on white elephant projects, and often used to line the pockets of corrupt public officials. FDI is a good viable option in many respects, but that too comes with a hefty price tag in form of various concessions the investor would extract from the host government: tax holidays, freedom to repatriate profits, supplying own personnel, reluctance to transfer technology, increase in environmental pollution from their production method,

to mention but a few. 'A Note on Foreign (Direct) Investment' critically engages with the conventional wisdom on this important aspect of economic policy and priorities.

The persistent problem of foreign exchange and the role of Nigerian banks in creating a 'parallel' market for its currency became a major public policy discourse, as much as the decision to close Nigeria's land borders in an attempt to stem the tide of importation (or smuggling) of foreign-manufactured rice. 'Can Nigeria Ever Stop Importing Rice'? This brought to the fore the industrial policy option of protectionism versus free trade by examining both the desirability and feasibility of discouraging rice importation when the country has still not built up sufficient capacity to absorb demand for the product. The argument dovetails with the wider debate about the need to diversify or decentralise the economy. State intervention and free market have always being a delicate balancing act even in the most advanced economies. The concept of 'too big to fail', occasioned by the financial crisis that started in the US in 2008, pushed Congress to pass legislation aimed at rescuing the financial institutions considered too big to fail. It has since been exported to the rest of the world. Nigeria's Assets Management Corporation of Nigeria (AMCON) and Debt Management Organisation (DMO) have come to symbolise this latest innovation at market intervention by stealth. In Nigeria, large corporations and banks found to be in 'distress' are taken over, their assets subjected to 'restructuring' or 'management' by AMCON, the toxic part of them are shipped over to DMO, and the company is then eased back into the private sector once the balance sheet becomes attractive enough to investors. This is a case of nationalising liability and privatising profit, it would seem. The 'elusive quest for tax revenue' and the 'crippling cost of borrowing' expatiate further on the Federal Government's ability to balance its books amidst mounting budget deficit. 'First Law of Development' postulates on who carries the burden of government's ever increasing public debt and wonders whether it is not disproportionately left on the shoulders of the have-nots. The issue of government intervention in business failure resurfaces again in the discussion on '9mobile' and attempts at saving it from collapse. These themes run through public debate for a considerable number of months when the issue of taking a company from private to public ownership comes to the fore mainly as a public education exercise. 'Why companies go bust' rounds up the chapter by exposing the reader to some aspects of company finance, especially the pivotal role of cash flow in keeping a company solvent.



## Chapter Two

The teaching, coverage, and public discussion of capital markets, universally, have been somewhat esoteric for a very long time. The financial crisis of 2008 heightened interest in the subject worldwide, but it is still a little hard to grapple with in the atmosphere of an emerging economy, where shareholding is yet to move into the mainstream. Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to bring the subject matter into public discourse in a way that reflects the language and understanding of the ordinary person, while still being technically relevant to the professional in the field. What better way to kick off the debate than by a discussion of the Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF). The idea of saving up for the proverbial rainy day is as old as the merchant banks, but a relatively new concept in an otherwise cash-strapped economy. Why would a struggling economy wish to save for the future generation, when the present generation is still underfed, and malnourished? SWF is a brilliant idea seen in other well-endowed (petrol-dollar) economies, but Nigeria is a pseudo petrol-dollar economy at best since the product accounts for less than 10% of the country's GDP. So, the question: "Sovereign Wealth Fund: Cui Bono?" was appropriately raised, and attracted volumes of correspondence right across the professional divide for years. This was followed by an attempt to simplify the logic of bonds and shares in the market, using real life examples. It is often the case that the rosier side of capitalism is understood, but not its uneven, seamier side. Another hot button topic of public concern in the financial sector is the issue of non-interest (Islamic) finance fronted in Nigeria by the country's indigenous Islamic bank, Jaiz Bank. Is it an attempt at an Islamic 'takeover' of society? Nothing could be further from the truth. It is just another instrument for raising funds, but few people, even highly qualified professionals, understand this very well. 'Why companies go public' came up as part of the continuous public education exercise by the column, and so was the issue of "derivatives" as an addition to Nigeria's capital markets. Derivatives are difficult to grapple with even in London, at the heart of Europe's financial market, talk less of an emerging economy. This too was followed up with a call for 'activist investors' in the capital markets. It is a matter for conjecture that if 'political activists' applied half of their energy and interest to the capital markets, the public would be much better served. The debate it provoked spurred other topics around the same theme for a few weeks more. Finally, a bold attempt was made to bring the use of the US dollar into the fray, as the Naira continued the downward spiral of depreciation against it. This is all the more important, given that the Naira was stronger than the dollar for a long period of time after independence. That said, other emerging economies have had their currencies

suffer the same fate as the Naira, hence, the need to discuss the economic history of the reserved currency of international finance over the course of three weeks. The chapter concludes with a short essay on why banks fail.

### **Chapter Three**

Economic and financial crime has been a prominent feature of public life in Nigeria at least since the 1980s. The agency set up to both deter and prosecute such crimes is the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Its mandate has led the organisation into a continuing controversy in the sense that everyone agrees on the imperative of combating financial crime in official circles, but no one seems to agree on the best tactics to achieve that. The head of the EFCC is by necessity thrust into the spotlight from inception, especially when it comes to political influence to either (as some see it) 'back off' certain corrupt elements in government, or 'go after' some of the others outside government. EFCC is also used by outside observers (Transparency International and other international financial institutions) as a barometer on how steadfast Nigeria is in combating official corruption. The pressure on the organisation and its leadership is understandably immense. The pressure is not made any easier by the unsettled view of its 'independence' from, or 'subordination' to the country's Ministry of Justice in the use of its prosecutorial powers. EFCC is a statutory body. Technically, the appropriate government department for its oversight is the Ministry of Justice, but no Minister of Justice would wish to be seen as 'interfering' in the 'independence' of the EFCC by raising even the most innocuous query about the organisation's rationale on certain matters. Additionally, EFCC is erroneously seen by many as a body with untrammelled powers. It is seen as accuser, prosecutor, judge, jury, and jailer in cases within its purview. One of the highlights of the many tensions inside the organisation came to the fore when the column raised an issue on 'EFCC's Persistent Failure at Criminal Assets Forfeiture'. The following day, the column received a message from the EFCC threatening legal action over 'inaccuracies' in the piece. The Minister of Justice announced the suspension of its Chairman three days later, then, subjected him to an official probe. He was subsequently removed from office a couple of months afterwards. Coincidence? That is for the reader to judge.

### **Chapter Four**

The chapter focuses on university education under the auspices of the National Universities Commission, the agency that regulates the sector. On independence in 1960, there was a universal embrace of the strategic need to

boost graduate admissions. The departing colonial administration did not make university education a priority. The oil boom of the 1970s saw a spike in the national expenditure on education, which was quickly followed by a sharp drop amidst the late 1980s inflation, recession and Nigeria's rising debt profile. University education, like other sectors of the economy, has endured its share of government cuts. Negotiating over pay and conditions of its academic staff has been moved from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Labour, where a more stringent approach and emphasis is placed on 'productivity'. It is no surprise, therefore, that government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) are nearly always at loggerheads over pay and working conditions. Government insists on efficiency, while the union demands funding to upgrade dilapidating infrastructure. General standards have inevitably taken a turn for the worse. The emergence and proliferation of private universities has done much, but not enough to stem the tide of the decline in the university sector. More parents are opting to educate their children in private universities which do not have a unionised workforce, but there are question marks over academic standards in some of the private universities as well. The regimented approach to student discipline applied in private universities is alien to the pervasive liberal environment in the public-funded universities. The jury is still out on which will become dominant, as the debate continues.

### **Chapter Five**

The Nigeria media is acknowledged to be relatively free by comparison with its peers across the African continent. Neither restricted nor free would be a fair assessment of where things are with the media. The prolonged military interregnum prior to a return to civilian governance in 1999 has embedded a culture of self-censoring across the media houses in Nigeria. There is a heightened awareness, on the part of journalists, of the need to pay attention to government sensitivities in media content. On its part, government (of all hues) often impose a burden on journalists to give credence to the 'national security' concerns of the state, and to refrain from doing things that could 'overheat' the polity. The regulatory agency, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), is on hand to monitor the broadcasters for compliance. The print media also broadly fall in line with the precepts of government, though, some of them stray beyond their permissible limits from time to time, leading to the occasional confrontation with the regulator. The essays in this chapter should be read with this background in mind.

## Chapter Six

The study of contemporary Nigerian politics is tied to the return of the country to civil rule in 1999. The biggest political question until then was the feasibility and indeed, survival of Nigeria as one entity. The military that held power until 1999 was seen as a major roadblock to democracy, having annulled what was considered the fairest and freest election that voted for what was to be the civilian administration of Chief Moshood Abiola, from the Southwest region in 1993. The military leadership (dominated by the north) had disavowed the election, apparently, as it had not resulted in the victory of their preferred candidate. The sudden cancellation of the results as they were being announced plunged the country into turmoil with the real fear that Nigeria might disintegrate. It came as no coincidence, therefore, that major stakeholders of northern extraction embraced the idea that the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at the handover from the military should be a person from the Southwest, if only to pacify the region for the annulment of the 1993 election adjudged to have been won by one of their own, Chief Abiola, who mysteriously died while in the custody of the government headed then by the military strongman, General Sani Abacha in 1998. He himself had died a few weeks prior. The Presidency was thus 'zoned' to the Southwest, leading to the emergence of former military General, Olusegun Obasanjo, as a civilian President in the election of 1999, under the auspices of the hurriedly formed Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), a coalition of conservative political bedfellows from across the ethnic divide. The party had remained in power for an unbroken sixteen years, until defeated by another coalition of political bedfellows, the All Progressives Congress, in 2015. If dousing the agitation for separatism was the *raison d'être* of the PDP, it achieved its purpose, but left itself vulnerable to attack on other fronts, especially in the area of insecurity and rampant levels of official corruption. APC thus came into office under the mantra 'change', but did not define exactly what that meant. It was left for the voter to fill in the void. The period under review for this book falls neatly within the first five years of the 'change' mantra. For many people, it is more than just a slogan, it is a challenge to see if and how the country, Nigeria, could be re-envisioned. This is the premise upon which the write-ups in this chapter were based.

## Chapter Seven

Certainly, the biggest concern with the judiciary in Nigeria since 1999 is the extent to which it has become politicised, and how to disentangle one of the great institutions of state from partisan politics. The term 'judiciary' is applied

in a liberal sense here to refer not only to the institutions, but also to everyone connected with it; lawyers, judges, and other functionaries. The main focus in this chapter is not so much the politics of the judiciary, but the application of the law in specific situations, and the logic and principles underlying the actions taken or not taken. Wider analysis about judicial corruption and its independence from political office holders is left for another assignment.

### **Chapter Eight**

The military has played a prominent role in the running of government in Nigeria since the first coup that toppled the post-independence civilian government in 1963. The military has been in and out of power ever since. The 'pro-democracy' activism of the political elite that finally pushed them out of power in 1999 came as a relief to everyone in and outside Nigeria. Suspicion remains, however, whether at some point, they may stage a comeback. Upon departure from government administration, the military hierarchy wrote and enacted a military-style constitution which protected their interest, and which to a large extent guaranteed their continued influence on government. Many of the military top brass resigned their posts and contested for, and indeed, won various political positions in the newly constituted National Assembly. The incoming Head of State, Olusegun Obasanjo, was a General in the army, likewise Muhammadu Buhari, who was elected in 2015. The military no longer directly wields power, but its influence remains ubiquitous throughout the political echelons, and the fear of another putsch is neither too far-fetched, nor too far away.

### **Chapter Nine**

Since independence, the ruling elites in Nigeria have convincingly propagated the idea that it is their country's 'manifest destiny' to lead Africa. The 1970s 'oil boom' and the frontline role the country played during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa gave credence to this conception. But since then, the internal crisis of governance that has plagued successive administrations in Nigeria has curtailed their ambition to take a more prominent role in the affairs of the continent. Other African leaders who might otherwise be sympathetic to a leadership role for Nigeria look at its internal problems both on the economic and political front, including the ineffectiveness of the military to deal with insurgency incidents, and choose to look the other way. It is to be noted that when it came to the major issue of African unity, Nigeria has been traditionally 'cautious' and difficult to convince. The latest continental trading initiative, the African Continental Free Trade

Area (AfCFTA) did not meet with the immediate approval of Nigeria, which held back on signing the agreement until one year after it came into force.

### **Chapter Ten**

This chapter focuses on how international events played into Nigeria's political activity and vice-versa. Particular attention was to the USA and the UK; the first being a successful federal system of government that Nigeria likes to hold out as a good example to emulate, and the second, being the former colonial master that bequeathed a lot of political and legal legacies some of which remain relevant presently. One of the two major events that have impacted on the domestic politics in Nigeria was the election of President Donald Trump in America, who, despite his reported disdain for the continent, enjoyed plenty of admiration as a maverick politician who had assumed the mantle of leadership in his country apparently from 'nowhere', and who had little time for the establishment. Trump was seen as a breath of fresh air, the likes of whom Nigeria, indeed, Africa could benefit from. The contrary position of the column meant it was sailing against the prevailing wind for much of the period under review. The second event, the 'Brexit' debate and election in the UK was a subject that baffled and confused many people watching from Nigeria. A lot of column inches needed to be devoted to simplifying both the argument and its attendant conundrum.