

The Nigerian Political Economy and Agricultural Sector

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria, endowed with abundant natural and human resources, is paradoxically trapped in a cycle of agricultural underdevelopment and economic fragility. Despite the sector's role in food security, employment, and non-oil revenue generation, the Nigerian agricultural sector reflects systemic distortions of the nation's political economy. The objective of this study was centered on examine the extent to which Nigeria's political economy, defined by governance practices, economic priorities, policy orientations, and institutional frameworks, shapes the development of its agricultural sector. This study employs a qualitative research design that was grounded in a review of literature, policy documents, and institutional reports. A thematic analysis was drawn from empirical evidence from reputable academic sources using Google Scholar and Scopus databases. The study also integrates a political economy analytical framework to examine the intersections of power, resource allocation, and policy outcomes. The findings reveal a complex web of challenges: land tenure insecurity, governance failures, infrastructural deficits, and an overreliance on oil revenue. However, opportunities such as digital agriculture, youth-driven agribusiness, and policy innovations in the country signal a systemic transformation within the political economy if there is an alignment of political will with institutional reform. Therefore, in the country, revamping the agricultural sector requires a strategic recalibration of its political economy, anchored on accountability, policy consistency, and inclusive governance from the state.

Keywords: Political Economy, Agricultural Development, Governance, Economic Transformation, Food Security.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of Nigeria's economy. Over the years, the sector of the economy has employed over 70% of the labour force and contributed substantially to the national GDP (Olu *et al.*, 2023). Despite the Agriculture sector contribution toward the development of the country, the sector is faced with different socio-economic problems such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and the adverse impacts of climate change, which have constrained productivity and food security within the state (Gavrilova, 2021; Onomu & Aliber, 2024). The political economy of Nigeria is influenced by agricultural policy formulation and implementation. Historical efforts, in areas such as the National Accelerated Food Production Programme and Operation Feed the Nation, were affected in the country due to poor execution and inconsistent stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, policy inconsistency and governance issues, such as corruption and rent-seeking behaviour among the elite classes, weakened institutional effectiveness and reduced agricultural output within the Nigerian political economy, a major increase in dependence on food imports (Premium Times, 2025).

Today, anywhere within the global system, climate change is now a state and individual-centric approach to survival. Climate change exacerbated agricultural challenges through erratic weather patterns, droughts, and flooding, affecting crop output or harvest within a political system (Wikipedia, 2025). Smallholder farmers, who make up the majority of Nigeria's agricultural workforce are vulnerable due to their limited resources and poor access to adaptive technologies in the farming system and these have intensified food insecurity, with millions

of Nigerians facing hunger and malnutrition annually ((Onomu & Aliber, 2024; AP News, 2025). Despite these setbacks to the country's economy, the agricultural sector presents opportunities for transformation for all within the political system (i.e., the haves and have-nots) who make up the economic configuration. This study seeks to address three primary objectives: (1) to analyse how Nigeria's political economy shapes agricultural policy formulation and implementation; (2) to evaluate the impact of political decisions on agricultural productivity and food security; and (3) to identify challenges and opportunities in the agricultural sector influenced by political and economic factors. Therefore, the aim was to contribute new academic and practical perceptions to the political economy in determining agricultural development in Nigeria.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Political Economy

The term political economy has its roots in classical antiquity, where thinkers such as Aristotle explored the nature of governance and economic activities. Aristotle's works on Politics and Economics look into the management of household resources and the state's role in economic stability in the state. However, it was during the 18th century that political economy emerged as a distinct field of study. James Steuart's *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* (1767) is regarded as the first systematic treatise on the subject that stated the role of a state in economic regulation. Adam Smith's seminal work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), brought about a major paradigm shift in political economic thought and introduced the concept of the "invisible hand," that individuals pursuing their self-interest contribute to societal welfare. This championed a free market that limit government intervention in a state's economy, which laid a good foundation for classical economics. David Ricardo further advanced this school of thought with his theory of comparative advantage advocates for specialization and free trade as means to national wealth. In contrast, Karl Marx offered a critical analysis of capitalist political economy in his work *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (1867). Marx examined the dynamics of labour, capital, and class relations, arguing that the capitalist mode of production inherently leads to exploitation and social inequality. Karl's argument was centered on social relations of production and the nexus in which economic systems operate in a political system. However, contemporary political economy incorporates these approaches to analyse how political institutions, through economic systems, and social factors influence each other. Modern scholars examine issues such as income inequality, globalization, and the role of state policies in the economic development of a state within the international system. These incorporate various sub-disciplines: international political economy, which studies the global connection between politics and economics, and comparative political economy, which analyses different national economic systems.

Development

The concept of development has transitioned from a narrow focus on economic growth to a multifaceted understanding of social, political, and environmental dimensions. Early scholar Walt W. Rostow conceptualized development through linear models, such as the "Stages of Economic Growth," which centered on societies progress through predetermined phases culminating in high mass consumption (Rostow, 1990). This perspective uses the industrialization and capital accumulation of a state as primary indicators of development. However, such models were critiqued for their failure to account for the diverse historical and cultural views in the developing nations within the global system (Frankema, 2013). In response to the limitations of earlier proponents, Dudley Seers advocated for a perspective on development. Seers argued that true development is measured by economic indicators and by the extent to which it reduces poverty, inequality, and unemployment within a political system (Seers, 2010). Shift in social justice and equitable distribution of resources laid the foundation for development paradigms within the social science that consider human well-being as central to progress within the development paradigm. Amartya Sen introduced the "capability approach," which redefines development as the expansion of individuals' freedoms and the kind of lives they value (Sen, 1999). Sen sees that development is assessed by the real opportunities people have, such as access to education, healthcare, and participation in political processes of the state. This argument focuses on material wealth to human agency and empowerment that influence global development policies and the creation of the Human Development Index (HDI) (Hopkins, 1991). So, the contemporary discourse on development incorporates sustainability and environmental considerations within the state. The Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*,

introduced the concept of sustainable development, defined as meeting present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the cornerstone of human civilization that evolves from subsistence farming to a complex, multifaceted industry integral to global economies. Early economic theories, such as Physiocracy, posited that agriculture was the primary source of a nation's wealth, stating the productivity of land and the natural order of economic systems within a state (Quesnay, 1758). In human history, the 20th century saw the agricultural sector undergo a process of transformation that was influenced by technological advancements. The Green Revolution is high-yield crop varieties that causes an increase in productivity as well as human concerns about social equity within the social structure (Evenson & Gollin, 2003). Contemporary studies on the agricultural sector are based on how sustainable agricultural practices are used to balance productivity with ecological stewardship within states (Altieri, 1995). Recent scholarly discourse on sustainable agriculture is in line with addressing global challenges such as climate change, food security, and rural development at the local, state, national, and international levels of human interaction. Sustainable agriculture aims to meet current food needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs a practice that is environmentally sound, economically viable, and socially responsible within the states (Pretty, 2008). Also, the advent of digital technologies ushered in a new era for the agricultural sector that is referred to as Agriculture 4.0. This paradigm shift involves the application of Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and data analytics for decision-making, optimizing resource use, and improving supply chain efficiency within the agricultural chain economy (Wolfert *et al.*, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Development Theory

Development theory is a paradigm shift that reflects the new global economic thought and policy. Early models, such as Rostow's stages of economic growth, a linear progression towards development through industrialisation and capital accumulation as primary drivers in a state or within the global system (Rostow, 1990). However, these models overlooked the socio-political systems in post-colonial states such as Nigeria. The dual-sector model by Lewis (1954) introduced the idea of labour transition from traditional agriculture to modern industry, yet it assumed an unlimited supply of labour did not account for the structural challenges in agrarian economies (Staatz & Eicher, 1998). Critiques of these early theories stated the inadequacy of applying Western development models to a diverse global system economy (Escobar, 2011).

In Nigeria, the application of development theories is marked by a series of policy shifts aimed at economic transformation. Post-independence strategies focused on state industrialization, but these efforts were hampered by political instability as well as the state's overreliance on oil revenues (Akinyoade & Uche, 2016). The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s, influenced by neoliberal development theories, sought to liberalise the economy but led to reduced public investment in agriculture and increased poverty levels (Ihonvbere, 1996). Recent initiatives, such as the Agricultural Transformation Agenda, aim to revitalise the agricultural sector, which has been challenged by inadequate infrastructure, policy inconsistencies, and limited access to credit for smallholder farmers (FAO, 2018). Critically, the implementation of development theories in Nigeria's agricultural sector failed to consider the local socio-economic realities. Top-down approaches that abandon the importance of community participation and indigenous knowledge systems lead to unsustainable outcomes (Chambers, 1997).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Author(s) & Year	Focus	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Odukoya (2020)	Political economy of agricultural commercialization in Nigeria,	Qualitative analysis of political regimes from military to democratic periods	Political transitions influenced agricultural commercialization; under military rule and	Within the Nigerian political economy, effective agricultural development requires

	focusing on different political eras.	and their agricultural policies.	SAP, policies were erratic and extractive.	policy consistency and genuine political commitment to rural development.
Olayemi, Ope-Oluwa & Merianchris (2021)	Political economy of agricultural development in Northern Nigeria.	Review of historical and contemporary policy, and socio-economic challenges in Nigeria's political economy.	Identified factors that hinder agricultural activities: land tenure, conflicts, urban migration, low education, and corruption.	Reform in land use, conflict resolution, and rural infrastructural investment to revamp the agriculture sector in the country.
Omeje, Arene & Okpukpara (2019)	Impact of agricultural protection on growth (1980–2016) using a political economy lens.	Time series data (1980–2016), regression, NPC model, Granger causality tests.	There is a negative relationship between protection policies and agricultural growth; budgetary allocation influences growth in the country.	Reforming protection policies and increasing budgetary support to agriculture.
Sertoglu, Ugural & Bekun (2017)	Contribution of agriculture to economic growth in Nigeria (1981–2013).	Time series analysis using Vector Error Correction Model (VECM).	A long-run relationship exists between agricultural output and GDP; agriculture affects economic growth in the country based on positive outcomes.	Advocates for agricultural diversification and increased funding for sustained economic impact within the Nigerian political economy.
Olabanji et al. (2017)	Relationship between agricultural output and economic growth in Nigeria (1981–2014).	Johansen co-integration test, Vector Error Correction Model, and Granger causality test.	Long-run and causal relationships exist between agricultural output and growth in the country's economy.	To strengthen agricultural policies and institutional support for productivity within the country.

Historical Agricultural Programs in Nigeria: A Detailed Post-Colonial Review

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, agriculture was the dominant economic sector that served as the principal source of national revenue and employment. The immediate post-colonial period witnessed optimism that indigenous governance would improve agricultural productivity and rural development within the economy. At the time, agriculture contributed over 60% to the country's GDP and employed more than 70% of the labour force within the Nigerian economy (Iwuagwu, 2022). Nigeria was among the leading exporters of commodities such as cocoa, palm oil, and groundnuts within the global economy. Despite high production levels, rural communities lacked access to infrastructure such as roads, healthcare, and electricity, which is a structural deficiency in the system (Osita-Njoku, 2016).

The First National Development Plan (1962–1968) was the earliest major effort by post-colonial government in Nigeria to steer agricultural development in the country, this place aimed to accelerate economic growth and improve local control of the economy, it primarily continued the colonial legacy of transportation and communication networks facilitated by the export of agricultural commodities rather than strengthening internal agricultural systems (Ibietan & Ekhosuehi, 2013). The plan abandons the rural infrastructural development, a factor for sustainable agricultural progress in the African development economy before colonialism. As a result, the agricultural base of the country was underdeveloped, and productivity gains were limited within the state. Critics argued that this plan failed to establish a clear policy for agricultural transformation, causing a kind of missed opportunity for rural empowerment and food security for the country.

The Second National Development Plan (1970–1974) is a pivotal period coinciding with Nigeria's post-civil war reconstruction and the oil boom era. This plan was inclusive in its formulation, involving various stakeholders and aimed at reducing inequality between rural and urban areas within the country's cosmopolis. Stating the national unity, economic growth, and social justice (Marcellus, 2009). However, the unprecedented increase in oil revenues led to a neglect of agriculture, with funds channeled towards massive importation of food and other goods. The economic shift created what is termed the "resource curse," where dependency on oil revenues stunted the development of other productive sectors within the Nigerian economy, such as agriculture (Oyefusi, 2007; Akpan *et al.*, 2023).

Under the Third National Development Plan (1975–1980), a renewed focus on agricultural modernization was evident. The government introduced innovative programmes, such as the Operation Feed the Nation (1976), the River Basin Development Authorities (1976), and the Agricultural Development Project (funded by the World Bank). These initiatives aimed to boost food production, empower smallholder farmers, and bridge disparities across regions within the Nigerian system (Staatz & Eicher, 1998). The plan featured budgetary allocations for agricultural development, the highest of all the preceding plans (Abubakar *et al.*, 2021).

The Fourth National Development Plan (1981–1985) was under a civilian regime that advocated for the balanced development of sectors and regionalism within the country, post-development activities. However, the global oil price collapse during this period constrained fiscal capacity, which caused a reduction in public agricultural investment at that time within the country's developmental growth (Emeh *et al.*, 2023). The plan made provisions for rural infrastructure in the form of water supply and irrigation through the River Basin Development Authorities. Federal and state governments allocated substantial funds for boreholes, feeder roads, and electricity (Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2005).

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, successive administrations have implemented various agricultural programmes that were aimed at revitalising the agricultural sector of the Nigerian political economy to ensure food security and promote economic diversification. President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1999–2007) initiated the National Special Programme for Food Security (NSPFS) in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The NSPFS aimed to improve food production and alleviate rural poverty by disseminating proven agricultural technologies to farmers across the country (Ephraim & Arene, 2015). Under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007–2010), the agricultural sector received attention through the National Food Security Programme (NFSP), which was part of the administration's seven-point agenda. The NFSP focused on increasing food production through the rehabilitation and expansion of irrigation infrastructure, construction of dams, and provision of counterpart funding for projects such as FADAMA III and initiatives supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the African Development Bank (ADB). However, despite these efforts, the average contribution of agriculture to Nigeria's GDP during this period declined.

President Goodluck Jonathan's tenure (2010–2015) witnessed the launch of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) in 2011, aiming to reposition agriculture as a business venture and integrate the agricultural value chain. The key components of the ATA; the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (GESS), to subsidize inputs (such as fertilizers and seeds) to farmers, and the establishment of Staple Crop Processing Zones (SCPZs) to attract private sector investments in agribusiness. Also, the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) was introduced to facilitate access to credit for farmers. Despite these initiatives, the agricultural sector's contribution to GDP averaged 21.09% during Jonathan's administration (Sogah *et al.*, 2024). The administration of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023) introduced the Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP) in 2016, also known as the "Green Alternative." The APP aimed to build on the successes of previous administration programmes by improving farmers' access to inputs, finance, and markets, with a focus on achieving food security and self-sufficiency. Two of the notable initiatives under the APP were the Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP), which provided loans to smallholder farmers through the Central Bank of Nigeria, and the Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI), aimed at making fertilizers more affordable and accessible. While these programmes contributed to increased agricultural activities, the sector's growth under Buhari was the weakest since 1999, with an average annual growth rate of 15% (Premium Times, 2021). In response to the challenges in the agricultural sector, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration

(2023–present) is implementing the National Agricultural Growth Scheme – Agro-Pocket (NAGS-AP). This is designed to stimulate increased productivity and higher yields among farmers to bring about an impact on food production and agricultural growth across the country.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to evaluate the interconnectedness between the Nigerian political economy and the agricultural sector. 70% of Nigeria's GDP is based on Agriculture, which shows that agriculture is as important as oil in Nigeria. Therefore, the choice of a qualitative methodology is informed by the nature of the objectives of the study, which aim to explore policy discourses, institutional practices, as well as the normative implications of digital governance frameworks. Data for the study are drawn from secondary sources. These are legislative instruments such as government policies, policy briefs, and peer-reviewed academic literature. The study employs content analysis as a method of data analysis; the use of a systematic coding and thematic evaluation of documentary materials to identify patterns and normative orientations in the Nigerian political economy and agricultural sector. A deductive coding strategy, aligned with constructs of transparency and accountability, is used to interrogate the alignment. Finally, the study incorporates an ethical dimension by engaging with the normative discourse.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Political economy dynamics affecting the agricultural sector

The political economy dynamics in Nigeria are rooted in historical and structural factors of the country. Before colonialism, land was allocated based on each tribe's culture, some based on individual family lineage, or traditional institutions. So, during the colonial era, agricultural policies were designed to serve the interests of the British Empire extraction of raw materials for export (Adeyeri & Adejuwon, 2012). This legacy persisted post-independence in the country's history, with successive governments prioritising cash crops over food crops by neglecting the needs of smallholder farmers within the system. Therefore, in the country, the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in the 1980s exacerbated these issues by reducing government support for agriculture, causing decreased productivity and increased food insecurity (Ibekwe, 2024).

In recent years, neoliberal economic reforms of the government have shaped the agricultural sector. The removal of subsidies and liberalization of trade policies exposed local farmers to global market fluctuations to their detriment (Odukoya, 2020). While these policies aimed to increase efficiency and attract investment, they resulted in reduced access to essential inputs for small-scale farmers, which hinders agricultural development (Olu *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, the state focuses on commercial agriculture, marginalising subsistence farming, the backbone of rural livelihoods in Nigeria (Olayemi *et al.*, 2021). Institutional weaknesses compound the challenges facing the agricultural sector within the Nigerian political economy. Corruption and mismanagement within government agencies due to the misallocation of resources and the failure of various agricultural programmes (Atakpa & Akpan, 2023). State initiatives such as the Growth Enhancement Scheme (GES), designed to provide subsidized inputs to farmers, have been undermined by inefficiencies and a lack of transparency (Tiri *et al.*, 2014). These institutional failures waste public funds and erode trust among farmers, making them less likely to engage with government programmes in the country. There are conflict issues that are disturbing one of Nigeria's federating states, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast and farmer-herder clashes, where agricultural activities are disrupted and also cause displacement in states of the federation (Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023). Furthermore, many have argued that conflicts in Nigeria's federating states are fueled by competition over land and resources, but in recent times, exacerbated by climate change and population growth (AP News, 2024). The incessant instability within the Nigerian federating states affects food production and deters investment in the agricultural sector development in the fragile economy (Kimenyi *et al.*, 2014).

Government Policy Analysis in Nigeria's Agricultural Sector

Government policies in Nigeria's economy, historically shaped all sectors of the economy, such as the agricultural sector, through subsidies, land reforms, and fiscal strategies. Early post-independence initiatives such as the Operation Feed the Nation (1976) and the Green Revolution (1980) were state interventions intended to boost

agricultural productivity through input subsidies (Olayemi, 1995). However, these programmes were affected due to poor implementation, elite capture, and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Adewumi & Omotesho, 2002). Despite large public expenditures, the benefits rarely reached the rural smallholder farmers, who form the backbone of Nigeria's agricultural economy. The mismatch between policy formulation and local realities resulted in policy failure and a deepening of rural poverty. Subsidy regimes within the Nigerian political economy shifted focus with the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (GESS), that was launched in 2011 under the Agricultural Transformation Agenda. GESS attempted to leverage mobile technology to deliver fertilizers and seeds directly to farmers to reduce corruption in the supply chain (Tiri et al, 2014). While the scheme to some degree improved input access for some farmers, it faced infrastructural deficits, network issues, and elite dominance that is common to many government initiatives in the country.

Land reform is a fundamental but unresolved policy issue in Nigeria's agricultural development discourse. The Land Use Act of 1978 in the country vests land ownership in state governors; the essence of this was to standardise land tenure and facilitate access for development (Akinola, 2000). However, the Act is a bottleneck; insecure land tenure, limited access to credit, and conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. Recent studies argue that without genuine decentralization and community-based land governance, land reforms in the Nigerian economy will continue to reproduce inequalities. Women's access to land is constrained under customary and statutory systems, which hinders gender equity in agriculture (FAO, 2018). Since independence, the public expenditure of successive governments on agriculture has fallen short of the 10% allocation benchmark set by the Maputo Declaration (African Union, 2003). This underfunding affects infrastructure, research, extension services, and rural development, all for agricultural productivity. Moreover, fiscal leakages due to corruption, weak institutional capacity, and misaligned budget priorities reduce the effectiveness of agricultural spending. Subsidy systems need digitized transparency and rural infrastructure support; land reform must empower customary authorities and tenure security for all demographics (women and youth).

Impact of Corruption, Rent-Seeking, and Patronage Systems on Agricultural Development in Nigeria

Corruption impedes Nigeria's political economy and agricultural development, distorting policy execution and investment for many decades, due to the misallocation of scarce resources and corrupt practices in government-sponsored agricultural programmes, rendering initiatives ineffective (Transparency International, 2021). In Nigeria's political economy, the government's imitative of large-scale fertilizer subsidy schemes is marred by diversion and embezzlement by the agents of the government or public officers, denying beneficiaries the necessary inputs for production. As Klitgaard (1998) argues, when discretion is high and accountability is low, corruption thrives in sectors with weak regulatory oversight in any economy. The erosion of trust in public institutions discourages local and foreign investment in actual investment in this sector of the economy, and this systemic failure perpetuates underdevelopment and cyclical poverty among rural farmers.

Also, the issue of rent-seeking behaviour in the country, defined as the manipulation of public policy or economic conditions to increase profits without reciprocating benefits, is endemic in Nigeria's agricultural sector. Political elites and bureaucrats capture agricultural programmes, redirecting resources for personal or political gains (Krueger, 2008; Aiyede, 2009). Forrest (1981) notes that the distribution of agricultural inputs in Nigeria is influenced by political patronage rather than the actual needs of the people, resulting in inefficiencies and disparities in resource allocation in the country. Furthermore, they create disincentives for productive engagement among genuine farmers. Patronage systems affect the bureaucratic professionalism in Nigeria's agricultural institutions, as positions are filled based on loyalty rather than merit. This institutional weakness translates into poor service delivery to the people, a lack of innovation among the government workers in the area of agriculture, and minimal accountability on their part as workers. Singh (2019) states that political clientelism distorts public service priorities, as leaders prioritise short-term electoral gains over long-term development strategies. Therefore, the rural infrastructure, extension services, and research institutions in Nigeria suffer chronic underfunding or neglect due to these problems. Patronage also erodes policy continuity, as successive administrations dismantle or redirect the programmes of their predecessors for partisan purposes (Akinwunmi, 2025). The effect on the economy and development is a fragmented and incoherent policy environment that is hostile to any sustainable agricultural reform.

Moreover, corruption and patronage within the Nigerian political economy deter many donors and reduce

credibility for the farmers. Donor agencies, the World Bank, and IFAD, on several occasions, suspended or redirected funding due to concerns about a lack of transparency (IFAD, 2020). This affects the availability of resources needed to modernize Nigeria's agricultural base in the form of research for mechanization and value chain for development in the country. As Adubi & Okunmadewa, (1999) note, global development partners demand verifiable governance benchmarks before supporting agricultural projects. Elijah (2007) argues that everyone must be ready to tackle issues that affect the political economy of Nigeria using legal reforms and the cultivation of a new political culture in terms of accountability, transparency, and meritocracy in the country.

Agricultural Sector Performance Indicators in Nigeria

The performance of the agricultural sector within the Nigerian political economy is measured through indicators such as its contribution to GDP, employment generation, food security levels, and export potential for the country. Historically, agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy before the oil boom of the 1970s, that contributed over 60% to GDP (Ekpo & Umoh, 2012). However, year after year, this contribution has declined to less than 25%, despite the sector employing more than 70% of the rural population (World Bank, 2021). This disconnect between employment and productivity is due to structural inefficiencies and underinvestment in value addition. Oyakhilomen & Zibah (2014) argue that the dominance of subsistence farming and low mechanisation levels are impediments to the political economy growth of the Nigerian state.

Employment in the agricultural sector is significant, but its quality and sustainability are questionable due to the happenings within the country's political economy. Rural households within the Nigerian economy are engaged in agriculture, yet underemployment and low returns per hectare persist (Olomola, 2015). Youth participation in the Agricultural sector is declining due to the sector's perceived lack of profitability and modernisation (Eze *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, agricultural labour in Nigeria's political economy is ageing, and productivity is stagnating. White (2012) notes that revitalising the agricultural sector is an investment in rural education, mechanisation, and access to credit to attract a younger, more productive workforce. Food production is another performance indicator in the country about food security and import dependency. Despite Nigeria's vast arable land, the country is one of the largest importers of basic staples such as rice and wheat. The paradox of food importation amid domestic abundance; inefficiencies in production, post-harvest losses, and marketing systems. Empirical findings by Abbas *et al.* (2018) reveal that up to 40% of farm produce in Nigeria is lost annually due to poor storage and transport infrastructure. Also, there are other problems of food production, which are inadequate irrigation and reliance on rain-fed agriculture limit year-round food production. The agricultural sectors of the Nigerian economy contribute to foreign exchange earnings; however, this is still underutilized. While Nigeria has comparative advantage in crops such as cocoa, cashew, and sesame, oil continues to dominate export revenues (CBN, 2020). According to Ayoola and Oboh (2015), the decline of agricultural exports is tied to policy neglect and fluctuating commodity prices, among others. These performance gaps are rooted in systemic issues (Akpan *et al.*, 2023). Addressing these bottlenecks requires a holistic performance framework that combines economic, social, and environmental metrics.

Challenges and Opportunities in Nigeria's Political Economy and Agricultural Sector

Nigeria's political economy is characterized by structural challenges and opportunities that have affected the Agricultural sector in the country. Historically, the nation's overreliance on oil revenues, accounting for over 90% of export earnings, has led to economic volatility in the agricultural sector (Gboyega *et al.*, 2021). Dependency in Nigeria stifled diversification by exacerbating income inequality and disparities among the haves and have-nots. Corruption is a pervasive issue in the country's development that affects policy implementation, eroding public trust in governmental initiatives (Atakpa & Akpan, 2023). Also, bureaucratic inefficiencies and inconsistent policy frameworks have hindered the development of a robust agricultural economy in the country, and these issues collectively impede sustainable economic growth and food security.

Since independence, the agricultural sector within the Nigerian political economy faces multifaceted challenges that are systemic and environmental. Land tenure insecurity limits farmers' access to land and discourages long-term investments in the agricultural sector of the economy (Olayemi *et al.*, 201). Also, inadequate infrastructure in the country, in terms of road networks and storage facilities, hampers the distribution of agricultural produce across states within the country (Gavrilova, 2021). Also, Climate change is a national threat due to temperatures

and rainfall patterns that affect crop yields (AP News, 2024). Insecurity in various areas of the country disrupted farming activities, resulting in decreased agricultural productivity and food insecurity.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for revitalising Nigeria's agricultural sector. The country's vast arable land and diverse agro-ecological zones a good potential for increased agricultural production (Gavrilova, 2021). Advancements in agricultural technology, precision farming, and biotechnology in the country to improve productivity and resilience to climate change (Tabe-Ojong *et al.*, 2023). Some of the recent policies in the country indicate a shift towards addressing these systemic issues. The implementation of economic reforms, the removal of fuel subsidies, and efforts to unify exchange rates aim to stabilise the macroeconomic environment for Nigeria's political economy (Financial Times, 2025). In the agricultural sector, programmes such as the National Agricultural Growth Scheme – Agro-Pocket (NAGS-AP) are designed for agricultural productivity and food security in the country. However, the success of these initiatives depends on effective implementation, transparency, and stakeholder engagement within the country. So, to harness the full potential of Nigeria's agricultural sector, a multifaceted approach is required.

CONCLUSION

There is an underperformance in Nigeria's agricultural sector, despite the vast potential that the sector can contribute to the economy, due to structural and policy challenges that are embedded in the political economy. This study examined how various political institutions, economic frameworks, governance practices, and historical patterns of mismanagement within the country constrained agricultural development activities. The findings revealed that Nigeria's overdependence on oil revenues, weak institutions, and inconsistent policy frameworks have affected the agricultural sector. Also, there are challenges within the Nigerian political economy that affect such as land tenure insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, climate-related shocks, and rural insecurity continue to impede agricultural productivity. Nonetheless, opportunities exist in the form of vast arable land, a youthful population, digital agricultural innovations, and domestic and international demand for food products. Recent economic reforms and strategies, such as the National Agricultural Growth Scheme – Agro-Pocket (NAGS-AP), demonstrate the potential for policy redirection toward sustainable agricultural development in the country. Furthermore, this study is primarily qualitative, relying on secondary data from peer-reviewed sources and publicly available reports. It does not incorporate empirical field data or primary quantitative analysis, which could have enriched the depth of the findings. Furthermore, sub-national political dynamics were briefly addressed. Nigeria stands at a crossroads where the political will of the leaders in the country, institutional reforms from the elites, and policymaking from the lawmakers in the country converge to unlock the transformative potential within the agricultural sector of the country. So, by addressing some of these foundational challenges within its political economy, the country fosters a resilient, productive, and inclusive agricultural system that contributes to national development and the attainment of global sustainable development goals.

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