



Article

High Cost of Governance and its Implications for Nigeria's National Development: Analysis of Some Salient Issues

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Abstract

The cost of governance has emerged as a critical constraint on Nigeria's developmental trajectory, raising concerns about fiscal sustainability, institutional efficiency, and the effective service delivery. This study examines the implications of cost of governance and Nigeria's development outcomes, with particular emphasis on public expenditure patterns, administrative overheads, and political office maintenance. Relying on secondary sources of data and discourse analysis, the study discovered that high cost of governance especially in the payment of salaries, wages and allowances for political office holders, and the maintenance of a large bureaucratic and political structure undermines economic growth, exacerbates inequality, and weakens public trust in state institutions. Furthermore, issues of corruption, duplication of agencies, and weak fiscal discipline are identified as key drivers of high governance costs. The study concludes that without comprehensive reforms—such as rationalization of government agencies, reduction in the size of political office holders, enforcement of transparency mechanisms, and prioritization of capital expenditure—Nigeria's aspirations for sustainable development may remain elusive. The paper recommends pragmatic policy measures aimed at reducing the cost of governance while enhancing efficiency and accountability in public sector management.

Key words: Governance, Cost of governance, National development, Fiscal indiscipline, public expenditure, corruption

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Introduction

Governance plays a central role in national development by ensuring the efficient allocation of resources, formulation of sound policies, and provision of essential public goods such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and security. In an ideal system, government expenditure is expected to stimulate economic growth, reduce inequality, and improve citizens' welfare. However, in the Nigerian context, the cost of governance—defined as the total administrative and operational expenses incurred in running government institutions—has been widely criticized as excessively high and disproportionate to developmental outcomes. This cost encompasses expenditures on political office holders, including salaries, allowances, and benefits, as well as the maintenance of an expansive bureaucratic structure and rising recurrent expenditure. The public sector in Nigeria has become like a conduit pipe where huge amount of resources meant for national development were drained, (Olojede & Osah,2020; Ghosh & Siddique 2015).

After nearly three decades of military rule and many years of socioeconomic and political crises, Nigeria returned to democracy in May 1999 amidst hopes and euphoria that the new era has emerged. Regrettably, twenty-five (25) years after the return to democracy, Nigeria stills reels in avalanche of socio-economic and political problems. In spite of her enormous natural resources, Nigeria has not been able to achieve the required development that would put her in the league of advanced economies. The economy remained in shambles, and there has been a sharp rise in unemployment, inflation, and poverty indexes over the past decades (Ghosh & Siddique2015). The country is still being confronted by extreme poverty, unemployment, and insecurity (Olojede & Osah,2020; Ghosh & Siddique 2015). More disturbing is the fact that the recent Statistics from National Bureau of Statistics shows that the level of poverty reached 67% in Nigeria. The country is still facing variety of socio-economic and political challenges (NBS 2025).

It has been argued that development has eluded Nigeria because of a plethora of reasons, and one of these reasons is the astronomical increase in the cost of governance (Peterside 2024; Afolugbo, 2004). The cost of governance in Nigeria has become a national problem because of its debilitating effect on national development. This emanates from Nigeria's historical penchant and structural propensity for creating paradoxical situations- the puzzling reality of a poverty-endemic nation It is axiomatic to state that if the cost of governance is rising, there ought to be a corresponding improvement in the quality of life of Nigerians (Okeke & Eme 2015; Josiah, 2013).

However, the paradox is very obvious in Nigeria that at a time when the citizen continue to grapple with pernicious economic realities, the machinery of government federal, state, and local governments continues to expand in size, luxury, and waste. Recent reports from civil society watchdogs and budget analysts reveal that at federal level, Nigeria's recurrent expenditure which includes spending on political office holders, personnel salaries and wages, pensions, as well as overhead cost and services have continued to consume over 45% of the national budget and huge chunk of the revenue since 2017 (Peterside, 2024).

For example, data from the Budget Office of Nigeria showed that over the past ten years, recurrent expenditure (money spent on salaries, allowances, vehicles, and government overhead) always supersedes the capital expenditure. This leaves little room for capital projects, infrastructure, and investments that could improve the lives of citizens. According to the data, between 2015 and 2025, the federal government has allocated a total of ₦80.83 trillion in the payment of salaries, wages, and other

allowances for the public servants, while ₦37.33 trillion was allocated for capital expenditure (www.budgetoffice.gov.ng). Political office holders in Nigeria are among the highest paid in the world. Each Senator in Nigeria receive the sum of ₦750,000 per month as basic salary plus allowances of ₦13.5 million per month. This sums up in a total package of ₦14.25 million per month and ₦171 million annually (Ndujihe, Young, & Alechenu 2023; Ogunleye 2021).

In a bid to overcome the challenges that the high cost of governance causes to national development, successive governments in Nigeria, since the return to democratic rule in 1999, have talked about the need to reduce the country's high cost of governance through reducing or merging the number of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of government so that more funds will be available for development. The irony, however, is that rather than reduce it, every new government seems to increase it further than it inherited from its predecessor to the detriment of development and the people.

Arising from the above; the question that now confronts Nigeria is simple but urgent: can a nation struggling with poverty, insecurity, and unemployment continue to fund a government structure that consumes so much while delivering so little? How can the cost of governance be reduced to encourage development in Nigeria? The main objective of the paper therefore is to examine the implications of high cost of governance on Nigeria's national development.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Cost of Governance

The cost of governance is the money spent on administrative processes. It is also known as administrative expenditure. Adewole and Osabuohien (2007) divided cost of governance into two: recurrent administrative expenses and capital administrative expenses. They defined cost of governance as costs associated with the running of government. In other words, these are costs incurred by the government in running its affairs. In addition, Cost of Governance is any cost associated with the running of government. In other words, it is the cost incurred by the government in the course of providing goods and services to the citizenry. It may be subdivided into recurrent and capital expenditure. Whereas recurrent expenditure is government spending on overhead and personnel costs, capital expenditure on the other hand is government spending in providing infrastructural facilities (Peterside 2024).

The government helps to sustain the social contract that binds every member of the state. In the same vein, Fluvian (2016) defined cost of governance as any expenditure in maintaining government administrative structures. He also equates cost of governance to total administrative expenditure, which is a part of total federal government expenditure in Nigeria. He stated that the justification for using total administrative expenditure as cost of governance stems from the fact that administrative expenditures are incurred in governing processes. According to Drucker (2017), cost of governance is government budget allocated to both capital and recurrent expenditures on maintaining government administrative structures, which appear to be very enormous in Africa.

The question of efficiency in governance is, therefore, to ensure that public funds are spent judiciously, while public goods and services are sufficiently provided. Cost of governance, according to Afolugbo (2004), is the cost incurred in running the government. It is the cost of performing political duties, and discharging civil services to the public. According to Rothstein and Varraich, (2017), a larger than

optimal civil service, with significant human capital deficiencies is bound to raise governance costs and institutionalize the mechanisms for rent extraction. This is a major problem in Nigeria. The distribution of public goods and services in Nigeria is not based on equity. While Nigeria is endowed with abundant natural and human resources, access to wealth is limited to a few individuals who occupy public position. Given the Nigerian economy's chronic dependence on oil as well as lack of diversification and craze for material wealth, access to state power becomes the only means of wealth accumulation. This is because access to wealth in Nigeria is determined by the public position that one occupies.

2.2 Reasons for the Increase in the Cost of Governance in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the cost of governance will continue to rise as long as the emphasis is on consumption and living an opulent lifestyle rather than on production, hardwork and discipline. The public sector in Nigeria has been a drain pipe of government revenue (Olojede & Osah,2020). The effort to sanitize the public sector through downsizing, privatization and commercialization has produced little or no result, because of the weak and politicised nature of the state, which is enmeshed in class divisions and primordialism, to the detriment of its objective and universal role of facilitating development. The rent-seeking nature of the state which has turned itself into a pool of wealth serves the primordial interests of the political class. Nigeria increased from 12 states in 1967 to the present 36 states' structure in 1996. There was no conscious effort to determine the cost of administering the states, and to ensure that the cost of governance was minimally maintained in order not to jeopardise the realisation of the nation's developmental objectives.

The constitutional provision for the appointment of many political office holders without regard for the financial implication places the states in a dilemma that defies every rational logic of governance and truncates development. This anomaly is prevalent because of the poverty of the ideology of development which relegates national development to the background while entrenching fiscal indiscipline, impunity and extra budgetary expenditure as national ethos, which have been internalised by the elite and reproduced as national values from one republic to the other (Gilbert & Ubani, 2015).

In addition, a number of studies have exposed many areas of wastages and fund leakages at all levels of government in Nigeria in the past decades of democracy, (Kalama, Etebu, Charles and John, 2012; and Adamu & Rasheed 2016). It has become evident that the much-dreaded corruption in the public service exemplified by the looting of public funds starts with the budget. It is an open secret that senior civil servants are some of the richest persons in Nigeria today even though their stupendous wealth cannot be equated with their legitimate wages. It is common that audit reports in Nigeria at all levels, reveals flagrant disregard to rules and procedures, overthrow of financial discipline, accountability, probity and transparency, which the treasuries were set-up to establish and protect. These abuses/breaches ranges from duplication of contracts, over-valuation of contracts, fictitious payments of contracts, non-certification of payment vouchers by the internal auditor among others were the major reasons for increase in the cost of governance. Other fraud in treasury activities may include over payment to existing staff, payment of salaries and allowances to dead or retired staff and ghost workers (Adamu & Rasheed 2016). These are clear manifestations of the collapse of standard policy and practices in treasury departments, and hence the inability of most governments to achieve their objectives. Standard treasury management policy and practice is therefore, particularly essential in governance in Nigeria, with a view

to being proactive in preventing persistent lack of efficiency and effectiveness that characterized financial activities in the public sector, resulting in fraud.

2.3 Concept of National Development

Development is very essential and critical for the sustenance of any country. Indeed, the pride of any government is the attainment of higher level of development. The concept of development has been viewed differently by different scholars, largely depending on their ideology. To the western capitalist scholars, like Rostow (1960), national development is synonymous with economic development measured in quantitative terms of Gross Domestic Products (G.D.P), and Gross National Products (G.NP).

However, view has been challenged by scholars who emphasized that development should be viewed from the standpoint of qualitative improvements in human life especially in regards to reduction of poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Seers 1969), as well as general societal advancement through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society (Stojanović, Ateljević, & Stević, 2016; Ojo, Aworawo & Elizabeth 2014; Gilbert & Ubani, 2015).

In contemporary discourse, institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2022) further frame national development as “a process of structural transformation that improves economic productivity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” Amartya Sen (1999) conceptualizes development as the expansion of human freedoms and capabilities, arguing that income is only one of several means to achieving well-being. In this sense, development is both a process and an outcome that enhances individuals’ ability to lead meaningful lives. This stems from the fact that development is not purely an economic phenomenon. Ultimately it must encompass more than the material and the financial side of people’s life. That is why writers Todaro and Smith (2020), describe development from a multi-faceted dimensions cutting across change in structures, institutions, fighting poverty, unemployment, inequality, building the productive capacities of human as well general improvement in the standards of living of the people. National development therefore is an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, in a sustainable way.

Taken together, these scholarly perspectives indicate that national development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also how this translates to fighting poverty, unemployment, some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. Consequently, a country could be considered to be developed to the extent at which every sector of its economy, or national life reflects steady, yet progressive growth. The development process, of course, must be seen in its broadest context if it is to meet the expectation for a more elevated standard of living. Hence, national development is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is classified as developed when is able to provide qualitative life for her citizenry. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country’s collection of strategies mapped out by the government.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted a theory called “Public Interest Theory” to serve as theoretical framework. In the public-interest view, government is seen to be made up of individuals whose desire it is to serve the public by doing what is "right." In this context, the government becomes an instrument that will or should improve the welfare of society. The society does not expect any unintended and unexpected consequences of government actions to arise in the course of the discharge of responsibilities. Hence, individuals in government being rational, should be able to provide answers to a number of questions such as: what is the right cost of governance, does current output correlate with level of spending, does the cost of governance have any implications on the overall national development?

It is in this connection that section 16 (1) of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (as amended) stated that; the state (Nigeria) shall direct its policies towards ensuring the control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity; the promotion of a planned and balanced economic development; that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good; that the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group; and that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.

From these provisions, it is clear that governance entails ensuring just and egalitarian society, which the public interest theory should exemplify. But, when the government spent too much on maintaining itself at the detriment of the generality of the citizens, the national development is put in jeopardy.

Methodology

This study adopted documentary research. Data was obtained from the secondary sources using already existing literatures and was analysed using discourse analysis and discussion in order to guide and shape our understanding. This is based on the premise that information needed for the study was is sufficiently available to provide a reasonable ground and arrive at valid conclusion, (Creswell, 2015; Scott 2006; Balihar 2007). The analysis specifically focuses on analyzing the effect of high cost of governance on the national development of Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999.

Results and Discussion

Given that Nigeria continues to be one of the world's poorest countries and that cost of governance in the past has not resulted in any significant change in the lives of the populace, the high expense of administration is of great concern.

A brief outline of the federal bureaucracy underscores the heavy burden the treasury of the country bears, which undermines all development efforts across various regimes. The costs associated with the running of government have increased dramatically over the years such that

an increasingly higher proportion of public revenue is used to support and implement the primary functions of government. Rising government expenditure has, therefore, not translated to meaningful development as Nigeria still ranks among world's poorest countries (Peterside, 2024).

For instance, data obtained from the Budget office of the federal republic of Nigeria on the amount of budgetary allocation on recurrent and capital expenditure from 2015 to 2025 shows that between 2015 and 2024, 43.89% (₦80.83)of the federal government budget had been used for the payment salaries, wages, and other overhead costs to the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the federal government as presented presented in table 1.

Table 1: Budgetary Allocation in Nigeria

YEAR	BUDGET		RECURRENT EXPENDITURE		CAPITAL EXPENDITURE	
	Proposed (₦ Trillion)	Approved (₦Trillion)	Amount (₦ Trillion)	Percentage	Amount (₦ Trillion)	percentage
2015	4.46	4.49	2.59	57.7%	0.557	12.4%
2016	6.08	6.06	2.34	38.1%	1.80	29.7%
2017	7.29	7.44	2.90	39.0%	2.24	30.6%
2018	8.61	9.12	3.51	38.5%	2.87	31.5%
2019	8.53	8.92	4.07	45.6%	2.09	23.4%
2020	10.33	10.81	4.88	45.1%	2.14	19.8%
2021	13.98	14.57	5.95	40.7%	3.85	26.4%
2022	16.39	17.32	7.10	40.9%	5.41	31.2%
2023	20.50	21.83	8.33	38.2%	6.45	29.5%
2024	27.51	28.70	8.71	30.3%	9.92	34.6%
2025	54.49	54.99	30.45	61.0%	14.85	30.0%
TOTAL	170.97	184.25	80.83	43.89%	37.33	28.9%

Source: www.budgetoffice.gov.ng, https://budgit.org/post_infographics, www.fmf.gov.ng

Table 1 demonstrates that in the last ten years, the federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies have ₦80.83trillion Naira in the payment salaries, wages, and other overhead costs. leaving 37.33 trillion (28.9%) as capital expenditure. This is coming when all the statistics about national development ranked

Nigeria below average. The total percentage of the budget in relation to the total approved budget in each year shows that in 2015, 57.7% of the total budget was spent on recurrent expenditure alone. This in sharp contrast to capital expenditure which is left with only 12.4%. In addition, we can observe that in 2016, the recurrent expenditure dropped to 38.1% while the capital expenditure increased to 29.7% which is a remarkable increase from the previous year.

According to the Revenue Allocation Mobilization and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC, 2024), each Nigerian Senator earns basic salary of ₦2,026,400.00k annually excluding bonuses. In addition to basic salary, each senator receives allowance totalling ₦12,902,360.00 annually. Their counterpart in the House of representatives receives a basic salary of ₦1,983,212.00k annually in addition to ₦9,525,985.00k allowances annually.

When compared with what other senators in other nations earn, it is safe to say that Nigerian legislators are the most highly paid in the world. Among other countries, for example, in Singapore Assembly members get \$253, 469 per annum. While in the United States (US), a senator earns \$174, 000 per year (Brudnick 2025). However, in Nigeria, the total take home pay for each senator is estimated at \$450,000 - \$597,000 annually, (Peterside, 2024). In addition, the United States of America with a higher population and higher number of states than Nigeria, has 12 federal Secretaries (ministers) and ministries as against Nigeria's over 46 ministers. The US economic growth plan is very specific, articulate, people oriented and less expensive while policies are implemented in the national interest even in the midst of global economic uncertainties. Results of highly monitored expenditure of public funds are visible. This is not the case with Nigeria where a federal legislator earns higher than the President of the United States of America, even with so little input. For example, the salary structure of Nigerian Ministers is governed by the Remuneration Act of 2007. According to this Act, the basic salary of a Nigerian Minister is ₦2,026,400 (Two Million, Twenty-Six Thousand, Four Hundred Naira) per annum. This translates to a monthly salary of ₦168,866.67 (One Hundred and Sixty-Eight Thousand, Eight Hundred and Sixty-Six Naira, Sixty-Seven Kobo) (Ndujihe, Young, & Alechenu 2023).

Implications for National Development

Indeed, it can be stated without equivocation that Nigeria's is practicing one of the most expensive democracy in the world with minimal evidence in terms of infrastructure development, poverty level and pace of general economic growth. Beyond iota of any doubt, this has serious negative implications for national development. For a country like Nigeria with myriad of developmental challenges to devote huge amount of its resources on recurrent expenditure will not augur well for the nation. It is pertinent to point out that when recurrent expenditure as a percentage to total expenditure is substantially above the capital expenditure, it would lead to reduction in the provision of infrastructural facilities, reduction in the level of employment and the general stagnation in the economy.

Analysts point out that reducing the cost of governance is not just a financial issue but a matter of national survival. With dwindling oil revenues and rising debt, Nigeria cannot sustain a system where a disproportionate share of public funds goes into maintaining political offices rather than building infrastructure or investing in human capital development.

The predominance of recurrent expenditure implies that government spending is largely consumptive rather than developmental. This crowding-out effect reduces the capacity of the state to invest in critical sectors such as transportation infrastructure, energy, education, and healthcare—sectors that are essential for long-term economic growth and social transformation. Consequently, despite significant public spending, the developmental impact remains limited.

From a political economy perspective, excessive spending on governance reflects entrenched elite interests and institutional inefficiencies that prioritize administrative consumption over productive investment. This aligns with the argument that rent-seeking behavior within political systems can distort resource allocation and hinder development outcomes.

Moreover, the persistence of duplicated agencies and bureaucratic redundancies underscores the failure of institutional reforms. The limited implementation of the Oronsaye Committee's recommendations reflects political resistance and weak policy enforcement mechanisms. Without decisive restructuring, governance costs are likely to remain unsustainably high.

Corruption and fiscal leakages further complicate the situation by undermining efficiency and public trust. The diversion of public funds not only reduces the resources available for development but also weakens institutional legitimacy, thereby discouraging investment and civic engagement.

Civil society organisations, the media, and concerned citizens have consistently raised alarm over this imbalance, but successive administrations have shied away from tackling it. The reluctance is understandable: reforming the cost of governance would mean cutting down the privileges enjoyed by the political class, a move that few leaders are willing to champion. Yet, without decisive action, Nigeria risks plunging deeper into debt, widening inequality, and increasing public disillusionment with democracy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper analyses some salient issues regarding the high cost of governance vis-à-vis its implication on national development in Nigeria. It is true that Nigeria practiced democratic system of government that is patterned after that of the United States of America. However, the cost of governance in Nigeria had strong negative implications on the national development. This had attracted several comments from stakeholders in the nation's economy who expressed concerns as regards how best the prevalent wastage by government could be curtailed and translated into generally improved living standards for the citizenry.

Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and one of its largest economies, faces persistent developmental challenges including poverty, unemployment, infrastructural deficits, and inequality. Despite substantial public revenues, especially from oil, development outcomes remain modest. A key factor frequently identified in both policy and academic discourse is the high cost of governance.

Efforts have been made in Nigeria to address the high cost of governance, such as implementing cost-cutting measures and promoting transparency. However, achieving substantial changes requires a comprehensive and sustained approach, including structural reforms, anti-corruption efforts, and a focus

on improving public sector efficiency. Addressing the issue of high governance costs is crucial for ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently to promote economic development and enhance the standard of living for the Nigerian people.

Overall, the study demonstrates that reducing the cost of governance is not merely a fiscal necessity but a developmental imperative. Achieving meaningful progress will require comprehensive reforms aimed at restructuring public institutions, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and reorienting expenditure priorities toward capital formation and human development.

The paper recommends among others that;

- i. In order to address Nigeria's high government cost, there is need for the review and rationalization of the remuneration structure of political office holders, including salaries, allowances, and benefits, to align with the country's economic realities and global best practices. The number political appointees should be reduced so that government will be relieved of the burden associated with their maintenance.
- ii. Apart from the obvious answer of fighting corruption, wastage, profligacy and implementing measures to enhance transparency in public financial management, procurement, and project execution, the government should strengthen Anti-corruption agencies, particularly the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in terms of autonomy, capacity, and legal authority to effectively investigate, prosecute, and deter financial malpractices within the public sector.
- iii. There is need for Institutional Rationalization and Structural Reforms. The government should undertake a comprehensive restructuring of ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) through eliminating duplications, down-sizing, rightsizing and streamlining Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to reduce bureaucracy. This is urgent. This is the aim of implementing the Oronsaye report. This would eliminate redundancy, reduce administrative duplication, and improve operational efficiency.
- iv. There is also need for rebalancing Public Expenditure Priorities in such a way that Nigeria's Fiscal policy should prioritize capital expenditure over recurrent spending. Increased investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and technology is essential to stimulate economic growth and enhance human development outcomes.
- v. Also, introduction of cost-cutting measures in government operations, such as reducing unnecessary travel expenses, minimising overhead costs, and optimising resource allocation as well as embracing e-government through technology with the aim of reducing paperwork and associated costs is very important.

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