DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENTINDEX IN AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA AND MAURITIUS

Ekan Willy AKENZUA
Department of Political Science
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
willy.akenzua@uniben.edu

Ewaen Petra FASHOLA
Department of Political Science
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
petraogie@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

While democracy is generally seen as the solution to underdevelopment, existential realities show the contrary in Africa. Besides manifest hardship, poverty and widespread inequality, the African continent has had its democratic experiment truncated by military juntas. This has arisen as a surprise on the continent fuelling wider argument of the nexus between democracy and development in Africa. This paper titled democracy and human development index in Africa: a comparative analysis of Nigeria and Mauritius explored the synergy (nexus) between democracy and development on the African continent. It relied on secondary and official data to mirror the impact of democracy on the developmental experience in Nigeria and Mauritius. Itadopts the most different system comparative design as a control for confounding factors. The qualitative comparative analysis of both countries revealed an interesting twist to the argument of whether or not democracy births human development in Africa. While democracy appears to have strengthened institutions and development experience in Mauritius the reverse is the case in Nigeria. The paper further found out that the ability of democracy to birth human development depends on institutional capability that stems from good governance in the country under focus. This explains the disparate experience in the democracy human development narrative in both Mauritius and Nigeria. This paper consequently recommends that the practice of democracy must be rooted in the rule of law to strengthen institutions to drive the development process in Africa.

Keywords: Democracy, Developmental state, Good governance, Liberal democracy

INTRODUCTION

The notion thatdemocracy is the foundation for development is highly contestable (Ake, 1994; Nyamnjoh, 2005).Evenmore so, whendevelopment is defined in terms of human development index (Todaro and Smith, 2009). Democracy is a critical component of liberal internationalism and constitutes the core of the liberal capitalist school (Osei-Hwedie, 2000). Privileging this argument, liberal capitalist scholar Fukuyama, for instance, opines that

democracy, liberal democracy to be precise is the end of all political and economic development for humankind (Burchill et al., 2001). The Bretton Wood institutions advance it to the global south, which is categorised as developing countries, as the panacea for their development and integration into the global economy as well as the condition for access to financial facilities. While the United Nations and the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) have argued that development is less likely to succeed in the long run without a democracy than in any other system (Tommasoli& Sisk, 2013). They also further argue that democracy and development mutually necessitate each other. The democracy-development nexus has generated a plethora of heated discourses and liberal democracy in particular has come under heavy criticism as an embodiment of contradictions that attempts the attainment of an ideal ideology, by the convergence of worthwhile values of freedom, justice, human right amongst others and a free economic system (Schlag, 2023). This economic system Schlag argues is one that privileges private ownership of property and absolves the state of any form of regulatory responsibility or intervention that may provide guidance which in the long run can help to cushion the negative impact of market forces on the people.

This position has been vehemently refuted by scholars that democracy cannot be universally applied because its impact and effects differ from society to society (Harrison& Boyd, 2018). Those of African descent argue that in addition to not being universally applicable, democracy cannot only be forced on Africa, and if it must be practiced at all, Africans must themselves negotiate and determine the terms and conditions of democracy that best suits the peculiarities of their society (Ake, 1994; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Obi, 2006; Larok, 2011). Obi (2006) in his critic of liberal internationalism (globalization) by the global west, describes this universalisation as an attempt to internationalise both the market ideology and political culture of the west. Thishe said represents a process of universal'hegemonization' and not homogenization and accounts for why the impact of liberal democracy on Africa and African states has not been uniform. For instance, despite democratising since 1999 in the face of an uncertain democratic future, development in Nigeria appears elusive amid severely stunted human development index and crisis of democratic values (Eghweree&Akenzua, 2023).A similar situation exist with many African states like Mali and Gabon which were once democratic but have soon sank into autocratic military rule owing to the elusive hope of development that democracy seem to promise. This is in contrast with Mauritius, which, though faced with similar constraints as Nigeria and other African states, has made steady progress in attaining sustained equitable growth through the instrumentality of a welfare state that has consolidated democracy (Sandbrook, 2005). Today Mauritius ranks between first and second in Africa on the democracy table and is described as a full democracy (EIU Report, 2023; V Dem report, 2023). This it is argued is because amongst other things it operates a system that respects basic political freedom and civil liberties, breeds the right political culture, and allows for the independence of the media and judiciary. Nigeria on the other hand ranks 22 on the table and is described as a hybrid democracy where elections are characterized by substantial irregularities with weak civil society and rule of law, wide spread corruption and harassment of the media. These inherent weaknesses also reflect in its political

culture and participation as well as a judiciary that lacks the necessary independence to carry out its statutory functions (EIU Report, 2023; V Dem report, 2023).Whereas, when it comes to human development Mauritius ranks the highest in Africa with a human capital development index of 0.802, whereas Nigeria ranks 29 as low with a human development index of 0.535.This leads one to ask the questions; isdevelopment always a consequence of democracy? Why do some states in Africa which practice democracy fail to exemplify this argument? And why do some other non-practicing democracies in Africa show development?

This paper on the basis of the most different system comparative analysis of Nigeria and Mauritius examined how democracy anddevelopment has fared in Africa. Both Nigeria and Mauritius are located in Africa, West and East Africa respectively.Both share a common history of colonization (a familiar explanation for underdevelopment in African discourse). However, they are highly different on many grounds. These dissimilarities include that Nigeria is divided along ethnic lines, while Mauritius is divided along racial lines. Both countries possess different configurations of democratic governance. Mauritius exhibits strong electoral institutions, effective government, democratic political culture and active participation where civil liberties reinforce one another to produce a stable democracy. Nigeria, on the other hand shows weakness in government effectiveness and political culture where civil liberties interact with electoral challenges, resulting in a hybrid democracy. Nigeria being a mainland with Africa's largest economy and population suffers a low human development index, while Mauritius is an island with a small population and economy.

The choice of these two cases for comparison is to help control confounding factors. In its analysis this paper relied on five (5) selected indicators of democracy that include electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties for its comparison of Nigeria and Mauritius. This paper also utilised three (3) indicators of human development index which include; life expectancy rate, literacy and standard of living as measure for development in its comparative analysis.

This paper comprises five sections. The first section, conceptualizes democracy and development which form the basis of this discourse of this study. The second part examines both the interplay and the current state of affairs of democracy and development in Africa. The third part situates the discourse of this paper within two theoretical frameworks by utilizing the liberal democratic theory to explain the condition of democracy and development in Nigeria, especially in the light of its failures and the democratic developmental theory to examine the successes of democracy in creating the needed environment for economic growth and sustainable development in Mauritius. The fourth section examines the conditions of both countries and compares what different account for the divergent results in form of development both countries have recorded. The final section of this paper discusses its conclusions and proffers recommendations for African states based on the Mauritius example of success.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The relationship between democracy and development remains one of the most enduring assumptions within liberal political theory. Liberal scholarship generally advances the argument that democratic governance creates the institutional conditions necessary for economic growth, human development, accountability, and social progress. However, empirical realities in Africa present a more complex picture that challenges the presumed causal relationship between democracy and development.

Across the continent, only a very small proportion of states classified as full democracies exhibit corresponding levels of economic and human development. Conversely, a significant number of states categorized as flawed or struggling democracies, and even some authoritarian regimes, have recorded comparable or, in certain cases, superior human development outcomes. This divergence raises important questions about the validity and universality of the democracy-development nexus.

The first gap emerges from the observation that several non-democratic or semi-democratic African states perform relatively well on indicators of human development. Such cases weaken the claim that development is exclusive to democratic governance and suggest that alternative political arrangements may also facilitate developmental outcomes. Consequently, the assumption that democracy constitutes the sole or superior pathway to development becomes increasingly contestable.

The second gap concerns the inconsistent developmental outcomes observed among democratic states themselves. While democracy may contribute to development under certain conditions, evidence from several African countries indicates that the presence of democratic institutions does not automatically translate into economic progress or improvements in human welfare. In many instances, democratic governance has coexisted with persistent poverty, inequality, weak institutions, and low human development indicators. This inconsistency challenges deterministic arguments that portray democracy as a universal catalyst for development.

These contradictions expose a significant theoretical and empirical gap in the democracy-development literature. They suggest that the relationship between democracy and development is neither linear nor automatic, but may be contingent upon a range of contextual, institutional, and socio-economic factors. It is against this backdrop that this study interrogates the proposition that democracy engenders development and seeks to explain why developmental outcomes vary across African states despite the adoption of democratic governance.

THE DEMOCRACY-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS: THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

The two concepts of democracy and development as they relate to Africa have continued to be subjects of heated discourse across both academia and policy-making circles, generating

questions that border on whether each necessitates the other, if democracy is the best-suited system of government for development in Africa, as well as the best way to harness whatever gains there are in democracy. These questions and thematic discourses are particularly important given the spate of sit-tightism, mass protests, and military takeovers in erstwhile democratic states like Mali, Chad, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and most recently Gabon.

The pendulum of academic discourse regarding the causality or correlation of the concepts of democracy and development is one that swings between two major schools. The first believes that democracy and development are both consequence of one another. It is on this premise that the theoretical arguments of AmartyaSen are based. He argues that freedom, which is representative of democracy, is both the principal end and the basic means of development (Sen, 1999). And development cannot be said to have occurred unless people have the freedom to decide the kind of life they place value on. Hence, there cannot be freedom or true democracy without development (Sen, 2006; Tommasoli and Sisk, 2013). This definition focuses on the individual and his capabilities as opposed to social ones. They see poverty as the deprivation of men's basic capabilities and argue that democracy does not slow development but rather is the basis and foundation for economic development.

However, critics have refuted this argument, saying that the fact that people possess full democratic rights does not guarantee their exercise of those rights in a manner that will bring them any good; rather, they are most likely to exercise them in a way that will endanger their own good. In furtherance of this argument, they believe (Sen, 2006) that democratic states don't necessarily tend towards development because their citizens who hold democratic rights can hinder policies that, in their opinion, do not seem to bring any short-term real prosperity. To this argument, scholars of the democracy-development nexus admit that the exercise of these democratic rights may portend grave dangers but refuse to see it as sufficient to jettison democracy and their position.

The second is based on Lee Kuan Yew's model of development for Singapore, which privileges the denial of rights whether political or civil in nature as an acceptable approach towards economic development and the greater good and wealth of all (Sen, 1999).Lee Kuan Yewdescribed the proclivity of democracy towards encouraging indiscipline and conducts that are disorderly in nature as general threats to development. Hence he argued in favor of the need to be open to whatever approaches and systems as conditions may demand to attain and safe guard development(Bhagwati, 1995; Kisekka, &Tshimba, 2017).

But theorists on Africa such as Claude Ake (1994) argues that for democracy to succeed in Africa, it must be a product of the ordinary people, who will themselves, determine their participation, not as prescribed by western democracies. This position is further advanced by Larok (2011), who says that Africans must negotiate a form of democracy that best suits their reality, society, and context. On their part, Harrison and Boyd (2018) query the claim of the

universal applicability of democracy and argue that the true measure of democracy is the degree to which the people (the ruled) can influence the government.

Data from Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU, 2023) reveals however that only one country in Africa is a full democracy, while the total number of countries that practice some form of democracy is 24, which is representative of 44.44% of the total number of countries in Africa and lower than fifty percent (50%). Meanwhile, the total number of authoritarian states is 27, signifying fifty percent (50%) of the total number of countries. It may appear from the recent spate of military coups in Africa that African states are beginning to slide into autocratic rule and "de-democratise" with arguments that the extant democratic governments fail to address question of development through poverty reduction measures, tackling of unemployment and improvement of the quality and standard of living of the people (see Table 1). The EIU global democracy index categorises states into four (4) broad groups of full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes;

Full democracies consist of countries in where there is high regard forbasic freedoms whether political or civil in nature with a conducive political culture that allows for the thriving of democracy. They also have functioning and functional governments, and the system allows for the independence of the judiciary and a diverse media as well as efficacious checks and balance.Flawed democracies on the other hand may have regard for basic liberties and their elections free and fair, they are however fraught with challenges like abuse of media freedom, weaknesses in governance which reflect in poor political participation and political culture.Hybrid regimes are regimes that do not have free or fair elections because of severe irregularities. They are characterisedby weak political culture and subjugation ofopposition parties. Other easily identifiable characteristics of these regimes include corruption, no value for rule of law, poor political participation with no independence of either the media or judiciary.

The fourth and final group is the authoritarian regimeswhich are classified as outright dictatorship. These regimes are characterized by proscription of political pluralism with little or no formal institutions. Within such regimes elections rarely occur and should there occur there are never free and fair. Furthermore they infringe and abuse allforms of civil liberties with high repressive policies towards the media for government criticism and give no room for judicial independence. The EIU categorisation however fails to capture all the states as this gap invariably creates a fifth group that can be classified as uncategorised.

This classification of the top ten democracies in Africa reveals that only one country (Mauritius) is a full democracy. Others who seemingly qualify on the list are somewhat pseudo democracies where only certain features of democracy are noticeable. This only suggests that none except Mauritius can be satisfactorily referred to as a democracy.

Development is another critical question in Africa. And literature is replete with discourses and attempts at presenting the most suitable and appropriate blueprint forGross Domestic

Product (GDP) indicators of development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) has however derived the Human Development Index (HDI) based on three (3) indicators, namely;

i) Life expectancy rate (ii) literacy (iii) standard of living.

With these indicators the UNDP derived three categorisation of the development of states. They include high, medium and low human development.

Statistics on the HDI of the same top ten democracies who cannot be classified as proper democracies reveal that the majority of the countries that are not proper democracies have a high HDI value (see table 3). This can only suggest that their democracy status does not directly affect their development performance, which can substantiate the argument that development is not necessarily hinged exclusively on democracy.

A comparison of data(see tables 2 and 4)on the top ten democracies in Africa and most developed countries in Africa respectively reveal that only three countries that are classified top ten democracies in Africa fall within the top ten most developed countries in Africa. Data therefore establishes that democracy does not necessarily or directly translate to development in Africa.This corroborates Ake's (1994) and Larok (2011)argument that democracy cannot be dictated to Africans, as such form of democracy cannot do Africa any good except Africa and Africans negotiate a democracy that best serves their society and context. However, Mauritius, one of the case studies of this paper has remained first in categorisation as both the most democratic and most developed country in Africa necessitating Ake and Larok's argument that "africanisation" of democracy is needed to make democracy workable in Africa.Others African states (see table 2) that are among the top 10 democracies in Africa include South Africa and Botswana.

The statistical data on the top 10 most developed states in Africa (see table 3) reveal the following;

Four (4) of the 10 top most developed countries in Africa are under authoritarian regimes, while two (2) are hybrid democracies, another two (2) are flawed democracies, only one (1) is a full democracy while last one (1) is uncategorized.This accentuates the following arguments;

(a) that development is possible in autocratic states

(b) democracy as put forward by the international financial institutions in Africa has not proven to produce development except in few instances in like Mauritius while the others are not full democracies

(c) for democracy to lead to development it may require a domestication process what Larok (2011) describes as africanization of democracy

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper relies on the structural functionalism and developmental state theories to explain and compare democracy and development in the case study of Nigeria and Mauritius. While structural functionalism is utilized to describe the Nigerian state, the democratic developmental state theory mirrors the Mauritian state strides in both democracy and development.

Structural functionalism theory

This studyadopts the systems model oftheStructural Functionalist theory, developed by Gabriel Almond to explain the failure of the democracy-development nexus in Nigeria. Almond's framework provides a robust analytical tool for examining how political institutions perform functions that sustain or undermine political stability, democratic consolidation, and socio-economic development. Unlike classical institutional approaches that focus primarily on formal governmental structures, Almond conceptualizes politics as a system of interrelated structures performing functions necessary for the survival and effectiveness of the political system. He argues that every political system, irrespective of its level of development, possesses structures such as the executive, legislature, judiciary, political parties, bureaucracy, interest groups, and the mass media. Although these structures may differ across societies in terms of complexity, organization, and historical evolution, they perform similar systemic functions necessary for political survival and societal development. To facilitate comparative analysis, Almond substitutes traditional concepts such as *state*, *power*, and *office* with *political system*, *functions*, and *roles* respectively, thereby emphasizing what institutions do rather than merely how they are constituted.

Central to Almond's framework is the distinction between input functionsandoutput functions. Input functions comprise political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, and political communication. These processes transmit societal demands, values, and expectations into the political system. Output functions, on the other hand, consist of rule-making, rule-application, and rule-adjudication, through which governments formulate, implement, and enforce public policies. The effectiveness of output functions depends largely on the quality of the inputs received by the political system. Consequently, political outcomes are not independent phenomena but reflections of the character and quality of systemic inputs.

For the purpose of this study**,** political socialization and recruitment constitute the principal input variables through which Nigeria's developmental challenges can be explained. Political socialization refers to the process by which citizens acquire political values, norms, attitudes, and orientations toward the state and its institutions, while political recruitment concerns the mechanisms through which individuals are selected into positions of political leadership and public authority. In well-functioning political systems, these processes generate civic values, democratic norms, accountability, meritocracy, and national commitment. However, where political socialization reproduces ethnic loyalties, patron-client relations, corruption, and weak

civic consciousness, and where recruitment is dominated by patronage, godfatherism, and prebendal politics, the political system is likely to produce dysfunctional outputs.

Applying Almond's input–output model, this study argues that Nigeria's developmental failure is fundamentally rooted in deficiencies within its political socialization and recruitment processes. Since independence, the Nigerian political system has been characterized by weak civic education, ethnicized political identities, elite domination, patronage networks, and the recruitment of political actors based largely on personal loyalty, sectional considerations, and access to resources rather than competence and public service orientation. These dysfunctional inputs shape the nature of governance and directly influence the quality of policy outputs.

The consequences of these defective inputs become evident in the output function of rule adjudication**,** which this study operationalizes as a critical explanatory variable. Rule adjudication refers to the activities of judicial and quasi-judicial institutions responsible for interpreting laws, resolving disputes, enforcing constitutional provisions, and ensuring accountability within the political system. In a developmental state, an independent and effective adjudicatory system promotes the rule of law, protects property rights, checks executive excesses, resolves political conflicts impartially, and enhances public trust in state institutions. Conversely, where political recruitment produces elites who seek to capture state institutions and where political socialization normalizes corruption and impunity, adjudicatory institutions become vulnerable to political interference, selective justice, and weak enforcement of legal norms.

Nigeria's persistent governance challenges can therefore be understood as the outcome of a dysfunctional input–output relationship. Weak political socialization and defective recruitment processes generate political actors who often prioritize personal, ethnic, and factional interests over national development. These actors subsequently influence judicial appointments, undermine institutional autonomy, and weaken the effectiveness of rule adjudication. The resulting outputs include poor accountability, electoral disputes, policy inconsistency, corruption, weak contract enforcement, and limited citizen confidence in state institutions. Such outcomes inhibit economic transformation, democratic consolidation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development.

This framework also provides a basis for comparative analysis between Nigeria and Mauritius. While both countries inherited colonial institutions and operate democratic systems, Mauritius has generally developed more effective mechanisms of political socialization and recruitment that emphasize merit, institutional accountability, civic participation, and national integration. These positive inputs have contributed to stronger rule-adjudication mechanisms, greater institutional effectiveness, and better governance outcomes. As noted by scholars of Mauritian development, state institutions in Mauritius function in close coordination with societal institutions, creating a governance framework capable of translating societal demands into effective public policies and developmental outcomes(Lange, 2003). Consequently, the

quality of systemic inputs in Mauritius has produced outputs that support political stability, economic growth, and human development.

The theoretical proposition underpinning this study, therefore, is that the developmental divergence between Nigeria and Mauritius can be explained through variations in political system inputs and their effects on output functions**.** Specifically, the study contends that Nigeria's developmental failure is largely a consequence of defective political socialization and recruitment processes which generate weak rule-adjudication outcomes, whereas Mauritius has achieved relatively higher levels of development because its political system receives and processes more functional inputs that strengthen governance institutions and developmental performance.

In line with the perspectives of Seers (1979) and Sen,(1999) who argue that development should be assessed by its capacity to reduce poverty, unemployment, deprivation, and human insecurity, Almond's framework enables this study to link institutional performance to developmental outcomes. It demonstrates that development is not merely a product of economic resources but also a consequence of how political systems process societal inputs and transform them into effective governance outputs. The theory is therefore particularly suitable for explaining why similar democratic structures in Nigeria and Mauritius have produced markedly different developmental trajectories.

Developmental state theory

This study also adopts the Developmental State Theory as an additional theoretical framework to explain the success of the democracy-development nexus in Mauritus. The theory emerged primarily from the work of Chalmers Johnson (1982), who sought to explain the rapid industrialization and economic transformation of East Asian economies, particularly Japan. In contrast to liberal theories that assign development primarily to market forces and democratic institutions, Developmental State Theory argues that successful development is fundamentally driven by a capable, autonomous, and interventionist state that strategically guides economic transformation.

The developmental state occupies a position between centrally planned socialist economies and laissez-faire capitalism. It relies on market mechanisms and private ownership while simultaneously maintaining sufficient state capacity to direct investment, coordinate industrial policy, regulate strategic sectors, and mobilize resources toward national development goals (Johnson, 1982; Woo-Cumings, 1999). Consequently, development is viewed not as the automatic outcome of democracy or market liberalization but as the product of deliberate state action.

Central to the theory is the assumption that developmental success depends on the existence of a competent bureaucracy insulated from narrow political pressures yet sufficiently connected to society to understand economic needs. According to Bresser-Pereira (2019), developmental

states are characterized by four major attributes: (i) a commitment to economic transformation and national development; (ii) the capacity to intervene strategically through industrial and developmental policies; (iii) the ability to maintain macroeconomic stability; and (iv) the support of a broad developmental coalition comprising state actors, entrepreneurs, workers, and other productive sectors of society.

While Johnson emphasized bureaucratic capacity, the theory was significantly refined by Evans (1995) through his concept of embedded autonomy. Evans argues that developmental success requires the simultaneous presence of two conditions that are often viewed as contradictory: bureaucratic autonomy and societal embeddedness in what is referred to as state-society integration. Autonomy refers to the existence of a professional, meritocratic, and coherent bureaucracy capable of pursuing long-term developmental objectives independent of particularistic interests. Embeddedness refers to dense institutionalized linkages between state officials and productive sectors of society, especially business groups, through which information, cooperation, and developmental coordination are achieved.

According to Evans (Ibid), developmental states succeed because they strike a balance between these two dimensions. Excessive autonomy can produce an isolated bureaucracy detached from societal realities, while excessive embeddedness can result in state capture by private interests. Development therefore emerges when state institutions maintain sufficient independence to pursue national goals while remaining sufficiently connected to productive social actors to formulate effective policies. This condition, which Evans terms "embedded autonomy," explains the success of several East Asian developmental states where bureaucracies were both technically competent and socially connected.

The embedded autonomy thesis is particularly relevant to the comparative analysis of Mauritius and Nigeria. In Mauritius, state institutions have historically maintained relatively high levels of bureaucratic professionalism, policy continuity, and constructive engagement with economic actors. Successive governments cultivated close but regulated relationships with business groups, export-oriented industries, and agricultural interests while preserving bureaucratic competence and policy discipline (Meisenhelder, 1997; Lange, 2003; Sandbrook, 2005). Consequently, democratic governance was complemented by developmental state institutions capable of coordinating economic transformation, diversifying production, and improving human development outcomes.

Nigeria presents a contrasting case. Although democratic institutions have existed since 1999, the state has struggled to develop the bureaucratic coherence and embedded autonomy necessary for developmental governance. Rather than being embedded in productive sectors of the economy, state-society relations have frequently been mediated through patronage networks, rent-seeking coalitions, and clientelist structures. The extensive dependence on oil revenues has further weakened incentives for productive state-business collaboration. As a result, state institutions often lack both the autonomy required to resist political interference and the

developmental embeddedness necessary to coordinate economic transformation. In Evans' terms, the Nigerian state exhibits tendencies toward either bureaucratic fragmentation or state capture rather than embedded autonomy.

Despite its analytical strengths, Developmental State Theory has attracted several criticisms. First, critics argue that the theory was developed primarily from the experiences of East Asian states and may therefore suffer from regional exceptionalism. Scholars question whether conditions that facilitated developmental states in East Asia—such as strong bureaucratic traditions, cohesive political elites, Cold War geopolitical support, and relatively homogeneous societies—can be replicated elsewhere (Leftwich, 2000).

Second, the theory has been criticized for underestimating the role of democratic institutions, political contestation, and civil society. Early developmental state literature often focused on authoritarian regimes such as South Korea and Taiwan, leading some scholars to suggest that developmental outcomes require restrictions on democratic competition. However, cases such as Mauritius demonstrate that developmental states can emerge within democratic settings, thereby challenging the assumption that authoritarianism is a prerequisite for development.

Third, critics of Evans' embedded autonomy thesis argue that the concept is difficult to operationalize empirically. Determining the precise balance between autonomy and embeddedness remains problematic, and scholars often disagree on how to measure these variables across different contexts. Furthermore, the theory provides limited guidance on how states can deliberately create embedded autonomy where historical conditions are unfavorable.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Developmental State Theory remains highly relevant to this study because it shifts attention away from democracy as a sufficient condition for development and toward the quality, capacity, and orientation of state institutions. The theory suggests that developmental outcomes depend less on the existence of democratic procedures and more on whether the state possesses the bureaucratic competence, policy autonomy, and societal embeddedness necessary to guide economic transformation. It therefore provides a useful framework for explaining why democracy has contributed to development in Mauritius while producing more limited developmental outcomes in Nigeria.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA AND MAURITIUS

Table 1: EIU Democracy index2022 for Africa

	No. of countries	**% of countries in Africa**
Full democracies	1	1.85
Flawed democracies	6	11.11
Hybrid democracies	17	31.48
Authoritarian regimes	27	50
Uncategorised	3	5.56
TOTAL	**54**	**100**

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit limited 2023Table 1 is a summary of the 2022 democracy index for Africa which reveals that 50% of African states are authoritarian with no element of democracy. While44.44% comprising 1.85% of full democracy and the other 42.59% are states that have some element of democracy. The remaining 5.56% are uncategorized. This corroborates and establishes the both arguments that democracy is alien to Africaand that it cannot be universally applied as put forward by some scholars of African descent, because most of Africa is yet to successfully democratise on the terms and conditions of those who have pushed forward the internationalisation of liberalism (Ake, 1994; Larok, 2011Harrison& Boyd, 2018).

Table 2: Top ten (10) Democracies in Africaand their global ranking (scale of 1-10)

SN	**Country**	**Overall score**	**Global**						
Rank	Classification	Electoral process and pluralism			Functioning of government				
	Political participation	Political culture		Civil liberties					
1	Mauritius	8.14	21	Full democracy	9.17	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.82
2	Botswana	7.73	32	Flawed democracy	9.17	6.79	6.67	7.50	8.53
3	Cabo Verde	7.65	35	Flawed democracy	9.17	7.00	6.67	6.88	8.53
4	South Africa	7.05	45	Flawed democracy	7.42	7.14	8.33	5.00	7.35
5	Namibia	6.52	58	Flawed democracy	7.00	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94
6	Ghana	6.43	63	Flawed democracy	8.33	5.00	6.67	6.25	5.88
7	Lesotho	6.19	71	Flawed democracy	9.17	4.14	5.56	5.63	6.47
8	Malawi	5.91	76	Hybrid democracy	7.00	4.29	5.56	6.25	6.47
9	Zambia	5.80	78	Hybrid democracy	7.92	3.64	5.00	6.88	5.59
22	Nigeria	4.23	105	Hybrid democracy	5.17	3.93	3.89	3.75	4.41

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit Limited 2023

KEY:

The EIU (2023) index values are used to place countries within one of four types of regimes:

1. Full democracies: values above 8

2. Flawed democracies: values above 6, and below or equal to 8
3. Hybrid regimes: values above 4, and lower or equal to 6.
4. Authoritarian regimes: values below or equal to 4

Summarily from table 2, of the top ten (10) democracies in Africa only one (1) is a full democracy while the remaining nine (9) are imperfect democracies with various levels of flaws and challenges in both operation and practice.Furthermore using the indicators of governance namely; electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties to measure democracy in Africa, the shows details of how democracy has performed in Africa.Among the top ten countries in the continent which are represented in the table there is only 1 full democracy, 6 flawed democracies, and 3 hybrid democracies. This reveals in specific terms that electoral processes and pluralism in African states and Africa as a continent falls short of the required transparency. In the functioning of government

Table 3

Top ten (10) Democracies in Africa and their HDI

RANKING IN AFRICA	**COUNTRY**	**2021 HDI**	**HDI TIER**	**Democracy Classification**
1	Mauritius	0.802	Very High	Full democracy
2	Botswana	0.693	High	Flawed democracy
3	Cabo Verde	0.662	High	Flawed democracy
4	South Africa	0.713	High	Flawed democracy
5	Namibia	0.615	High	Flawed democracy
6	Ghana	0.632	High	Flawed democracy
7	Lesotho	0.514	High	Flawed democracy
8	Malawi	0.512	High	Hybrid democracy
9	Zambia	0.565	High	Hybrid democracy
29	Nigeria	0.535	Low	Hybrid democracy

Source: UNDP 2022 report

Key;

0.0 – 0.499 : Low human development

0.50 – 0.799; Medium human development

0.80 – 1.0; High human development

Table 4

Top ten (10) most developed countries in Africa

RANKING	COUNTRY	2021 HDI	HDI TIER	Democracy Classification
1	Mauritius	0.802	Very High	Full Democracy
2	Seychelles	0.785	High	Uncategorized
3	Algeria	0.745	High	Authoritarian
4	Egypt	0.731	High	Authoritarian
5	Tunisia	0.731	High	Hybrid Democracy
6	Libya	0.718	High	Authoritarian
7	South Africa	0.713	High	Flawed Democracy
8	Gabon	0.706	High	Authoritarian
9	Botswana	0.693	High	Flawed Democracy
10	Morocco	0.683	High	Hybrid Democracy
29	Nigeria	0.535	Low	Hybrid democracy

Source: UNDP 2022 report

Table 4 revealsthat more undemocratic states have high human development index compared to those who practice some form of democracy.

DEMOCRACY

Table 5

Democracy index for Nigeria and Mauritius

S/N	ITEM	COUNTRY	
		NIGERIA	MAURITIUS
		Scale (1-10)	
1	Electoral process and pluralism	5.17	9.17
2	Functioning of government	3.93	7.86
3	Political participation	3.89	6.11
4	Political culture	3.75	8.75
5	Civil liberties	4.41	8.82
	Overall score	4.23	8.14

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit Limited 2023

KEY:

The values are utilised in the categorisation of countries in to four broad groups of regime type:

1. Full democracies: values above 8

2. Flawed democracies: values above 6, but lower than or equal to 8

3. Hybrid regimes: values above 4, and lower than or equal to 6

4. Authoritarian regimes: values lower than or equal to 4

Table 5 compares specifically the human development index of Nigeria and Mauritius

The assessment of Nigeria's democratic performance, as reflected in Table 5, reveals significant challenges in the country's democratic consolidation. With an overall score of 4.23 on the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index, Nigeria is classified as a hybrid regime. According to the EIU (2023), hybrid regimes occupy an intermediate position between full democracies and authoritarian systems. While such regimes maintain the formal institutions of democracy—including constitutions, elections, political parties, and representative bodies—their practical operation is undermined by systemic deficiencies that compromise democratic governance.

The EIU evaluates democracy across five broad dimensions: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. Nigeria's relatively low aggregate score reflects weaknesses across these interconnected dimensions and highlights the persistent gap between the formal existence of democratic institutions and their substantive effectiveness.

Electoral process and pluralism

The electoral process constitutes the cornerstone of democratic governance. In principle, elections provide citizens with the opportunity to select political leaders and hold governments accountable. However, Nigeria's electoral system continues to be characterized by recurrent irregularities that undermine the principles of free, fair, and credible elections. Electoral malpractice, vote buying, voter intimidation, logistical failures, manipulation of electoral outcomes, and the misuse of state resources by incumbents have consistently weakened public confidence in the electoral process.

Although Nigeria operates a multiparty system, political competition remains uneven. Opposition parties often face structural disadvantages arising from incumbency privileges, unequal access to state resources, and the politicization of electoral institutions. Consequently, the existence of multiple political parties does not necessarily translate into genuine political pluralism. This observation aligns with the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute's classification of Nigeria as an electoral autocracy, a regime type characterized by the existence of formal democratic institutions and elections that nevertheless fail to meet minimum standards of competitiveness and fairness. Under such conditions, elections become mechanisms for legitimizing political authority rather than instruments of democratic accountability.

Functioning of government

The functioning of government dimension assesses the effectiveness, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness of public institutions. Nigeria's low performance in this area

reflects longstanding governance challenges. Despite the existence of constitutional mechanisms for checks and balances, public institutions frequently exhibit weaknesses in policy implementation, service delivery, and accountability.

Akhaine (2011) identifies a critical disconnect between democratic institutions and developmental outcomes in Nigeria. He argues that democratic governance has not been accompanied by the emergence of a collective national will capable of facilitating the effective operation of institutions. As a result, formal democratic structures often fail to produce the expected outcomes associated with good governance.

Similarly, Dickovick (2014) argues that Nigeria exemplifies a political environment in which formal institutions are frequently subordinated to informal networks of power, patronage, and elite bargaining. Such dynamics undermine institutional autonomy and weaken mechanisms of accountability. Consequently, governance becomes personalized rather than institutionalized, reducing the effectiveness of public administration and limiting the state's capacity to provide public goods and services efficiently.

The prevalence of corruption further exacerbates these governance deficiencies. Numerous studies have identified corruption as one of the most significant obstacles to democratic governance and development in Nigeria (Ikotun, 2004; Babawale, 2007; TAFGN, 2011–2015; Gberevbie, Oyeyemi&Nchekwube, 2014; Nwankwo&Udeobasi, 2017). Corruption weakens state legitimacy, distorts resource allocation, undermines public trust, and reduces the effectiveness of democratic institutions.

Political participation

Political participation represents the extent to which citizens engage in political activities beyond voting, including membership in political parties, civic activism, public debates, and engagement with policy processes. While Nigeria has witnessed periods of increased political mobilization, particularly among youth populations and civil society organizations, participation remains constrained by widespread political disillusionment, electoral distrust, poverty, insecurity, and perceptions of elite domination.

The emergence of social movements such as the #EndSARS protests demonstrated the willingness of citizens, particularly younger generations, to engage actively in political discourse and demand accountability from government. However, the limited institutional responsiveness to such demands raises questions about the extent to which citizen participation translates into meaningful political influence. Consequently, political participation often remains symbolic rather than transformative, reinforcing public perceptions that political outcomes are determined primarily by elite interests.

Political culture

Political culture refers to the attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms that shape citizens' relationship with political institutions and democratic governance. Democratic consolidation requires a political culture characterized by trust, tolerance, respect for the rule of law, and commitment to democratic norms.

Nigeria's political culture remains deeply influenced by ethnic, regional, religious, and patron-client considerations. Electoral competition is frequently shaped by identity politics rather than programmatic policy debates. Such patterns weaken national cohesion and encourage the personalization of political power.

Furthermore, decades of military rule and authoritarian governance have left enduring legacies that continue to influence political behavior. Although democratic institutions have been re-established since 1999, democratic values have not always become fully institutionalized within society or political elites. This has contributed to a political environment in which democratic procedures are often embraced while democratic norms remain weakly embedded.

Civil liberties

Civil liberties constitute a fundamental component of democratic governance and encompass freedoms of expression, association, assembly, religion, and the press. Nigeria's constitutional framework provides legal guarantees for these freedoms; however, their practical realization remains inconsistent.

Although the country maintains a relatively vibrant media landscape and active civil society sector, concerns persist regarding restrictions on freedom of expression, harassment of journalists, excessive use of force by security agencies, and limitations on civic space. Episodes of state repression during protests and the selective enforcement of laws have raised concerns regarding the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

The persistence of insecurity, including terrorism, banditry, and communal violence, has further complicated the protection of civil liberties. In some instances, security considerations have been invoked to justify restrictions on individual freedoms, creating tensions between national security imperatives and democratic rights.

Mauritius is widely regarded as one of Africa's most successful democratic states and consistently ranks among the highest-performing countries on global measures of democracy and governance. Based on its performance across key democratic indicators, Mauritius is classified by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) as a full democracy, a category reserved for countries where political rights and civil liberties are comprehensively protected, democratic institutions function effectively, and democratic norms are deeply embedded within society. Unlike hybrid regimes or flawed democracies, full democracies are characterized by robust institutional checks

and balances, an independent judiciary, a free and pluralistic media environment, and a political culture that actively supports democratic governance (EIU, 2023).

Similarly, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute classify Mauritius as an electoral democracy, reflecting the country's ability to conduct elections that are genuinely competitive, transparent, and capable of translating citizens' preferences into political outcomes (V-Dem, 2023). The Mauritian case therefore provides an important example of democratic consolidation within the African context and demonstrates the potential for functioning democratic systems and institutions to facilitate socioeconomic development when supported by effective institutions and good governance practices.

Electoral process and pluralism

The electoral process and the degree of political pluralism constitute fundamental pillars of democratic governance. Mauritius has established a long-standing tradition of competitive elections characterized by transparency, credibility, and broad public acceptance of electoral outcomes. Elections are generally regarded as free and fair, with political parties enjoying relatively equal opportunities to compete for political office.

A distinctive feature of Mauritian democracy is its institutional design, which seeks to balance majority rule with minority representation. Sandbrook (2005) argues that the Mauritian constitutional framework has been instrumental in preventing ethnic polarization by encouraging political parties to nominate candidates from both majority and minority communities. This institutional arrangement has contributed significantly to political stability by reducing the likelihood of ethnic exclusion and fostering a culture of inclusive governance.

An important mechanism supporting political pluralism is the country's unique **"**Best Loser System**"**, which was designed to ensure adequate representation of underrepresented ethnic communities within the National Assembly. Under this arrangement, additional parliamentary seats may be allocated to candidates who were unsuccessful in elections but belong to groups whose representation falls below specified thresholds. Although the system has attracted debate in recent years, it has historically played a significant role in promoting inclusiveness and mitigating ethnic tensions in a highly diverse society.

The effectiveness of electoral administration is further strengthened by an independent electoral commission responsible for overseeing electoral processes and ensuring compliance with democratic standards. The credibility of these institutions has contributed to public confidence in electoral outcomes and reinforced the legitimacy of democratic governance.

Functioning of government

The functioning of government dimension assesses the effectiveness, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness of public institutions. Mauritius consistently performs strongly in this area due to the relatively high quality of its state institutions and administrative structures.

Unlike many postcolonial African states that have struggled with institutional fragility and governance deficits, Mauritius has developed a political system characterized by effective policy implementation, bureaucratic professionalism, and institutional continuity. Government institutions operate within clearly defined constitutional frameworks, while mechanisms of accountability constrain the arbitrary exercise of power.

Sandbrook (2005) describes Mauritius as an example of an activist developmental state, where government intervention has been strategically employed to promote both economic growth and social welfare. Importantly, this intervention has occurred within a democratic context rather than through authoritarian governance. Public institutions have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to formulate and implement long-term developmental strategies while remaining accountable to elected representatives and citizens.

The country's judiciary operates with a high degree of independence, and judicial decisions are generally respected and enforced. Furthermore, institutionalized checks and balances ensure that executive authority remains subject to legal and constitutional constraints. These features have strengthened public trust in government and contributed to the stability of democratic governance.

Political participation

Political participation extends beyond electoral voting to encompass broader forms of citizen engagement in public affairs. Mauritius exhibits relatively high levels of political participation compared to many developing democracies. Citizens actively engage in electoral processes, political party activities, trade unions, civic organizations, and public policy debates.

The strength of civil society has been particularly important in fostering participatory governance. A vibrant network of civic associations, professional organizations, religious groups, and community-based organizations contributes to public discourse and serves as an intermediary between citizens and the state. Such institutions enhance democratic accountability by providing channels through which citizens can articulate interests and influence policy outcomes.

Moreover, the inclusive nature of Mauritian politics has reduced barriers to participation among different ethnic, religious, and social groups. This broad-based engagement has strengthened democratic legitimacy and facilitated social cohesion within a highly diverse society.

Political culture

One of the most significant determinants of democratic consolidation is political culture. The EIU identifies democratic political culture as a critical characteristic of full democracies because institutions alone cannot sustain democracy without corresponding societal values and norms.

Mauritius has developed a political culture characterized by tolerance, compromise, respect for democratic procedures, and acceptance of political competition. Political actors generally recognize the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and operate within constitutional frameworks. The willingness of political elites to engage in coalition-building and consensus-seeking has contributed significantly to political stability.

Sandbrook (2005) traces the origins of this democratic culture to the country's early post-independence leadership, which adopted a conciliatory and issue-oriented approach to politics. Rather than mobilizing support through ethnic exclusion or divisive nationalism, political leaders emphasized accommodation, negotiation, and power-sharing. These practices helped institutionalize democratic norms and foster a political environment conducive to democratic consolidation.

The resulting political culture has enabled Mauritius to avoid many of the challenges that have undermined democracy elsewhere in Africa, including military intervention, ethnic conflict, and authoritarian backsliding. Consequently, democracy in Mauritius enjoys both institutional and societal legitimacy.

Civil liberties

Civil liberties constitute another area in which Mauritius performs strongly. Fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, religious freedom, and press freedom, are generally protected and respected. The media landscape is characterized by diversity and relative independence, enabling journalists and civil society organizations to scrutinize government actions and contribute to public debate.

The protection of civil liberties is reinforced by an independent judiciary and a constitutional framework that guarantees fundamental rights. Citizens possess legal avenues through which they can challenge government actions and seek redress for violations of rights.

Although occasional concerns arise regarding media regulation or political tensions, such issues are generally addressed within established democratic and legal frameworks. Consequently, civil liberties remain substantially more secure in Mauritius than in many other African states, contributing significantly to its classification as a full democracy.

Democracy and Development: The Mauritian Example

The Mauritian experience challenges arguments that democracy necessarily impedes economic development in developing countries. Instead, it demonstrates that democratic institutions, when supported by strong state capacity, inclusive governance arrangements, and a democratic political culture, can create favourable conditions for sustained development.

The country's success suggests that democratic consolidation and developmental governance are not mutually exclusive but can be mutually reinforcing. Effective institutions, accountable leadership, political inclusiveness, and respect for civil liberties have collectively contributed to both democratic stability and socioeconomic progress. Consequently, Mauritius stands as one of Africa's most compelling examples of how democracy, good governance, and development can coexist and reinforce one another in the pursuit of national transformation

Human Development Index in Nigeria and Mauritius

Table 6

Human Development Index (HDI) for Nigeria and Mauritius

RANKING	COUNTRY	2021 HDI	HDI TIER
1	Mauritius	0.802	Very High
29	Nigeria	0.535	Low

Source; UNDP 2022 report

Data from table 6 show a clear disparity in the HDI of both Nigeria and Mauritius withNigeria ranking 29 while Mauritius ranks first. The values of the HDI are an aggregate of living standards, education and health indicators of both countries.

Mauritius's exceptional human development performance has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly because its success appears to contradict many conventional development predictions. As noted by Subramanian and Roy (2003), the explanations for Mauritius's developmental achievements remain diverse and contested; however, the reality of its transformation is indisputable. From a country once characterized by monocrop dependence, high population pressure, limited natural resources, and vulnerability to external shocks, Mauritius has evolved into one of Africa's most successful development stories, attaining a level of human development that places it among countries with very high Human Development Index (HDI) rankings. This growth in its HDI can be explained through three interconnected dimensions; health achievements, educational progress and rising income levels. Mauritius has experienced substantial improvements in life expectancy through investments in universal healthcare, disease prevention, maternal health, and public health infrastructure. These gains reflect the country's commitment to social welfare and its ability to convert economic growth into improved health outcomes. From a human development perspective, the health dimension

illustrates the success of state-led social investment. Life expectancy improvements have contributed significantly to the upward movement of HDI over the past three decades while education on the other hand has been a cornerstone of Mauritius's development strategy. Universal primary education, high literacy rates, and expanding access to secondary and tertiary education have strengthened the country's human capital base. The educational dimension is particularly significant because it supports the transition from agriculture toward manufacturing, tourism, financial services, and information technology sectors. The accumulation of human capital has enabled Mauritius to move beyond resource-based development toward a knowledge-based economy. The income component of HDI reflects sustained economic growth, export diversification, and institutional stability. Mauritius's economic transformation was facilitated by its investment in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), Tourism development,financial services expansion, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sectors and strategic trade integration. The growth in GNI per capita has raised living standards and contributed directly to improvements in HDI. However, HDI's logarithmic treatment of income acknowledges that income gains contribute less to human development at higher income levels. Studies by Mistry (1999) and Zafar (2018) demonstrate that living standards improved considerably across both urban and rural areas as a result of sustained government expenditure on education, healthcare, and social protection. Notably, these investments continued despite pressure from international financial institutions advocating fiscal austerity and reductions in public spending. The Mauritian government maintained a strong commitment to free education, universal healthcare, and comprehensive welfare programmes, reflecting a development philosophy that prioritized human well-being alongside economic growth.

A central explanation for this success lies in the developmental role of the Mauritian state. Contrary to neoliberal prescriptions that emphasize minimal state intervention and market self-regulation, Mauritius pursued a pragmatic developmental strategy in which the state assumed an active role in economic transformation. Sandbrook (2005) argues that the country's achievements were facilitated by a highly interventionist state that successfully combined economic growth with social equity within a predominantly market-oriented economy. Rather than relying exclusively on free-market mechanisms, the Mauritian government employed a range of regulatory controls, import-substitution policies, industrial incentives, and strategic planning measures. According to Mistry (1999), the Mauritian government demonstrated remarkable political and administrative flexibility by abandoning ineffective policies and adopting a more outward-oriented development model. One of such critical turning points was the early 1980s when policymakers recognized the limitations of a closed economic system, and the inadequacies of a narrow import-substitution industrialization strategy based on aspirations of self-sufficiency. This willingness to reassess and reform economic strategies reflects the adaptive capacity that is often absent in less successful developmental experiences.

Furthermore, sound governance, particularly in fiscal and macroeconomic management, played a pivotal role in sustaining economic growth and social development. Effective public

financial management enabled the state to maintain macroeconomic stability while simultaneously financing investments in social infrastructure. This balance between fiscal prudence and developmental spending helped create an enabling environment for both private sector growth and human development advancement.

Another important factor was Mauritius's ability to engage constructively with international financial institutions without compromising domestic developmental priorities. Rather than adopting externally prescribed reforms wholesale, the government negotiated policy reforms and structural adjustment programmes on terms that aligned with national development objectives. This selective engagement facilitated access to financial resources and technical assistance while preserving policy space for social investment and economic transformation. Such an approach demonstrates a sophisticated form of state capacity in which external pressures were managed strategically rather than accepted uncritically.

Finally, Mauritius effectively leveraged opportunities arising from the international trading system. The country capitalized on preferential access to European Union markets, particularly in the textile and garment sectors. As production costs increased in traditional manufacturing centres such as Hong Kong, Mauritius positioned itself as an attractive alternative supplier, enabling rapid export growth and employment generation. This strategic exploitation of international market opportunities accelerated industrial diversification, increased foreign exchange earnings, and contributed significantly to improvements in income and living standards.

From a human development perspective, therefore, Mauritius illustrates how economic growth, institutional quality, social investment, and strategic state intervention can interact to produce sustained improvements in human welfare. The country's HDI achievements are not simply the consequence of favourable external conditions but rather the outcome of deliberate policy choices that successfully combined market participation with developmental governance. Consequently, Mauritius provides a compelling case study for development scholars, demonstrating that effective state institutions, inclusive social policies, and strategic integration into the global economy can generate substantial human development gains even within the structural constraints faced by small island developing states.

However, the UNDP (2025) argues that despite its impressive performance, Mauritius faces several development challenges including population ageing and increasing dependency ratios, rising income inequality despite overall economic growth, youth unemployment in some sectors, climate change vulnerability as a small island developing state and dependence on international tourism and global economic conditions. These issues suggest that maintaining high human development will require continued policy innovation and sustainable economic planning.

Within the framework of data from table 6, Nigeria presents a particularly compelling case. Despite possessing the largest population in Africa, vast natural resource endowments, and a

significant contribution to continental GDP, the country continues to record relatively low human development outcomes. The Nigerian experience therefore exemplifies the paradox of economic potential coexisting with persistent deficits in human welfare.HDI measures development through three dimensions: a long and healthy life (life expectancy), access to knowledge (education), and a decent standard of living (Gross National Income per capita)

The health dimension of HDI is measured through life expectancy at birth. While Nigeria, according UNDP 2023 has recorded improvements in life expectancy over time, health outcomes remain constrained by several structural challenges, including:inadequate healthcare infrastructure, shortage of medical personnel, high maternal and infant mortality rates,inadequate healthcare financing, unequal access to healthcare services between urban and rural areas. These challenges have direct implications for HDI performance because life expectancy constitutes one of the three core dimensions of the index. Persistent underinvestment in public healthcare has limited Nigeria's ability to convert economic resources into human welfare gains.Developmental state theorists argue that successful human development requires a state capable of mobilizing and allocating resources effectively. The relatively weak performance of Nigeria's health sector therefore reflects broader institutional and governance deficiencies.

Education constitutes the second pillar of HDI measurement through mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling. Since independence, Nigeria has expanded access to education through programmes such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Basic Education (UBE). Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. These include; high rates of out-of-school children, poor educational infrastructure, regional disparities in educational attainment, teacher shortages, insecurity affecting school attendance and low educational quality. Human capital theory suggests that education enhances productivity, innovation, and economic competitiveness. However, within the human development framework, education possesses intrinsic value because it expands individuals' freedoms and opportunities as expounded by Sen (1999).Nigeria's educational challenges therefore represent both an economic and developmental constraint. The persistence of educational inequalities contributes directly to lower HDI outcomes and limits social mobility.

The income dimension of HDI is measured through Gross National Income (GNI) per capitaadjusted for purchasing power parity (Todaro and Smith, 2009). Despite periods of rapid GDP growth, Nigeria continues to experience widespread poverty and unemployment.This apparent contradiction reflects a central issue in development economics: economic growth can coexist with human deprivation when wealth is concentrated among a small segment of the population.The Nigerian experience demonstrates that: GDP growth does not automatically reduce poverty; resource wealth does not guarantee human development; income distribution significantly affects development outcomes.Consequently, national income figures often mask profound socioeconomic inequalities that undermine overall human development performance.

Inequality and the limits of aggregate HDI

UNDP however, places inequality as the most critical dimension of Nigeria's human development challenge. The UNDP estimates that Nigeria experiences a loss of approximately 32.7% of its HDI value due to inequality, indicating that a substantial portion of human development achievements is unevenly distributed across the population. It advances that this inequality manifests through regional inequalities, urban-rural disparities, and gender inequalities.

One of the most important theoretical explanations for Nigeria's HDI performance is the resource curse thesis. Scholars such as Auty (1993) argue that resource-rich economies often experience slower development due to rent-seeking behaviour, institutional weakness, corruption, and excessive dependence on commodity exports. Nigeria's economy has historically been dominated by crude oil exports. While petroleum revenues have generated substantial national income since the 1970s, these resources have not consistently produced corresponding improvements in healthcare, education, or living standards. Instead, oil dependency has contributed to economic volatility, governance challenges, and unequal wealth distribution. From a human development perspective, the Nigerian case illustrates Sen's (1999) argument that income is only one means to development rather than development itself. Economic growth becomes meaningful only when translated into expanded capabilities and improved quality of life.

CONCLUSION

This paper comparatively examined Nigeria and Mauritius and argued that democracy and development can be mutually reinforcing; however, this is only to the extent that the intervening factor of the state through the regulation of the free market is guaranteed. Where this is lacking, like in the case of Nigeria as opposed to Mauritius, the benefits derivable from the development process are cut short, and as aptly put by Bresser-Pereira (2019), the people are subjected to the harsh effects of capitalism. When this occurs, it triggers a spiral effect of a military takeover in what could be described as a reversal of the democratic process or the “undemocratization” of the state, like the recent events in Mail and Gabon, to mention a few.It is noted that economic development is not exclusive to democracy. It could be observed in other forms or systems of government as well. However, if development is to be considered on a broader level and conceived as the freedom of the individual to aspire to his or her full capacities and determine his or her future through freedom of choice and contribution to what the developmental processes should be, as advanced by Sen (1999), then democracy is privileged by this paper.

While this paper speaks in support of democracy, it observes that liberal democracy cannot be taken hook line and sinker without some form of moderation. It goes further to advance a more state-centred form of democracy known as social democracy, with features such as free health care, free education, the provision of employment, etc. Palacios (2022) admits this is what

is practiced by the global western countries, with Europe as her case study. Hence, her findings revealed the success of social democracy in providing citizens with their expectations in the same countries that advocate the liberal strand of democracy for Africa.It is also noteworthy that the successes of democracy in Mauritius and yet its seeming lack of similar successe in Nigeria do not portend the unworkability of democracy in Africa, but rather, like Ake (1992 &1994) points out respectively in his works that democracy is possible everywhere but the question is how it is to be applied. There is need for the peculiarities of the African context to be given high consideration and the people to be allowed to define the terms of their collective inclusion and determine the nature and manner of their participation.

This paper therefore concludes that the best approach to development for Africa is through state activism, welfarism, developmentalism, and interventionism,while the most appropriate system of government that privileges this is social democracy.

The study,however, acknowledges that its findings are the starting point for another research. It notes that a comparison of only two cases(Nigeria and Mauritius)in Africa may not be sufficient but serves as trigger for further inquiry into more cases. Additionally, this study limits its analysis of development to human development index. This gives room forthe application of the inequality-adjusted human development index (IHDI) for further analysis to test the actual level of the national human development.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this paper, five key recommendations were crafted and they are as follows:

- Democracy can lead to human development but only if certain variables such as the effective functioning of democratic institutionsare present. There is therefore, need for states to ensure that their democratic institutions perform the functions for which they were designed.
- Every human development index is the outcome of a conscious and cautious character of a state. States must then be prepared toarm themselves with the requisite willpower and take responsibility for their development.they are more
- Democracy leads to development whenan activist, interventionist, and developmental approach to domesticating democracyis adopted by the state.Social democracy is best suited to provide Africans with a chance at negotiating and determining their future when it comes to the domestication of democracy. It also enables the state to be involved to provide both guidance and the necessary cushioning effect against any harshness that any policy or system not suited for their peculiarities may create.

- There is a need to build bureaucratic institutions that are embedded in society and can design and marshal national developmental programmes.
- African states must become deliberate about their development and, by so doing, take a cue from the Mauritius example.

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