

DEVELOPMENT AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN AFRICAN STATES: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF HOW EUROPE UNDERDEVELOPED AFRICA

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Abstract

This study critically evaluates the development and underdevelopment of African states: a critical evaluation of how Europe underdeveloped Africa. This study also investigates the historical and contemporary processes that contribute to underdevelopment in African States, the impact of colonial legacy experience on Francophone and Anglophone African States, and the role of neoliberalism and the state-led economy growth model in Africa's development. Dependency theory and Marxist political economy theory were adopted as the theoretical framework for this study to explain how global inequalities were historically constituted and continue to be reproduced. A qualitative approach and interpretive methodology were utilized for this study, which explores the intersections of colonialism, neoliberalism, state-led development models, and internal governance failures. The findings contribute to a more nuanced, interdisciplinary understanding of Africa's developmental trajectory, offering critical insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners working toward the continent's sustainable and inclusive growth. The study concludes that African development requires a decolonized, context-specific paradigm that acknowledges historical injustices, reclaims African agency, and integrates grassroots and participation. Thus, this study recommends hybrid models which involve mixing market incentives with social protection and decentralization with strategic planning.

Introduction

Underdevelopment in African states remains a subject of intense scholarly debate, policy concern, and social frustration. For decades, researchers and thinkers have attempted to unpack the complex historical and structural factors that have kept much of the continent on the margins of global economic prosperity. Walter Rodney's

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How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1972) is one of the most enduring and provocative contributions to this discourse. Heavily influenced by radical Marxism and pan-Africanist philosophical orientation, Rodney argued that Africa's current condition is not the result of internal failings or a lack of effort, but rather the consequence of centuries of systematic exploitation by European powers. He described underdevelopment not merely as economic backwardness but as a historical process that is intentional, structural, and deeply embedded in global capitalism. The continuation of unequal trade relations, foreign debt, and donor dependency have been cited as evidence of neo-colonialism and global economic injustice even in the post-independence era (Bond, 2006; Taylor, 2019). Furthermore, most literature tends to treat Africa as a monolithic whole, glossing over the diversity of colonial experiences from British indirect rule to French assimilation and Belgian paternalism and their varying postcolonial legacies. For instance, Ghana's economic structures and social transformations differ markedly from those in Algeria or the Democratic Republic of Congo. A more granular, regionally specific understanding is crucial for scholarly accuracy and effective policy-making.

Another overlooked dimension in the discourse is gender's role. Colonialism not only exploited nations but also restructured gender roles in ways that marginalized women economically, politically and socially. Scholars such as Mama (2001) and Amadiume (2015) have shown that colonial rule often entrenched patriarchal norms, sidelining women from leadership roles and economic participation. Yet gendered analyses remain rare in the literature on mainstream development. Finally, the global landscape has changed dramatically since Rodney wrote his thesis. Contemporary forms of dominance, such as digital imperialism, environmental degradation, and multinational corporate control, present new challenges that echo but also extend beyond classical colonialism. Engaging Rodney's framework considering these new realities requires both fidelity to historical insight and openness to evolving dynamics. Therefore, this study seeks to critically analyze how Europe underdeveloped Africa.

Statement of the problem

The persistent underdevelopment of African states remains one of the most pressing challenges in global development discourse. Walter Rodney's seminal work *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* provides a powerful historical framework for understanding how colonial exploitation and capitalist expansion systematically impoverished the continent. However, the literature rooted in Rodney's thesis often exhibits critical gaps that limit its explanatory scope in contemporary contexts despite its significant contributions. Most notably, the overwhelming emphasis on external factors, such as European imperialism and global capitalism, implemented by neoliberal institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has resulted in the relative neglect of African agency. Scholarly engagement with how African leaders, elites, and local institutions have contributed to underdevelopment is insufficient. This imbalance risks perpetuating a narrative of passive victimhood and overlooking the failures of internal governance, corruption, and policy missteps that have shaped Africa's developmental trajectory since independence. Furthermore, the literature tends to treat Africa as a monolithic entity, overlooking the diversity of colonial experiences and postcolonial outcomes across different regions and states. This generalization limits the ability to generate context-specific solutions that reflect individual countries' socio-political and economic realities.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of gendered analysis in studies on underdevelopment. The distinct ways in which colonial and postcolonial systems have affected women and marginalized gender groups remain underexplored. Global influences such as digital colonialism, climate injustice, and debt entrapment are seldom connected to historical patterns of exploitation. These gaps indicate the urgent need for a more nuanced, interdisciplinary approach to the study of African development. Therefore, this study seeks to explore development and underdevelopment in African states: A critical evaluation of how Europe undeveloped Africa.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- i. What historical and contemporary processes contribute to underdevelopment in African States?
- ii. How do Francophone and Anglophone African states experience the impact of the colonial legacy?
- iii. Have neoliberalism and state-led economic growth models contributed to the development of Africa?

Objectives of the study

The study's broad objective is to examine development and underdevelopment in African states: A critical evaluation of how Europe undeveloped Africa.

- i. Investigate historical and contemporary processes that contribute to underdevelopment in African countries;
- ii. Examine the impact of the colonial legacy experience on the Francophone and Anglophone African States.
- iii. Neoliberalism and the state-led economy growth model in Africa's development

Scope of the study

This study focused on the development and underdevelopment in African states: A critical evaluation of how Europe underdeveloped Africa, drawing from the past and examining the present to reimagine the future. The study is guided by three central objectives: (1) the historical and contemporary processes that contribute to underdevelopment in African States; (2) the impact of colonial legacy experience on the Francophone (Burkina Faso) and Anglophone (Nigeria) African States; and (3) the role of neoliberalism and the state-led economic growth model in Africa's development. This study also covers key historical periods, from pre-colonial times through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and the post-independence era.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to investigate how Africa underdeveloped in Europe. The interpretive research design was also utilized in this study. This approach allows for in-depth engagement with historical texts, political economy, and socio-cultural processes. This study will critically analyze existing literature, historical data, and contemporary scholarly perspectives to understand both the systemic external factors and internal dynamics shaping Africa's development trajectory. The study relies on secondary sources, including: historical documents such as colonial administrative records, treaties, and economic data from the pre- and post-colonial eras, as well as scholarly books and journal articles published between 2015 and 2024 on development, underdevelopment, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and political economy in Africa.

Review of relevant studies

Development and Underdevelopment Concepts

In its simplest sense, development refers to the process through which societies improve their citizens' well-being, often measured through indices such as health, education, infrastructure, and economic productivity. At the individual level, increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being". It could be further referred to as an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. According to Andrews, development in the Global North has always been parasitic, feeding off the labor, resources and bodies of those in the Global South. He argues that this parasitism continues in more insidious forms through trade imbalances, debt regimes, and intellectual property regimes that disadvantage African countries. Willoughby-Herard similarly emphasizes the imminent racial tendencies in global capitalism, pointing to how anti-blackness remains fundamental to the distribution of power and resources in the international order. It is within this critical context that Rodney's analysis finds renewed vitality, and his insistence that "the question is not whether Africa can be developed, but rather whether it can

be developed under the present capitalist system” (Rodney, 1972) is echoed in contemporary calls to rethink the very foundations of global economic relations.

Conversely, underdevelopment is not simply the absence of development but a structural condition produced through exploitative global interactions. This dialectical understanding, where the development of Europe was predicated on the underdevelopment of Africa, is central to Rodney’s thesis and has found renewed resonance in contemporary scholarly literature. Recent works underscore the need to reassess the historiography of African development from a critical and decolonial perspective. Scholars, such as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) and Olivia Rutazibwa (2021), have called for a paradigmatic shift from Western-centered-development discourses toward what they term “epistemic justice.” Ndlovu-Gatsheni, in particular, argues that the prevailing development frameworks in Africa are deeply embedded in coloniality, i.e., the enduring systems of knowledge, power, and being that continue to structure African societies in the image of Europe. These frameworks often portray African societies as blank slates requiring salvation through Western-style modernization, ignoring the violent histories and extractive systems that contributed to their marginalization in the first place. **Rodney** emphatic that Africa’s underdevelopment was intentional, systematic, and maintained through force, ideology, and economic coercion. The process began with the transatlantic slave trade, during which millions of Africans were forcibly removed from the continent, crippling population growth, disrupting social systems, and fueling wars between African societies incentivized by European traders. According to Rodney, the slave trade did more than deplete human capital as it reshaped African societies around violence, profit, and external dependency. This legacy laid the groundwork for European colonization, which intensified Africa’s economic reorientation toward the needs of the metropolis and underdevelopment in African states. The colonial encounter was a brutal, calculated, and systematic reorganization of African societies for the benefit of European powers.

Colonial Legacies of Nigeria and Burkina Faso

The colonial legacies in Nigeria and Burkina Faso continue to shape their post-independence trajectories. In Nigeria, British indirect rule entrenched ethnic divisions, empowered unaccountable traditional elites, and laid the foundation for regionalism and elite-dominated politics. Burkina Faso, shaped by French assimilation, inherited a centralized bureaucratic state that marginalized indigenous governance and bred social alienation. Both systems weakened local institutions, fostered dependency, and disrupted cultural continuity. Today, these legacies manifest in fragile state structures, uneven development, and contested national identities. Understanding these inherited systems is crucial for crafting governance models that reflect the realities of Africa and promote inclusive, grassroots-driven development. Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta under French colonial rule, presents a postcolonial narrative that contrasts Nigeria’s. While both countries grapple with the enduring effects of colonialism, their trajectories diverge significantly due to differences in administrative legacies, ideological experiments, and socio-political contexts.

French colonialism in Burkina Faso was characterized by direct administrative centralization, cultural assimilation policies, and the imposition of French language and values, an approach that was fundamentally distinct from the British model of indirect rule in Nigeria. Harsch (2014) observed that the postcolonial state in Burkina Faso was burdened by inherited structures that prioritized Parisian-style central governance over indigenous participation or local autonomy. Burkina Faso’s post-independence history has been turbulent, marked by coups, assassinations, and a persistent struggle to establish democratic and developmental stability. However, there have been critical moments within this volatility, particularly under the leadership of Thomas Sankara, when the state experimented with radical alternatives to the orthodox development models prescribed by international financial institutions. These experiments, however short-lived, remain significant in

understanding how African agency has been articulated and contested within the wider matrix of underdevelopment and external pressure. Blaise Compaoré ruled Burkina Faso for 27 years following the assassination of Sankara, ushering in a period of relative political stability but persistent authoritarianism and elite dominance. Compaoré's regime reversed many of Sankara's policies, reopened the country to foreign aid, privatized state assets, and aligned closely with France and Western financial institutions. The neoliberal turn was framed as a necessary step toward modernization and economic integration, but critics argue that it entrenched dependency and excluded popular voices.

Neoliberalism and the State-Led Economy Growth Model in the Development of Africa

Neoliberalism is not simply an economic ideology but a political project that privileges market mechanisms over state intervention. Rooted in the philosophies of Hayek and Friedman, and globalized through Reaganomics and Thatcherism, it champions liberalization, privatization, and deregulation. Neoliberalism gained ground in the African context in the 1980s through structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which conditioned aid and debt relief on radical economic reforms (Mkandawire, 2005). In contrast, state-led development is premised on the belief that the state must play a central role in planning, coordinating, and directing economic activity. Postcolonial African leaders such as Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, and Thomas Sankara envisioned a developmental state that would break the chains of colonial dependency and build self-reliant, egalitarian societies (Ake, 1981; Shivji, 2009). These two models are not merely economic preferences; they represent competing worldviews about the role of the state, market, and citizen.

Nigeria's embrace of neoliberalism began in the mid-1980s under General Ibrahim Babangida, with the introduction of the SAPs. These reforms included currency devaluation, subsidy removal, and state-owned enterprise privatization. Over the years, successive governments have continued to implement neoliberal policies, often under pressure from external creditors. Although macroeconomic indicators have shown periodic improvements, poverty, inequality, and unemployment remain widespread. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), more than 63% of Nigerians live in multidimensional poverty. The privatization of key sectors, such as electricity, has not improved access or affordability for most citizens. Meanwhile, subsidy removals, particularly on fuel, have triggered massive protests and deepened hardship. Critics argue that reforms benefit the elite while burdening the poor (Oxfam, 2017; Aiyede, 2020). Moreover, neoliberalism in Nigeria has coincided with increased elite capture and rentier politics. Oil wealth, instead of fostering inclusive development, has fueled corruption and weakened state institutions (Watts, 2004). Neoliberal reforms have not tackled this structural problem; in many ways, they have worsened it by reducing state responsibility and oversight.

Burkina Faso's encounter with state-led development is best illustrated during Thomas Sankara's tenure. Between 1983 and 1987, Sankara launched a radical transformation agenda that focused on self-reliance, redistribution, and citizen mobilization. Under his leadership, the state redistributed land to peasant cooperatives, vaccinated millions of children, built thousands of schools and health clinics, and promoted women's rights (Harsch, 2017). Crucially, Sankara rejected foreign aid as a tool of dependency and insisted that Burkina Faso must develop on its own terms. Sankara's model was not without flaws; some policies were top-down and faced bureaucratic resistance. However, he demonstrated that an ideologically driven, participatory state could prioritize the poor and challenge imperial legacies. His assassination in 1987, widely believed to involve external actors and internal elites, halted this momentum. His successor, Blaise Compaoré, reversed many Sankara's reforms and aligned Burkina Faso with neoliberal norms. Yet inequality persisted, and the benefits of liberalization were unevenly distributed. Today, Burkina Faso faces security challenges, governance deficits, and economic vulnerability, all of which are symptoms of an unresolved development crisis (Hilgers &

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Loada, 2013). The contrast between Sankara's revolutionary state and the post-revolution neoliberal turn highlights deep contestations over the meaning and direction of development.

Theoretical frameworks

Understanding the development and underdevelopment of African states necessitates engagement with robust theoretical frameworks that explain how global inequalities were historically constituted and continue to be reproduced. The theoretical framework for this theory was dependency theory and Marxist political economy.

Dependency Theory

Dependency theory remains a foundational lens for analyzing the unequal exchange between the Global North and South. Initially developed by Latin American scholars like Raúl Prebisch, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Theotonio Dos Santos in the 1960s, it gained traction in Africa through thinkers such as Samir Amin and Walter Rodney. The central claim of dependency theory is that underdevelopment in the Global South is not a stage before development but a consequence of its integration into a capitalist world economy on exploitative terms. Scholars like Ndongo Samba Sylla (2017) and Tinashe Nyamunda (2020) have revitalized dependency theory to analyze Africa's continuing economic vulnerabilities, especially in relation to international financial institutions and transnational corporations. Sylla's work on the CFA franc, for example, underscores how monetary dependency continues to undermine Francophone African countries' economic sovereignty.

He critiques what he calls "economic coloniality," showing how France continues to exert indirect control over African economies through monetary policy, echoing the concern of dependency theorists with structural domination. Moreover, Weinhardt (2021) explores how Africa's trade relations with the European Union remain asymmetrical despite decades of policy rhetoric promoting "partnership" and "cooperation." Her work illustrates how the EPAs systematically favor European exporters while constraining African industrial development. Such studies affirm the enduring relevance of dependency theory in unpacking how the rules of global capitalism constrain development structurally.

Marxist Political Economy Theory

Marxist political economy tradition offers a class-based analysis of exploitation, emphasizing the role of capitalist accumulation in shaping global inequality. This tradition deeply informs Walter Rodney's analysis. He argues that the accumulation of capital by the European bourgeoisie depended on the extraction of surplus value from Africa's labor and resources, a process that systematically underdeveloped the continent while enriching Europe.

Contemporary Marxist scholars such as Leo Panitch, Sam Moyo, and Issa Shivji have carried forward this legacy. Moyo and Yeros (2015) argue that African agrarian systems have been increasingly subordinated to global capital through land grabs, contract farming, and the commodification of commons. They describe this as a "new scramble for Africa," where global capital continues to plunder African resources under the guise of development and investment. This resonates with Rodney's depiction of colonialism as an organized and systematic theft of wealth. Issa Shivji (2020) extends the Marxist critique to the postcolonial state, arguing that many African governments have evolved into "neoliberal gatekeepers," facilitating foreign capital penetration while neglecting their developmental obligations to the masses. He insists that genuine development must be people-centered and rooted in class struggle, not in elite consensus or foreign aid. Shivji's work focuses on the internal class dynamics that complicate simplistic north-south binaries, highlighting the role of local elites in perpetuating capitalist underdevelopment. Marxist debates also grapple with the ecological crisis and its development implications. African scholars such as Grace Akello (2023) have begun exploring "eco-Marxist" frameworks to understand how Africa's capitalist accumulation intersects with climate change, extractivism, and environmental degradation. These contributions highlight that development must now confront not only

economic injustice but also ecological sustainability, a dimension that was less pronounced in Rodney's original analysis.

Underdevelopment Causes in African States

Despite abundant natural and human resources, underdevelopment remains a pervasive challenge in many African states. African countries, such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso, are rich in natural resources but plagued by poverty, insecurity, and poor governance. Underdevelopment goes beyond economic backwardness; it includes political instability, social disintegration, and institutional decay. The international economic system has disadvantaged African countries through unfair trade terms, high debt burdens, exploitative practices of multinational corporations, debt overhang, and aid conditionality, where international donors often impose policies (e.g., Structural Adjustment Programs by the IMF/World Bank) that cut public spending and weaken the social sector. The general causes of underdevelopment in Africa include the following:

1. Colonial Legacy

Colonialism laid the foundation for Africa's underdevelopment. The colonial powers extracted resources, built infrastructure to serve their economic interests, and dismantled pre-colonial institutions. Imposition of artificial boundaries resulted in ethnic fragmentation and intergroup conflict. Colonial education systems were designed to produce low-level clerks who were not skilled professionals. Even after independence, many African economies remained dependent on exporting raw materials without adding industrial value.

2. Poor leadership and corruption

Corruption and weak political leadership have significantly contributed to underdevelopment. Leaders often mismanage public resources, prioritize ethnic and personal interests over national development, and suppress democratic accountability.

3. Political instability and conflict

Frequent military coups, civil wars, and insurgencies disrupt governance, divert resources to military expenditure, and displace populations. Since independence, Nigeria has faced civil war (1967–70), recurring ethnic violence, and terrorist insurgencies (Boko Haram). Burkina Faso is also known as one of the most coup-prone nations, with at least 8 successful coups since 1960. The military justified the recent coups (2022 and 2023) by the government's failure to curb the Islamist insurgency.

4. Weak Institutions

African states often lack strong institutions capable of enforcing laws, providing services, and ensuring justice. Bureaucracies are inefficient, often politicized, and under-resourced.

5. Overdependence on the Primary Commodities

Most African economies rely heavily on the export of raw materials, such as crude oil, gold, and cocoa, which are subject to fluctuations in the international market. Over 90% of its foreign exchange earnings are from oil. A drop in oil prices leads to economic crises, and Burkina Faso relies heavily on cotton and gold exports, making it vulnerable to price volatility and climate shocks.

6. Inadequate Infrastructure

Lack of roads, electricity, water supply, and information and communication technology (ICT) hinders industrialization, service delivery, and rural development. Nigeria, despite being the largest economy in Africa, has poor electricity supply, contributing to the collapse of manufacturing industries. Burkina Faso is a landlocked country with poor transport infrastructure, limiting access to trade and markets.

Effects of Colonial Legacy on African States: Francophone (Burkina Faso) and Anglophone (Nigeria)

1. Political Volatility in Burkina Faso

Since its independence from France in 1960, Burkina Faso's post-independence journey has been marked by political volatility. The country has experienced multiple coups, reflecting fragile institutions and deep-seated social inequalities rooted in its colonial past. However, moments of visionary leadership emerged most notably under Thomas Sankara (1983–1987), whose radical reforms emphasized self-reliance, gender equality, and grassroots development. However, his assassination plunged the nation back into authoritarian rule. Despite recent democratic efforts, Burkina Faso continues to face insecurity, governance challenges, and economic hardship. The struggle to balance revolutionary ideals with enduring structural constraints is illustrated in its history.

2. Contemporary Political Volatility and Burkina Faso's Security Challenges

Since the ouster of Compaoré, Burkina Faso has struggled to consolidate its democracy during growing insecurity and institutional fragility. The country has witnessed multiple coup attempts, including a successful military takeover in 2022 that unseated the transitional government. This continued volatility reflects both the weakness of political institutions and the deep socioeconomic cleavages that successive regimes have failed to address. Compounding the political crisis is the growing threat of violent extremism. Since 2015, Burkina Faso has become a hotspot for jihadist insurgency in the Sahel, with attacks targeting civilians, security forces, and infrastructure. The rise of insecurity has had devastating developmental consequences. Schools have closed, health services have been disrupted, and displacement has soared. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that by the end of 2023, over two million Burkinabè were internally displaced. Scholars such as Idrissa (2021) argue that the proliferation of insurgency is not solely a product of radical ideology but is rooted in state neglect, historical marginalization of peripheral regions, and failure to deliver development. The presence of jihadists has exploited governance vacuums and socioeconomic despair, particularly in northern and eastern provinces. Although international support, including the French military presence, was intended to bolster state capacity, it has often been perceived as neo-colonial and ineffective, leading to increasing anti-French sentiment and calls for a reorientation of national security strategy. This security crisis underscores the fragility of developmental gains in the absence of structural reforms. It also reveals the complex interplay between postcolonial legacies, internal mismanagement, and geopolitical entanglements that continue to shape Burkina Faso's developmental trajectory.

3. Oil Dependency and Elite Capture in Nigeria

The discovery of crude oil in Nigeria in 1956 marked a turning point in the country's economic and political trajectory. What began as a potential resource for national prosperity quickly transformed into a mechanism of dependency, elite enrichment, and socioeconomic exclusion. By the 1970s, oil had emerged as the cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, accounting for the bulk of government revenue and export earnings. This phenomenon led scholars such as Karl (1997) to describe Nigeria's development pattern as emblematic of the "resource curse," a condition in which natural resource wealth paradoxically undermines economic growth and democratic accountability. The proliferation of oil wealth fundamentally reconfigured the Nigerian political economy into a rentier state, in which revenues accrued through state-controlled access to resource rents rather than through productive economic activity. According to Watts (2004), this *rentiers* severed the social contract between the Nigerian state and its citizens as taxation became unnecessary and accountability mechanisms weakened. Instead of functioning as a developmentally oriented institution, the state evolved into a distributional apparatus, where elites competed for control over oil revenues through both formal and informal networks.

Furthermore, Nigeria's mono-cultural orientation entrenched its vulnerability to external shocks. The collapse of global oil prices in the 1980s and again in the 2010s exposed the fragility of a development model overly

dependent on petroleum exports. Okonjo-Iweala (2018) argues that Nigeria's fiscal policy failures and budgetary instability stem in large part from its dependence on a volatile commodity market, leaving little room for long-term planning or structural transformation. In addition, the neglect of other sectors, particularly agriculture and manufacturing, reversed many early post-independence development gains and intensified unemployment and food insecurity.

The environmental and human costs of oil exploration in the Niger Delta are perhaps most damning. As Obi (2010) noted, the region has suffered extensive ecological degradation due to oil spills, gas flaring, and unsustainable extraction practices. Despite being a source of national wealth, the Delta remains one of Nigeria's most underdeveloped areas, with limited infrastructure, inadequate public services, and widespread poverty. This paradox has fueled militant insurgencies and demands for resource control, positioning oil as not only an economic but also a deeply political and existential issue for affected communities.

4. Persistent Inequality and Regional Marginalization in Nigeria

Despite the abundance of oil wealth, Nigeria remains one of the most unequal societies in sub-Saharan Africa. Income distribution and regional access to infrastructure, education, healthcare, and political representation are indicators of inequality. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), the wealthiest 20% of Nigerians control over 60% of the national income, while the poorest 20% are trapped in multidimensional poverty.

Regional disparities are particularly severe. The Niger Delta, despite being the epicenter of oil extraction, continues to experience infrastructural neglect, high unemployment, and environmental degradation. Okonta and Douglas (2001) argue that this marginalization is a function of state policy and corporate exploitation, which prioritized extraction over human development. The resulting sense of injustice has fueled violent resistance, including the rise of groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which sought to disrupt oil production to pressure the state and oil companies to address local grievances. At the same time, northern Nigeria grapples with chronic poverty, low educational attainment, and limited state presence, creating conditions conducive to extremism and insurgency. Although rooted in ideological and religious discourses, the emergence of Boko Haram must also be understood in the context of economic marginalization and state failure. As Mustapha (2014) noted, disparities in development have fed perceptions of exclusion and injustice, which are exploited by violent actors. In this sense, oil dependency has not only distorted the economic structure but has also entrenched social fragmentation and political instability. The concentration of oil wealth in the hands of the narrow elite has rendered development uneven, exclusionary, and ultimately unsustainable.

5 Elite Capture and Rentier Politics in Nigeria

The capture of elites in Nigeria is neither a recent development nor merely a by-product of corruption; it is structurally embedded in the political economy of oil. The Nigerian state's rentier nature has produced what Bayart (1993) famously referred to as the "politics of the belly," a clientelistic system in which elites monopolize state resources and distribute them through patronage networks. This system has turned oil wealth into a source of political loyalty and survival, with appointments to public office often determined by access to oil revenues rather than meritocratic considerations. Scholars such as Joseph (1987) describe Nigeria's neo-patrimonial system as one where formal institutions coexist with informal practices of favoritism and prefeudalism. In such a system, public office becomes an avenue for personal enrichment rather than public service. This undermines state legitimacy and hollows out developmental institutions, as bureaucracies are repurposed to serve elite interests. Rather than fostering inclusive growth, oil wealth has become a weapon of exclusion, empowering a small elite class while disempowering the broader population. More recently, scholars,

such as Aiyede (2020), argue that elite capture has evolved with democratic transitions, taking on more sophisticated forms under civilian regimes. While elections have become routine, the political process remains largely uncompetitive and dominated by money politics. Campaign financing, which is often sourced from oil-related rents or contract kickbacks, ensures that only the wealthy or politically connected can run for office. As a result, governance remains elitist, and the enacted policies tend to favor narrow constituencies over national development goals.

In addition, the legislative and executive branches are frequently implicated in scandals related to oil licensing, subsidy fraud, and off-budget spending. Reports by Nigeria's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) have repeatedly identified leakages, underreported revenues, and unauthorized payments. Despite these revelations, prosecutions are rare and often symbolic. The institutions themselves often undermine the political will to confront elite misappropriation through their complicity.

IMPLICATIONS OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

First, this research underscores that Africa's underdevelopment was not accidental but rather systematic and deliberate. The implication here is that contemporary developmental policies cannot ignore or gloss over these historical injustices. Effective development strategies must confront these colonial legacies and redress the structural imbalances that persist in global economic arrangements.

Second, it challenges the Eurocentric framing of development as a linear path modeled after Western industrialization. The emphasis on epistemic injustice, as highlighted by scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Escobar, suggests that genuine progress in African states requires a decolonization of knowledge and the revaluation of indigenous African worldviews, governance systems, and development strategies. The implication is that African states must develop not only economically but also intellectually and culturally on their own terms.

Third, the comparative analysis between Nigeria and Burkina Faso demonstrates that the impact of colonialism was neither monolithic nor uniform. The contrast between British indirect rule and French assimilation reveals how different colonial policies created varying institutional legacies, elite formations, and post-independence trajectories. This means that policy prescriptions for African development must be context-specific, considering each country's unique historical and political experiences, rather than applying generic, one-size-fits-all development models.

However, the study concludes that the centrality of good governance, participatory institutions, and ethical leadership can succeed where corruption, repression, and exclusion thrive and the state could mobilize society toward meaningful development goals.

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