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Governance in Nigeria, 1999-2015: Opportunities and Challenges

Muhammad Awwal Adamu¹, Sule Magaji² & Yahaya Ismail³

¹Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Abuja, adamu.awwal@uniabuja.edu.ng, ORCID ID: 0009-0006-3370-8787

²Department of Economics, University of Abuja, sule.magaji@uniabuja.edu.ng, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9583-3993

³Department of Economics, University of Abuja, ismail.yahaya@uniabuja.edu.ng, ORCID ID: 0009-0006-7876-9524

Abstract

This study examines governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2015, a period marking the country's return to democratic rule after prolonged military intervention. Focusing on the administrations of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, and Goodluck Jonathan, the paper explores the opportunities and challenges that characterized governance during the era of Peoples' Democratic Party dominance. Using historical and descriptive analysis, the study interrogates key governance issues such as democratic consolidation, economic management, corruption, security challenges, infrastructural development, and public welfare. The findings reveal that although the return to democracy created significant opportunities for national development, institutional strengthening, and international reintegration, these prospects were largely undermined by pervasive corruption, ethno-religious conflicts, weak service delivery, insecurity, and poor accountability. Despite some policy initiatives such as anti-corruption agencies, debt relief, fuel subsidy reforms, and the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme, governance outcomes fell short of citizens' expectations. The study concludes that governance during the period did not substantially improve the living conditions of the majority of Nigerians, as poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and infrastructural decay persisted. The paper underscores the need for transparent leadership, institutional reforms, and inclusive governance to translate democratic rule into tangible development outcomes.

Keywords: Governance, Democracy, Nigeria, Opportunities, Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The year 1999, as the starting point for this paper is significant in so many ways. Y. B. Usman looked at it from the continental perspective and says...*the year 1999 is especially significant because it marks the end of the first century in our history when we are conquered, occupied and subjugated by foreigners, from one end of our continent to another.* (Usman, 1999:15) Coming back home in 1999 signifies a very important epoch in our collective history as Nigerians. The year marks Nigeria's return to democratic rule after about 3 decades of military rule. The choice of 2015 as the terminal point of this paper signifies the end of 16 years period when the People's Democratic Party was at the helm of affairs. Between 1999 and 2015, governance in Nigeria was under democratic leaders, dominated by the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), particularly at the federal level. This paper, therefore, examines the opportunities and challenges in governance in Nigeria from 1999-2015, focusing on the administrations of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, late Umaru Musa Yar'adua and Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The paper argues that during this period, governance in Nigeria faced colossal opportunities for moving the nation forward and enormous challenges, which made the task of nation-building a very daunting one. The paper concludes that governance during this period did not meet the yearnings and aspirations of the teeming population. The bulk of the populace remained poor, ravaged with diseases, hunger, poor electricity and water supply, inflation, insecurity and general lack of progress in the country.

In considering this paper, it is necessary to begin with a concise definition of some key concepts or terms, such as 'governance', 'democracy' or 'democratic rule', 'opportunities' and 'challenges'. To

begin with, governance is an essential element in the fundamental progress and development of any modern state, Nigeria inclusive. For example, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific defines governance as *the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)*. (UNESCO Asia and Pacific, 2011:1) Simply put, governance is the activity of governing. Governance relates to decisions that define expectations, grant power or verify performance. It also means what a government does. Jimada sums it up by saying that *...it is the continuous exercise of political authority over a political unit, and it is related to a decision that defines expectations, grant power and verify performance*. He further states that *Governance is the total exercise of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage societal problems and affairs*. (Jiada, 2010:3) In their discourse on governance, Istifanus (2006:6) and Oyobiare (2008: 10) respectively pointed out some of the features of governance thus;

law making and maintenance of law and order, protection and securing of territory and citizens, provision of social amenities, promotion of economic activities, formulation and implementation of policies, international relations, protection of fundamental human rights, among others.

In recent times, it is no longer possible to look at governance without seeing how it is. As a result, the terms “governance” and “good governance” are now increasingly used by scholars and organizations. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific argues that;

good governance assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account, and the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society. (UNESCO Asian and Pacific, 2011: 3)

UNESCAP contends that good governance has eight major characteristics: It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. (Ibid) Therefore, when all these features are absent in a governed area, it means there is the absence of good governance, and the absence of good governance has been one of the root causes of all evil within a particular country (Magaji et al., 2014).

With regards to democracy or democratic rule, the popular definition of democracy, which says *is the government of the people, by the people and for the people* suffices us here. In other words, democracy is a form of government in which the people determine who their representatives in government should be, through the conduct of free and fair elections (Magaji et al., 2006). In Nigeria and other democratic countries, such democratic offices include the office of the President and his Vice, State Governors, Local Government Council Chairmen/Chair-person, Ward Councillors, National and State Assembly members. This means that under democratic rule, respect must be given to people’s voices and aspirations; this is just as the people must be provided with dividends of democracy (Magaji et al., 2025). In comparison with a military junta, which is a period of complete aberration of democratic ethos, it is full of deprivation and degradation of the freedom and fundamental human rights of the civilian population. As rightly observed by Agi (2010:8), *military incursion into politics leads to the abolition of democratic institutions, the institutionalization of corruption, and suppression of all forms of opposition to the rule*. Whereas the military ruled with a decree, democracy is through the will of the people.

Other concepts considered in this paper are opportunities and challenges. Opportunities simply mean prospects or chances to do something or many things. In the context of this paper, it simply means opportunities which governance witnessed in Nigeria from 1999-2015, and which would have been utilized optimally in providing meaningful development, especially in the areas of economy, infrastructure and ensuring peaceful co-existent among Nigerians. On the other hand, challenges could mean hurdles, difficulties, obstacles, or standing on the path to pursuing something (Adenekan et al., 2025). In this context, challenges were the obstacles or forces that confronted governance in Nigeria from 1999-2015 and affected its drive in surmounting the many intractable problems that bedevilled Nigeria. These challenges included but were not limited to the sharia riots in Kaduna, indigenes and settlers crisis in Plateau, crisis in the oil-rich Niger-Delta region, the Boko Haram crisis in Borno that later spread to other parts of the north, and the most recent kidnappings and banditry.

The return to democratic rule in 1999 has been greeted with mixed feelings by Nigerians. While some assert that there is nothing different between the civilian leaders and their military counterparts, others are of the view that democracy is a complete departure from military rule. Those who hold the latter view must have been informed by the popular saying that the worst democracy is better than the best military. As for those who say there is nothing different between the democratic rulers with and the military juntas, it is probably due to their conviction that democracy in Nigeria has not paid the populace, it has not deliver to the peoples wishes, rather, it has been costing the nation so much from its treasury. Supporting this view, "Our Reporter" examines the financial cost of democracy in Nigeria, where it argues that billions of naira has been disbursed to INEC to conduct elections since 1999, with the results of those elections being questions. It also argues that huge amount of money has been expended to the political parties in the conduct of their party activities. Similarly, the article asserts that the legislatures, the Senators, Federal House of Representative members and Representatives of the 36 States Assemblies have caused the nation so much finance. It puts the total number of the Legislatures to 1459, Senators-109, Federal House of Reps-360 and States Assembly members-990. (Our Reporter, 2010) This financial cost according to "Our Reporter" no doubt made some Nigerians to assert that we are not a democracy. (Ibid)

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, these opportunities and challenges abound in the country. In fact, most, if not all were already present on the eve of 1999. These opportunities and challenges only gathered momentum, with some changing dimensions only to blow with full force as from 1999, affecting the performance of governance both positively and negatively.

As earlier noted, between 1999 and 2015, governance, especially at the federal level has been dominated by the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). It is therefore not surprising that during this period; three (3) democratically elected Presidents were all of the PDP stock. These were; Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, late Alhaji Musa Yar'aduwa and Dr. Good Luck Ebele Jonathan. For ease of analysis and convenient, the paper is to be discussed under the three Presidents.

Prelude to return to democracy in Nigeria

The road to return to democracy in Nigeria which ushered in the Fourth Republic began following the demise of General Sani Abacha, the Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces in 1998. (Van Der Veen, 2004: 332) This incident dramatically blew the wind of democracy, which could not be ignored or taken lightly, as Nigerians have long been yearning for end to military rule. Military rule was viewed as a force undermining the growth of democracy. General Abdul Salam Abubakar succeeded Abacha, and following strong pressure both home and abroad to set the ground for Nigeria's return to democracy, Abdul Salam designed and implemented the agenda for transition to democracy, culminating in the conduct of the 1999 elections, which brought into office former military Head of States, General Olusegun Obasanjo as the President. It could be remembered that Obasanjo too, when he was in *Khakhi* in 1979, organized, conducted elections and handed over power to President Alhaji Shehu Shagari when the Second Republic commenced only to be terminated in 1983. Obasanjo was sworn in as President and Commander in Chief of Nigeria's armed forces in a colorful ceremony at the newly constructed, magnificent Eagle Square in Abuja, the new nation's capital. This feat, no doubt terminated military rule in Nigeria, thanks to the effort of General Abdul Salam, who did not turn a deaf ear to calls for the return of Nigeria to democracy. This ended about three (3) decades of intermittent and 16 years of consecutive military rule in Nigeria.

Governance in Nigeria during President Olusegun Obasanjo, 1999-2007: Opportunities and Challenges

President Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office on the 29th May, 1999, (The Economist, 2000: 3) amidst numerous problems. These included stagnant economy, deterioration of most of the country's democratic institutions and infrastructural deficits. (US State Department: 6) However, the fact cannot be ruled out that the period was also marked by some armful opportunities for the job ahead, Nigeria being a country blessed with enormous gifts of nature.

In the first place, the return to democracy itself was a very remarkable feat, an opportunity missed in Nigeria almost 16 years before 1999, and which President Obasanjo should have fully grabbed during his two terms in the presidency. Throughout his first four (4) year tenure Obasanjo travelled abroad visiting mostly western countries and the United States. He argued that the visits were necessary,

meant to redeem back the dotted image and revalidate the country's position in the international arena. However, this was only an aspect of governance, which the President spent too much time at the detriment of other problems bedeviling the nation and thus needing urgent and holistic redresses. That period should have been spent consolidating the return to democracy, as by the time democracy is consolidated and sustained, the country's image and position in the global arena would have been regained naturally. Nevertheless, Obasanjo succeeded in winning the support of some western countries, such as Britain and the United States of America, to mention just a few.

The first tenure of President Obasanjo regime grabbed yet another opportunity, as it received international aid and oil prices kept on coming. By implication, huge amount of money entered government coffers, and was therefore not lacking funds to finance its development projects. With a growth rate of four to five per cent a year, the economy appeared very promising, thanks to the rise in the prices of oil. But when the prices began to depreciate, the government found itself in a dilemma to source for fund. This was not surprising because of the country's over-reliance on oil, and the failure of successive governments to diversify other sectors of the economy such as agriculture, extracting, and manufacturing sectors, which were highly promising before they suffered utter neglect following the oil boom in the 1970s. (Njokwu, 2001; Musa et al., 2024). Before President Obasanjo came to power in 1999, Nigeria's GDP has not been appreciable. It was just three (3) per cent between 1999 and 2000. However, with his assumption in 1999, foreign reserves rose from 2 billion dollars in 1999 to 43 billion dollars in 2007 before he left office (Obasanjo, 2007).

One of the challenges of governance during President Obasanjo administration was corruption. Although corruption was not new in Nigeria, as at 1999 the new democratic environment inherited it from successive military governments, and the menace continued unabated. Simply put, as from 1999, corruption continued to eat deep into the fabric of high government functionaries and other top ranking civil servants in Nigeria. Thus, Obasanjo declared fighting corruption the stated aim of his first term. But despite his resolve to deal with the scourge, it persisted unabated. Money meant for executing government projects aimed at improving peoples' standard of living were squandered by a few. To fight the menace of corruption, President Obasanjo was said to have required all new Ministers to follow a course organized by Transparency International, an International NGO set up to tackle corruption around the globe. (Van Der Veen, 333) Subsequently, Obasanjo established the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and later, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) as government institutions to deal with corruption and other related financial cases.

But in spite of these measures, corruption continued and for the fact that Obasanjo had been a faithful supporter of transparency international for years, (Ibid) the organization had no choice but to keep Nigeria on the list of most corrupt countries, during his term of office. (Ibid) Corruption had a huge impact, ranging from a poor international image for the country, to poverty in many areas. However, Obasanjo's fight against corruption had been perceived in different ways. While some see it as a welcome development, others believe the agencies (ICPC & EFCC) were established to indict and crush the people opposed to the Obasanjo regime. This must have made the chairman of EFCC, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu to have said:

The assurance I can give the nation is that for me in the EFCC, we approach our duties with the highest sense of responsibility and patriotism, determined to confront the perpetrators of these crimes, headlong and fish them out where ever they may be.(Rufa'i and Usman, 2010:4)

Despite of this comment, people were quick to assert that the anti-corruption crusade was not a holistic one, arising from the fact that most of the convicted persons were those opposed to President Obasanjo, with many among his friends and close associates within the party and who were accused of siphoning monies remained untouchables. (Africa Today 2007) Thus, according to Rufa'i and Usman, *the anti-corruption crusade of the Obasanjo regime was a lost battle*, (Ibid:4) although the magnitude of the crime has reduced.

Another challenge faced by the Obasanjo administration, which saddled the country on the brink of collapse was the menace of violence. Prior to his coming to power as civilian President, the violence was more prevalent in the North, but later began to manifest in the south. In any case, government has been widely criticized for its inability to checkmate the prevalence of violence. Ethno-religious crisis had

its root in the colonial period and extended into the post colonial period with its impact fully manifesting as from 1999. The spate of violence has been threatening the corporate existence of the Nigerian State. A country of over 250 ethnic groups professing different religions, living in different socio-political organizations, knitted together by the British colonialist to form an entity in 1914 could not hold together since independence. The late Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, and Premier of Northern Region, once remarked; *By understanding our differences, we can build a strong and virile nation; the things that unite us are more than the things that divide us.* Nigeria's diversity could not provide the much-needed unity, it has been suspicion, mistrust and distrust among the people, which has developed since the colonial period. By 1999, the crisis manifested with wanton loss of lives and destruction of property. Okpoh said it all when he says the cause of the crisis was

arising due largely from the plural nature of the Nigerian nation and particularly the structural imbalance within and between its constituent units and the competition between social groups for power and scarce but allotable resources, political instability has continued to mitigate the prospects for meaningful development in the country. (Okpoh, 2010:12)

Since 1999, the country has witnessed so many ethno-religious violence, as well as youth restiveness and violence in the oil rich Niger-Delta region. There was violence in the North following the re-introduction of sharia, where the non-Muslims resident in the North viewed the sharia as a threat to their lives. But as Liman Chiroma puts it, *Sharia in those areas where it is so far introduced is nether aimed at curtailing the fundamental rights of non-Muslims nor the imposition of Islam as State religion.* (The Guardian, 2001) But in spite of this, and similar declarations, the crisis loomed on, and between February and May 2000, over 1000 people died in rioting over the introduction of the Sharia. It attracted reprisal in the south when Muslims from the north were killed. Ethnic crisis too had been taking root since 1999, in such place like Southern Kaduna, Jos in Plateau State, in Tiv land with the Jukun. In the South too, it happened in such place like Ife and the Modakeke, Aguleri and Umeleri which were however, intra-ethnic in nature, as it involved a lineage against another (Abubakar, 2008) and a group against another within an ethnic group, etc. In these crises, people were killed and property destroyed.

Obasanjo ended and began his 2nd term in 2003 with fresh violent crisis in almost all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. As Vander Veen puts it, *under Obasanjo, Nigeria found itself trapped in a downward spiral of violence that threatened its stability,* (Van Der Veen, 334)

Then there was militancy in the oil-rich Niger-Delta, where the youth of the region decided to take the law into their hands, believing that the region, which has been producing the wealth of the country since the 1970s, is not given fair treatment in the provision of social services and improvement of the people's standard of living. As a result, oil pipelines were vandalized; Oil Company workers were captured and kept as hostages, with huge ransom demanded for their release. The regime responded by cracking down on the militants in places like Odi in Bayelsa state. That has not in any way solved the problem. In addition to the effort of the oil companies, in providing infrastructure and employment to the youth of the Niger-Delta, the government also approved 13 per cent of federal oil revenues for the region, among other concessions meant to provide succour to the people (Ibrahim et al., 2025).

Other challenges the two-year term of Obasanjo faced were the inability to tackle poverty, ignorance, diseases, among others. In fact, the greatest misdeed of the Obasanjo administration was his attempt to continue in office after spending his two-term tenure of 4 years each, in the much talked "Third term Agenda." His plan to modify the constitution to actualize his dream was not met with success, as the National Assembly refused to ratify the bill.¹ Consequently, Obasanjo conducted an election, which brought the late Alhaji Musa Yar'aduwa into office as the Second President of the Fourth Republic.

Governance in Nigeria during President Alhaji Musa Yar'aduwa: Opportunities and Challenges, 2007-2010

Yar'aduwa assumed office on the 29th May, 2007, following the 21st April, 2007 amidst widespread condemnation of an election said to be marred with fraudulence. However the biggest

¹ *Ibid.*, p.11

opportunity of the Yar'aduwa administration was the sustainability of democracy. For the first time in the history of the country, Nigeria witnessed a smooth transition from the two term of four year civilian regime of President Obasanjo to the civilian regime of President Musa Yar'aduwa.

The greatest challenge of the late President Yar'aduwa short-lived administration was indeed his ill-health. It should be noted that even before the 2007 general elections; Umar Yar'aduwa had shown signs of illness. He was seen in several occasions at political rallies and campaigns collapsing, and taking abroad for medical attention. Therefore after election and his assumption into office his ill-health continued to deteriorate. Unlike Obasanjo, who made excessive travels abroad for redeeming the dotted image of the country and recover Nigeria's lost position in the global theatre, Yar'aduwa's many travels were due to his ill-health. Up to his death in 2010, Yar'aduwa spent more time looking after his health than concentrating fully in the act of governance. What exacerbated the low performance of his administration was the inability of his Vice, Goodluck Jonathan to fully pilot Government business.

However, one of the greatest achievements of the Yar'aduwa administration in spite of his ill-health was his ability to deal affectively with fuel crisis. The long queues associated with petroleum filling stations across the country became a thing of the past. Vehicles no longer wait more than necessary at the filling stations, thanks to the numerous NNPC mega stations scattered in all the states of the federation, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. This measure significantly contributed in solving the problem of hoarding the petroleum substance and selling it to black marketers for excessive profits.

In attempting to solve the problem of the Niger-Delta region, late Yar'aduwa faced the bull by the horn. Apart from the 13 per cent derivation earlier approved by his predecessor, Obasanjo, Yar'aduwa also sought to make the militias feel a sense of belonging, by introducing the Federal Government Amnesty programme, and call for the militias to lay down their arms for employment opportunity from the rehabilitation centers. Before his death, hundreds of militia groups in the Niger-Delta region obliged. Yar'aduwa went a step further by establishing a separate ministry for the Niger-Delta region, with a minister appointed to head the ministry, whose duty is to look at the problems affecting the region holistically, which has been the absence of social amenities like electricity supply, portable water supply, youth restiveness, due to lack of job and destruction of the people economic activities (Magaji & Adamu, 2011), such as fishing, as the oil exploration has been polluting the waters of the region. It should be noted that since the discovery of oil in commercial quantity, the region has generated hundreds of billions dollars, providing the country with a large chunk of its G.D.P, over 90% of its export earnings and almost all its tax revenues. (The Economist:8)

Another greatest challenge of governance during the late Yar'aduwa administration was the spate of violence, which he inherited from his predecessor, Obasanjo. This had blight the performance of Yar'aduwa administration. Among the violence that had the most devastating effects were the incessant clashes between the so called "settlers," the Hausa and the "indigenes," their hosts in Jos, Plateau State, between 2009 and 2010 leading to killings and vandalism. (Abubakar, 2010)

In late 2009, governance under Yar'aduwa was yet threatened with the emergence in Borno State of an Islamic religious group known as *Boko Haram*, which literary means western education is prohibited. It attracted membership not only from states neighboring Borno, Yobe and Bauchi, but also neighboring countries in the West African sub region, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Since their appearance in Borno, they have been engaged in clashes with the Nigerian Police leading to their death, with many apprehended and imprisoned in Maiduguri, the State capital, Damaturu and Bauchi, awaiting investigation trials. (Ibid)

In 2010, each day Yar'aduwa health became complicated. As a result, he was taken to a Saudi Hospital and never to return alive. He died on the 5th May, 2010. His deputy, Good Luck Jonathan succeeded him as the 3rd President of the 4th Republic.

Governance in Nigeria during President Goodluck Jonathan: Opportunities and Challenges, 2010 to date

Good luck, Jonathan became the President on 6th May 2010, just a day after the passing away of Yar'aduwa. The greatest opportunity in governance since the assumption of President Jonathan was the circumstance that brought him to power. It was through natural process and not through an election. With the death of Yar'aduwa, the constitution worked in his favour as the next in command. In fact,

looking at President Jonathan's political life, observers conclude that all the positions he has been occupying were through natural processes. What this means is that Mr. Jonathan did not contest for any political office before becoming the President.

Jonathan has the opportunity to win the support and confidence of Nigerians. But coming in to power at a time when the next general elections were near, he could not but indicate his intention to run for the presidency. This to some respect affected governance in Nigeria, even through some successes has been recorded. Jonathan builds up on where his former boss stopped in so many ways such as the stability in availability of the petroleum resources particularly fuel and gas, approval of some projects like roads, among others.

However, the serious threat to governance in the Jonathan administration has been the continuation of violence across the country, particularly in Jos and the returned of the activities of the militants, who expressed fears and suspicion for the continuation of the amnesty program instituted by the late Yar'aduwa regime. The Boko Haram threat also intensified, causing so much threat to people's life (Zailani et al., 2025). After the crackdown of the group during the Yar'aduwa's administration, the group has refused to stop their dreaded acts, as they gathered momentum, reorganized themselves and employed various tactics in causing havoc to people in the places they operate. They engaged in "hit and run" exercises, killing police men and any one that opposed their stand. In 2010, the group members have stormed a prison in Bauchi state, armed with sub-machine weapons, killed some warders and freed many of their members detained in the prison.

But the biggest opportunity of Jonathan administration was to win the support of Nigerians who have reservations about the conduct of elections since 1999 which were said to be characterized by scam and other forms of malpractices. Being a no "do or die" politician, Jonathan ensured the conduct of the April, 2011 election to be the most freest and fairest in the history of the nation, In the campaigns and other fora before the elections, Jonathan and his deputy Sambo reiterated their stand to conduct the most credible election not only in Nigeria but in the entire continental Africa and the world at large.

Disappointment in Governance in Nigeria since 1999: A General Assessment

A golden opportunity was realized and expectations were high by the people of Nigeria both home and abroad when the country returned to democratic rule in 1999. Many hoped that the democratically elected Presidents beginning from President Obasanjo to President Jonathan would seize the opportunity to surmount the many intractable problems that have bedeviled the country, especially the lack of unity of its people. But to many, the politicians, especially Obasanjo did little. In the words of Akinwumi (2010;22) *Obasanjo failed*. As a result, those hopes were dashed, and the people felt disappointed. Among the obvious failures of President Obasanjo's administration was his support for, and facilitating many illegal executive actions and ignoring judgments against himself and his government including judgment delivered by the Supreme Court. Obasanjo is also said to have illegally withheld funds due for Lagos State Local Governments for more than two years after the Supreme Court ordered its immediate release. Obasanjo is believed to have supported the illegal impeachment of several corrupted State Governors which the Supreme Court also reversed. Subsequently, the National Judiciary Council demonstrated its independence by dismissing several judges who connived with the executive to undermine the constitution during Obasanjo's regime.

Other failures of the two term of Obasanjo administration were the failure to provide uninterrupted power supply to Nigerians, having spent billions of Naira towards that.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that governance in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015 was marked by a paradox of immense opportunities and persistent challenges. While the return to democratic rule created a favorable environment for political participation, economic growth, and international legitimacy, successive administrations failed to fully harness these opportunities for sustainable national development. Issues such as corruption, insecurity, weak institutions, ethno-religious conflicts, and poor service delivery significantly constrained governance effectiveness. Consequently, the dividends of democracy remained limited, as a large proportion of the population continued to experience poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and social instability.

In light of these findings, the study recommends the strengthening of democratic institutions to enhance transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Anti-corruption efforts should be comprehensive, impartial, and insulated from political interference. Government should also prioritize economic diversification, infrastructural development, and inclusive policies that address regional inequalities and youth unemployment. Furthermore, sustained investment in security, conflict resolution mechanisms, and good governance practices is essential to consolidate democracy and ensure that governance delivers meaningful benefits to the Nigerian populace.

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