



The influence of materialism and cultural orientation on Nigerian politics and economic development

Mas'ud Bello^{1*} and Musa Abdullahi¹

¹ Department of History and International Studies, Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria

Corresponding author: Mas'ud Bello

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Abstract

Language and culture are inseparable elements in human society, with language serving as the primary medium through which culture is expressed, transmitted, and preserved. Culture encompasses the beliefs, values, norms, customs, and patterns of behaviour that shape every aspect of social life, including politics, economics, religion, education, and governance. In Nigeria, cultural orientations have historically influenced political participation, selection and election of leaders, and this has grossly affected Nigeria's social and economic development. However, the country's contemporary political landscape has witnessed a growing culture of materialism, where the pursuit of wealth and monetary inducements increasingly determines political behaviour and electoral outcomes. This development has transformed the political mindset of many Nigerians, making voting decisions more reflective of ethnic loyalties and financial incentives than competence, ideology, or commitment to national development. The paper examines the influence of materialism and cultural orientation on Nigerian politics and national development, with particular emphasis on the impact of these factors on citizens' voting behaviour and intergroup social relations in the twenty-first century. It argues that the interplay between ethnic identity and money politics has weakened democratic values, undermined the emergence of credible leadership, and hindered sustainable national development. The study adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative approach, drawing on primary sources, archival materials, and relevant secondary literature to analyse the historical evolution and contemporary manifestations of these phenomena. The paper concludes that promoting issue-based politics, strengthening civic education, enforcing electoral laws against vote-buying, and fostering a stronger sense of national identity are essential to deepening democracy and advancing sustainable national social and economic development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Materialism, Cultural orientation, Voting behaviour, National development, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation whose political evolution has been deeply influenced by its ethnic composition, historical experiences, and socio-cultural values, with over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 indigenous languages. This diversity has formed not only the social and economic lives of Nigerians but also their political attitudes, leadership preferences, and patterns of political participation. Since the pre-colonial period, cultural orientation has become an important factor in determining how individuals and communities relate to authority, exercise political power, and participate in governance (Osaghae, 1998; Suberu, 2001) [16, 18]. Culture, as the total way of life of a people, comprises their beliefs, customs, traditions, values, norms, and social institutions. It influences how people perceive their environment, make decisions, and interact with one another. In the political arena, cultural orientation often determines citizens' perceptions of leadership, loyalty, justice, and public responsibility. Equally, cultural values can promote social cohesion, accountability, and community development; these factors have also reinforced ethnic consciousness and political discrimination where loyalty to one's ethnic group takes precedence over commitment to national interest (Hofstede, et al. 2010; Ake, 1996) [9, 3].

The political history of Nigeria demonstrates the ongoing influence of cultural and ethnic identity on political organization and governance. During the colonial period and the years preceding independence, political mobilization was deeply shaped by regionalism and ethnicity. The major political parties reflected the country's dominant ethnic blocs: the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was predominantly associated with the Hausa-Fulani of Northern Nigeria; the Action Group (AG) was largely supported by the Yoruba in the Western Region, while the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) got much of its support from the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region. Although these parties pursued nationalist objectives, their regional and ethnic foundations laid the basis for identity politics that has continued to influence the democratic process of the country (Coleman, 1958; Dudley, 1982) [6, 8]. After independence, expectations that democratic governance would gradually reduce ethnic politics were not fully realized. Instead, ethnicity and regionalism remained a significant factor in political competition, electoral campaigns, and the emergence of leadership. Successive elections more especially in the second and fourth republics shown that many voters continue to support candidates primarily because they share the same ethnic, regional, or religious background rather

than because of their competence, integrity, or policy programmes. This pattern has weakened democratic values; it has also created and encouraged political polarization, and undermined efforts to form a cohesive national identity (Joseph, 1987; Lewis, 2007) ^[13, 14].

In addition to that, the Nigerian politics has witnessed the growing influence of materialism. The increasing commercialization of elections has introduced a political culture in which money has become a decisive determinant in deciding electoral outcomes. Vote buying, financial inducements, political patronage, and the distribution of gifts such as clothing, household materials, or other valuables and security threats during elections and campaigns have become common features of Nigeria's electoral process. Consequently, many citizens now regard elections as opportunities and ways for immediate economic benefits rather than civic exercises aimed at choosing competent leaders. This has contributed to the emergence of political leaders who often prioritize personal gains over public service, thereby weakening democratic accountability and good governance (Bratton, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2007) ^[5, 11]. The combination of cultural (tribal) orientation and materialism has essentially reshaped the political mindset of many Nigerians in the 21st century. Instead of evaluating candidates based on their leadership qualities, vision, and commitment to national development, electoral choices are frequently influenced by ethnic loyalty and financial incentives. This trend has diminished political accountability, encouraged corruption, weakened democratic institutions, and hindered sustainable national development. As a result, elections often become contests of ethnic and regional dominance as well as the financial influence instead of competitions based on ideas, policies, and competence (Achebe, 1983; Osaghae, 1998) ^[1, 16].

It is against this background that this paper critically examines the influence of materialism and cultural orientation on Nigerian politics and how it has grossly affected national development. Particularly, it investigates how tribal affiliations and money politics have shaped the political behaviour and voting patterns of Nigerian citizens. The paper further argues that strengthening national consciousness, promoting civic education, enforcing electoral laws during electioneering campaigns vote buying, and encouraging issue-based political participation are essential for consolidating democracy and advancing national development in Nigeria.

2. Conceptual exposition

2.1 Materialism

Hornby (2020) ^[10] defines materialism as the beliefs that money possession and physical comforts are more important than spiritual values. It is the acquisition of wealth and material possessions rather than spiritual, intellectual or cultural values. Materialism is widely explained as the excessive attachment to wealth, material possessions, and personal financial gain. It is a value orientation in which success, social status, and happiness are measured primarily by the acquisition of money and material resources. In the political sphere, materialism refers to the tendency of political actors and citizens to place

personal economic benefits above public welfare and national development. This orientation encourages practices such as vote buying, bribery, political patronage, corruption, and the commercialization of political offices. Consequently, political positions are often viewed as opportunities for wealth accumulation rather than avenues for public service. In Nigeria, the increasing commercialization of politics has significantly influenced electoral processes, with many politicians relying on financial inducements to secure electoral support while some voters exchange their votes for immediate economic benefits. Such practices undermine democratic principles, weaken accountability, and contribute to poor governance and also it undermines national development (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

2.2 Cultural orientation

Cultural orientation is the process of making people aware of the elements and commands of the culture that gives identity to a people. It is both the formal and informal system of promoting consciousness about the symbols, values, attitudes and philosophy or ideological outlook that defines and differentiates one community from another. (Olofu, 2025) ^[15]. It also refers to the collective beliefs, values, customs, traditions, norms, and behavioural patterns that characterize a particular society and guide the actions of its members. These cultural values are transmitted from one generation to another through family, language, religion, education, and other social institutions. Cultural orientation influences the perceptions of people in leadership, authority, social relationships, and political participation. In Nigeria, cultural orientation has historically influenced political process through ethnic and regional identity, communal loyalty, kinship ties, and traditional institutions. Even though these cultural values have strengthened solidarity and preserved indigenous identities, but they also promoted ethnic-based political affiliations and electoral patterns that sometimes undermine national unity and democratic consolidation. Thus, cultural orientation remains one of the most influential factors shaping Nigeria's political landscape (Osaghae, 1998) ^[16].

2.3 Politics

Politics is the authoritative and legitimate struggle for limited resources or precious rights and privileges within the context of government, the economy, and society (Social Sci LibreTexts, 2024) ^[17]. Politics can also be defined as the process through which power is acquired, exercised, and distributed within a society for the purpose of making and implementing decisions that affect public affairs. It includes the activities of governments, political parties, institutions, and citizens in the formulation and execution of public policies. Politics provides the framework through which societal interests are represented, conflicts are managed, and resources are allocated. In democratic societies, politics is expected to promote accountability, transparency, participation, and the rule of law. However, where political competition is driven by ethnic loyalties and financial inducements rather than competence and ideology, democratic governance becomes weakened and public confidence in political institutions

declines. Consequently, the quality of politics directly influences the pace and direction of national development (Dahl, 1989) ^[7].

2.4 Voting behaviour

Rule (2014) ^[22] defined voting behavior as the actions or inactions of citizens regarding participation in elections, resulting either in support for political candidates or parties or in abstention from the voting process (Bratton, 2008) ^[5].

2.5 National development

National development can be defined as the overall influence of all human forces and the increase to the inventory of physical, human capital, knowledge, and skill". It encompasses all facets of an individual's life as well as the life of a nation. It takes a holistic approach to the problem. It is a process that involves reconstruction and development of numerous aspects of a nation as well as the development of individuals. It encompasses the whole growth as well as the expansion of our societal, religious, and cultural institutions, as well as our agricultural and manufacturing sectors (Ziprebo, and Obi, 2024, Igwe and Ateke, 2019) ^[24, 12]. Therefore, national development can be achieved when public institutions function effectively, resources are managed transparently, and citizens actively participate in democratic governance (Todaro and Smith, 2021) ^[20].

3. Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on Social Identity Theory and supported by Political Economy Theory. These theories provide a suitable framework for understanding how ethnic identity and material interests influence political behaviour, voting patterns, and national development in Nigeria. Social Identity Theory was developed by British social psychologist Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. The theory posit that individuals derive part of their identity and self-esteem from the social groups to which they belong, this includes ethnic groups, religion, nationality, and social class. As a result, people tend to favour the members of their own social group while showing less interest for members of other groups. This sense of belonging significantly influences attitudes, perceptions, and behaviour, including political outcomes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) ^[19].

This theory is highly relevant to political activities of Nigeria where ethnic and cultural identity remains one of the strongest determinants of political behaviour. Nigeria comprises numerous ethnic groups, with the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo made up the three major ethnic groups. Since the colonial era, political competition has often been organized around ethnic and regional interests. As a result, many Nigerians identify more deeply by their ethnic groups than with the Nigerian state, leading voters to support candidates from their own ethnic background regardless of their competence, experience, or political programmes. This pattern has encouraged ethnic politics, weakened national integration, and limited the emergence of issue-based democratic participation (Osaghae, 1998) ^[16].

Political Economy Theory examines the relationship between politics and economics and explains how the pursuit of economic interests affected political institutions, governance, and public policy. The theory argues that political actors often compete for control of state power because it provides access to economic resources, wealth, and influence. Consequently, political behaviour is frequently motivated by material interests rather than public service or ideological commitment (Ake, 1981) ^[2].

In the Nigerian context, Political Economy Theory explains the increasing commercialization of politics and the growing influence of money in electoral processes. Elections and political campaigns have become highly monetized, with politicians spending numerous amounts of money on campaigns, vote buying, and political patronage to secure electoral victory. Likewise, many voters expect financial rewards before casting their votes, reflecting the growing influence of materialism on democratic process of the country. This situation has transformed politics into an investment for personal gains rather than an avenue for national and public services. The consequence is the election of leaders who often prioritize personal and group interests over national development, thereby perpetuating corruption, poor governance, and institutional weakness (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

The combination of Social Identity Theory supported by Political Economy Theory provides a comprehensive explanation of the major variables examined in this study. Social Identity Theory explains why many Nigerians vote based on ethnic and regional affiliation and tribal loyalty, while Political Economy Theory accounts for the influence of money politics, vote buying, and materialism on electoral behaviour. Together, these theories demonstrate that voting behaviour in Nigeria is influenced not only by cultural orientation but also by economic incentives. The interaction between these two factors has significantly influenced political leadership, democratic governance, and national development. Therefore, the theories provide an appropriate analytical framework for examining how tribal/cultural orientation and materialism continue to transform the political mindset and voting behaviour of the people of Nigeria in the 21st century.

4. Historical evolution of ethnic politics and money politics in Nigeria

The political development of Nigeria has been seriously influenced by its ethnic diversity and cultural orientation since the pre-colonial era, because before the advent of colonial rule, the various ethnic groups that are presently constitute Nigeria operated distinct political entity and systems based on their customs, traditions, and indigenous institutions. The Hausa-Fulani practiced a centralized emirate system, the Yoruba developed well-organized kingdoms under the authority of Obas, while the Igbo generally operated a decentralized republican system. Although these societies maintained different forms of governance, political leadership was largely community-oriented and reflected the cultural values and traditions of each ethnic group. Political competition was therefore localized and had not yet assumed the ethnic rivalry that later characterized Nigerian politics (Coleman, 1958) ^[6].

The British colonial administration fundamentally transformed Nigeria's political structure through the amalgamation of 1914 and the introduction of regional administration and indirect rule. These colonial policies strengthened ethnic consciousness by encouraging political organization along regional and ethnic based. Constitutional reforms introduced during the colonial period further consolidated this trend, leading to the emergence of political parties such as the Northern People's Congress (NPC) predominantly supported by Hausa/fulani in Northern Nigeria, the Action Group (AG) drew substantial support from Yoruba dominated Western part of Nigeria, and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), supported by Igbo in the Southern part of the country. Consequently, political competition became increasingly influenced by ethnic and regional identity rather than national ideology, laying the foundation for ethnic and regional politics in post-independence Nigeria (Osaghae, 1998) ^[16].

Following independence in 1960, ethnic and regional as well as religious politics became more predominant as political elites competed for control of state power and national resources. Electoral contests were increasingly characterized by ethnic loyalty, regional interests, and political patronage, while successive military and civilian administrations struggled to build a cohesive national identity. Although policies such as state creation, the federal character principle, and national integration programmes were introduced to reduce ethnic and regional tensions, tribal and regional affiliation has continued to influence political appointments, electoral behaviour, recruitment process and leadership selection. As a result, ethnicity and regionalism remains significant factors in democratic process of Nigeria (Suberu, 2001) ^[18].

Alongside the persistence of ethnic and cultural oriented politics, materialism has emerged as another defining feature of the political structure of Nigeria, particularly in the fourth republic which marked the return to democratic rule in 1999 (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

5. Materialism and the commercialization of Nigerian politics

Materialism has increasingly transformed the nature of Nigerian politics from a system of public service to one driven by personal economic gains. In the present Nigeria, political office is often used as a means of acquiring wealth, influence, and access to state resources rather than an opportunity to serve the public interests. This perception has promoted the commercialization of politics, where electoral success is largely determined by ethnic affiliation and financial strength rather than competence, integrity, and commitment to national development. Consequently, elections have become expensive, highly competitive, and susceptible to various forms of electoral malpractice, including vote buying, political patronage, and godfatherism, all of which undermine democratic governance and sustainable national development (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

5.1 Vote buying

Vote buying has become one of the most visible manifestations of materialism in Nigerian politics. It refers to the practice

whereby politicians or political parties offer or distribute money, food items, clothing, or other material incentives to voters in exchange for electoral support, which is aimed at influencing voters' choices, opinions and secure electoral victory regardless of the candidates' competence or political programmes. Economic hardship, poverty, and unemployment have made many voters vulnerable to this practice, allowing politicians to use and exploit their financial difficulties during elections. Consequently, elections have become an avenue for commercial transactions rather than democratic processes aimed at selecting capable and competence leaders (Bratton, 2008) ^[5].

The widespread practices of vote buying and commercialization of politics has serious implications for Nigeria's democracy. It weakens electoral credibility, discourages issue-based campaigns, promotes corruption, and undermines citizens' confidence in democratic institutions. Politicians who secure office through financial inducements frequently prioritize recovering campaign expenditures rather than good governance, public accountability declines while corruption, bad governance and poor service delivery become entrenched within the political system (Bratton, 2008) ^[5].

5.2 Political patronage

Political patronage refers to the distribution of government appointments, contracts, public resources, and other benefits to political supporters, loyalists, or associates in exchange for political loyalty. Rather than emphasizing merit, competence, or experience, appointments are often influenced by personal relationships, ethnic affiliation, or political allegiance. This system has become deeply rooted in Nigerian politics because political leaders frequently reward individuals and groups that contributed to their electoral success (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

The persistence of political patronage has weakened public institutions and reduced administrative efficiency. Qualified individuals are often overlooked in favour of politically connected persons, leading to poor policy implementation, institutional inefficiency, and corruption. Furthermore, political patronage reinforces ethnic and regional politics because appointments and government benefits are frequently distributed based on tribal or political considerations instead of national interest. This practice ultimately undermines good governance and sustainable development (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

5.3 Godfatherism

Godfatherism is another significant manifestation of materialism in Nigerian politics. It is a political arrangement in which wealthy and influential individuals, commonly referred to as political godfathers, sponsor candidates financially and strategically during elections with the expectation of controlling and influencing government decisions after electoral victory. Political godfathers often determine who receives party nominations, campaign resources, and political appointments, thereby exerting enormous influence over the democratic process (Albert, 2005) ^[4].

The influence of godfatherism has negatively affected democratic governance in Nigeria. Many elected officials become accountable to their political sponsors rather than the electorate, resulting in conflicts over political appointments, diversion of public resources, abuse of office, and political instability. The dominance of political godfathers also discourages competent individuals without financial backing from participating in politics, thereby limiting democratic competition and reducing the quality of political leadership (Albert, 2005) ^[4].

5.4 Politics perceived as a business enterprise

In recent decades, politics in Nigeria has increasingly been viewed as a business enterprise rather than a platform for public service. Many individuals seek elective offices because of the enormous financial benefits, allowances, and access to state resources associated with political positions. Consequently, elections and political offices served as investments, through which politicians expecting substantial financial returns after assuming office. This perception promotes excessive campaign spending, corruption, and the mismanagement of public resources and also the socio-economic development of the country (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

The commercialization of politics has seriously affected the democratic and developmental aspirations of Nigeria. Rather than focusing on policy formulation, public welfare, and national development, many political office holders become preoccupied with recovering campaign expenses and accumulating personal wealth. This orientation weakens democratic accountability, reduces public trust in government, and contributes to poor governance, slow economic development, and persistent corruption. Addressing this challenge requires comprehensive electoral reforms, stronger anti-corruption institutions, effective enforcement of electoral laws, and civic education that emphasizes public service, integrity, and national interest above personal gain (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

6. Tribal orientation and voting behaviour in Nigeria

Tribal orientation has remained one of the strongest determinants of voting behaviour in Nigeria. Despite the country's democratic progress, ethnic identity continues to influence political participation, electoral processes, and leadership recruitment. Rather than evaluating candidates based on competence, integrity, and policy proposals, many Nigerians make political decisions based on ethnic affiliation and regional interests. This trend has strengthened identity politics, weakened issue-based campaigns, and limited the growth of national unity and democratic consolidation (Osaghae, 1998) ^[16].

6.1 Ethnic loyalty in elections

Ethnic loyalty refers to the tendency of voters to support candidates who belong to their own ethnic group regardless of their competence, qualifications, political ideology, or development agenda. In Nigeria, this pattern has become a recurring feature of electoral politics because many citizens

perceive political power as a means of protecting the interests of their ethnic communities. Consequently, elections are often viewed as competitions among ethnic groups rather than democratic contests based on competence and public policy (Suberu, 2001) ^[18].

The persistence of ethnic loyalty has significantly influenced the quality of political leadership in Nigeria. Candidates who enjoy strong ethnic support often secure electoral victories even when they possess limited administrative experience or lack credible development programmes. This weakens merit-based leadership recruitment, promotes political exclusion, and encourages politicians to focus on ethnic mobilization instead of addressing national challenges such as insecurity, unemployment, and economic development (Osaghae, 1998) ^[16].

6.2 Identity politics

Identity politics refers to political participation and mobilization based on social identities such as ethnicity, religion, language, or regional affiliation rather than shared national interests or ideological principles. In Nigeria, identity politics has remained widespread because political actors frequently appeal to ethnic and religious sentiments to attract electoral support. These appeals strengthen group solidarity but often deepen political divisions and undermine national cohesion (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

The growing influence of identity politics has reduced the emphasis on issue-based campaigns and democratic accountability. Rather than debating policies relating to education, healthcare, economic development, or security, political discourse is frequently dominated by discussions of ethnic representation and religious balance. This situation diverts public attention from governance and encourages citizens to evaluate candidates primarily on the basis of identity instead of competence and performance (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

6.3 Regionalism and political parties

Regionalism has played important role in the historical evolution of Nigeria's political parties since colonial period. The earliest political parties of country developed strong regional and ethnic support bases, reflecting the diverse cultural composition of the federation. Although contemporary political parties claim to have national outlooks, electoral support often remains concentrated within particular regions where candidates share common ethnic or cultural backgrounds with the electorate (Coleman, 1958) ^[6].

The regional character of political parties has continued to influence electoral competition and governance in Nigeria. Political parties frequently consider regional balancing and ethnic calculations when selecting presidential and governorship candidates in order to maximize electoral support. While such arrangements may promote political inclusion, they also reinforce regional divisions and reduce opportunities for ideology-based politics. Consequently, party loyalty is often influenced more by ethnic identity than by political philosophy or policy direction (Suberu, 2001) ^[18].

6.4 The "Our Turn" mentality

The "Our Turn" mentality refers to the widespread belief that political power should rotate among Nigeria's major ethnic groups or geopolitical regions so that every section of the country has an opportunity to produce political leaders, and participate in the decision making process of the country. This perception is rooted in concerns about equity, inclusion, and fair representation within multicultural of Nigerian society. Consequently, many political debates focus on whose "turn" it is to occupy public office rather than on the competence and vision of those seeking leadership positions (Osaghae, 1998) ^[16].

Although the principle of power rotation has contributed to reducing feelings of marginalization in some instances, it has also strengthened ethnic consciousness and weakened meritocracy. Political office is sometimes viewed as an entitlement for a particular ethnic group or region instead of a responsibility entrusted to the most qualified candidate. As a result, electoral choices may be influenced by zoning arrangements and ethnic expectations rather than the ability of candidates to provide effective leadership and promote national development. This mentality continues to shape voting behaviour and political competition in contemporary Nigeria and it led to the political marginalization and domination of minority groups by the majority (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

7. How materialism and tribal orientation shape the political mindset of Nigerian citizens

Materialism and tribal orientation have become two of the most influential factors shaping the political mindset of Nigerian citizens. Rather than promoting issue-based politics and national consciousness, these factors have encouraged many citizens to prioritize ethnic and regional affiliations as well as personal economic benefits when participating in political activities. Consequently, electoral behaviour is increasingly influenced by tribal loyalty, financial inducements, and political patronage instead of competence, integrity, and commitment to public service. This trend has weakened democratic institutions and hindered sustainable national development (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

7.1 Preference for personal gain over national interest

The most important effect of materialism on Nigerian politics is the traditional tendency among citizens to prioritize personal interests over collective national development. During campaigns and elections, voters evaluate political contestants based on the immediate financial or material benefits they are likely to receive instead of considering their competence, experience, or policy agenda. This orientation has shifted political participation from a civic responsibility to an avenue for getting personal rewards, thereby weakening patriotism and public accountability (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

The preference for personal gain also affects political leaders after elections. Many elected officials view public office as an opportunity to recover their campaign and election expenses and accumulate wealth rather than to provide quality leadership and public service. Consequently, public resources are

frequently diverted for private and personal benefits, while other important sectors such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and employment receive lower attention. This situation has seriously contributed to corruption, poor governance, and slow national development in Nigeria (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

7.2 Acceptance and informal institutionalization of vote buying

Vote buying has become increasingly accepted as a normal feature of electoral politics in many parts of Nigeria. Economic hardship, poverty, and unemployment have made many citizens vulnerable to financial inducements during elections. Politicians often use this as an opportunity to provide some little amount of money, food items, clothing, and other gifts to manipulate voters, by changing the nature of elections into commercial transactions rather than democratic exercises based on informed political choices (Bratton, 2008) ^[5].

The acceptance of vote buying has seriously implicated democratic governance of the country. When voters exchange their votes for personal financial benefits, they become less likely to hold elected leaders accountable for poor performance after elections. Politicians who secure electoral victory through financial influence often prioritize recovering campaign expenditures instead of implementing policies that promote national development. As a result, corruption, poor service delivery, and weak democratic institutions continue to persist (Bratton, 2008) ^[5].

7.3 Blind followership and subjective loyalty

Tribal orientation has continued to influence voting behaviour of Nigeria by encouraging many citizens to support candidates primarily because they belong to the same ethnic group. Instead of assessing candidates based on leadership qualities, competence, integrity, or developmental plans, voters often rely on ethnic identity as the principal basis for making electoral decisions. This tendency has strengthened ethnic politics and weakened issue-based democratic participation (Osaghae, 1998) ^[16].

Politicians frequently exploit ethnic sentiments during election campaigns by portraying political contests as struggles for ethnic representation and dominance. Such narratives promote ethnic divisions, create suspicion among different ethnic groups, and reduce national cohesion. Consequently, qualified and competent candidates may be rejected simply because they belong to another ethnic group, while less competent and unqualified candidates receive support solely because they share the same ethnic background as the electorate. This practice undermines meritocracy and good governance (Suberu, 2001) ^[18].

7.4 Declining political accountability

Materialism and tribal orientated politics have greatly contributed to declining political accountability of leaders in Nigeria. Politicians who gain power through financial inducements or ethnic mobilization often feel more accountable to political sponsors, godfathers, or ethnic and

regional affiliations than to the general public. This undermines democratic accountability because elected officials become less responsible to the needs and expectations of the ordinary citizens (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

Similarly, many citizens fail to demand transparency and accountability from leaders who share their ethnic identity or who provided financial incentives during elections. Instead of evaluating government performance objectively, they often defend political leaders on ethnic or partisan grounds. This attitude encourages corruption, abuse of public office, and poor governance while weakening democratic oversight and citizen participation in governance (Suberu, 2001) ^[18].

7.5 Weak civic and democratic values

The growing influence of materialism and tribal politics has weakened civic responsibility and democratic values among many Nigerians. Democratic principles such as patriotism, political tolerance, civic participation, and respect for the rule of law are increasingly overshadowed by ethnic loyalty and the pursuit of personal economic interests. Consequently, many citizens perceive politics as a means of personal enrichment rather than a platform for promoting the common good (Dahl, 1989) ^[7].

Weak civic values have also reduced public confidence in democratic institutions and electoral processes. Citizens who believe that elections are determined by money and ethnicity may become politically apathetic or participate only for material benefits. This undermines democratic consolidation and limits the ability of elections to produce accountable and visionary leadership. Strengthening civic education, promoting political awareness, and encouraging issue-based campaigns are therefore essential for fostering responsible citizenship and sustainable democratic development in Nigeria (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

8. Implications for national development

The persistent influence of materialism and cultural (tribal) orientation on Nigeria's political system have had profound effects for the country's national development. Democratic governance is expected to produce competent leadership, strengthen institutions, and promote socio-economic development. However, in circumstances when political decisions are driven by ethnic, regional loyalty and monetary inducements rather than merit and national interest, the quality of governance declines significantly. The result is a political environment characterized by corruption, weak institutions, poor leadership, and limited developmental outcomes despite the abundant human and natural resources in the country (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

8.1 Emergence of unfit leadership and bad governance

Among the greatest consequences of tribal orientation and money politics is poor leadership recruitment. In an ideal democratic system, elections should produce competent, visionary, and accountable leaders who possess the qualities and capacity to address national challenges such as insecurity, unemployment, poverty, education and healthcare challenges.

In Nigeria, however, electoral success is often determined by ethnic and regional affiliations, financial influence, political patronage, and godfatherism rather than competence or integrity. As a result, many qualified individuals are discouraged from participating in politics because they lack the financial resources or political connections required to compete effectively (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

The emergence of leaders through ethnic mobilization and financial inducement has negatively affected governance and policy implementation. Rather than focusing on national development, some elected officials become preoccupied with satisfying political sponsors, rewarding supporters, or recovering campaign expenditures. This weakens accountability and limits the government's ability to formulate and implement policies that would improve the welfare of citizens. As a result, leadership recruitment based on ethnicity and materialism continues to undermine the democratic development of Nigeria (Joseph, 1987) ^[13].

8.2 Corruption and Mismanagement

Materialism has contributed significantly to the development of corruption and the mismanagement of public resources in Nigeria. Because political office is widely perceived as an avenue for wealth accumulation, many politicians engage in corrupt practices such as embezzlement, contract inflation, diversion of public funds, and abuse of office. Such public resources that should be invested in education, healthcare, infrastructure, employment are often diverted for personal or political purposes, thereby slowing national development (Ake, 1996) ^[3].

Also, corruption and mismanagement weaken public confidence in government institutions and reduce the effectiveness of development programmes. Citizens become less willing to trust public officials when government resources are consistently mismanaged, while foreign and domestic investors may hesitate to invest in an environment characterized by poor transparency and accountability. Consequently, corruption remains one of the major obstacles to sustainable development and good governance in Nigeria (Transparency International, 2023) ^[21].

8.3 Weak democratic institutions

The commercialization of politics and ethnic-based political competition has weakened democratic institutions of the country. Electoral bodies, political parties, legislative institutions, and other democratic structures often face pressure from politicians seeking to manipulate electoral outcomes through financial influence or ethnic, regional and religious mobilization for example the Muslim-Muslim ticket in 2023 elections. Such interference and mobilization undermine the independence, credibility, and effectiveness of democratic institutions (Dahl, 1989) ^[7] and weak democratic institutions also reduce citizens' confidence in elections and governance (Suberu, 2001) ^[18].

8.4 Ethnic tension and national disunity

Tribal oriented politics has continued to create ethnic tension and weaken national unity in Nigeria because political

campaigns based on ethnic identity often creates feelings of domination, exclusion, marginalization, and mistrust among different groups. Politicians sometimes exploit ethnic differences during election campaigns to mobilize support, thereby deepening divisions instead of promoting national cohesion (Osaghae, 1998) ^[16]. Such practices threaten peaceful coexistence and undermine efforts to build a united Nigerian nation.

The persistence of ethnic based politics also encourages regional interests to take precedence over national objectives. Rather than promoting policies that benefit the entire country, political leaders may prioritize the interests of their ethnic or regional constituencies. This has contributed to recurring political conflicts, separatist agitations, communal violence, and declining confidence in the Nigerian state. Promoting inclusive governance and strengthening national identity are therefore essential for sustainable peace and development (Suberu, 2001) ^[18].

8.5 Stunted socio-economic growth and national development

The combined effects of bad governance, corruption, weak political institutions, and ethnic as well as regional based politics have seriously affected the socio-economic development of Nigeria. Despite the abundant natural and human resources, the country continues to experience widespread poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, poor healthcare services and facilities, educational challenges, and insecurity. Many of these developmental problems are linked to governance failures arising from politics driven by materialism and ethnic as well as regional considerations rather than national interest (Todaro & Smith, 2021) ^[20]. Therefore, political reforms and civic education remain indispensable for Nigeria's long-term progress (World Bank, 2023) ^[23].

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate the adverse effects of materialism and tribal orientation on Nigerian politics and to foster sustainable national development.

- Government agencies, educational institutions, civil society organisations, and the media should intensify civic education programmes that promote patriotism, national unity, democratic values, and issue-based political participation. Citizens should be empowered to evaluate political candidates based on competence, integrity, and policy proposals rather than ethnic affiliation or financial inducements.
- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant law enforcement agencies must rigorously enforce existing laws prohibiting vote buying, vote selling, and other forms of electoral corruption. Strict prosecution of offenders (including individuals and political parties) is essential to deter future malpractice.
- Political parties should orient their campaigns around policies, manifestos, and developmental programmes, avoiding the exploitation of ethnic, religious, or regional

sentiments. Public debates and media engagements should prioritise national issues such as economic growth, education, healthcare, security, and employment to facilitate informed electoral decision-making.

- Electoral reforms should introduce stricter oversight of campaign financing, political donations, and election expenditures. Transparent monitoring and disclosure of campaign funds would reduce the commercialisation of politics and create a more level playing field for qualified candidates who lack substantial personal wealth.
- Political parties should institutionalise transparent, merit-based processes for candidate selection. Strengthening internal democracy will curtail the undue influence of political godfathers, encourage the emergence of competent leadership, and enhance public confidence in democratic institutions.
- Anti-corruption agencies should receive adequate funding and operational independence to investigate and prosecute cases of corruption, abuse of office, and financial misconduct without political interference. Robust accountability mechanisms will help diminish the perception of public office as a conduit for personal enrichment.
- The government should continue to implement policies that foster national unity, social inclusion, and equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of ethnic, religious, or regional background. Strengthening institutions that facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue and peaceful coexistence will help reduce tribal politics and cultivate a stronger, shared national identity.
- To reduce citizens' vulnerability to vote buying and political manipulation, the government should pursue policies that alleviate poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality. This includes investing in job creation, quality education, entrepreneurship development, and robust social welfare programmes to improve the overall economic well-being of the populace.

10. Conclusion

This paper examined the influence of materialism and cultural orientation on Nigerian politics and national development. It argued that while culture has historically shaped political structure and participation in Nigeria, contemporary politics is increasingly driven by ethnic and regional considerations as well as material interests. The study found that voting behaviour is frequently shaped by ethnic loyalty, regional affiliation, vote buying, political patronage, and the desire for personal gain, rather than by candidates' competence, integrity, and commitment to public service - a trend that has weakened democratic ideals and undermined the quality of governance. The growing commercialisation of politics and the persistence of ethnic-based political mobilisation have produced far-reaching consequences for national development, including corruption, weak democratic institutions, ethnic marginalisation, and slow socio-economic progress. Furthermore, the interaction between tribal and materialistic politics has created an environment where elections are often

perceived as opportunities for personal or group enrichment and access to national wealth, rather than as mechanisms for promoting accountability, national unity, and sustainable development. Consequently, Nigeria's democratic process has not fully translated into the expected improvements in governance and citizen welfare.

The study therefore concludes that achieving sustainable national development requires a deliberate transformation of Nigeria's political culture, wherein political leaders, institutions, and citizens must embrace democratic values that prioritise merit, accountability, transparency, patriotism, and the collective national interest above ethnic loyalty and material gain. Equally important are sustained civic education, credible electoral reforms, effective enforcement of electoral laws, and policies that foster national integration and inclusive governance. If these measures are consistently implemented, Nigeria will be better positioned to strengthen its democracy, improve leadership recruitment, promote national cohesion, and accelerate socio-economic development for the benefit of present and future generations.

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