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Globalisation and Democracy in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges for the 21st Century

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Abstract:

This paper explores the intricate relationship between globalisation and democracy in Nigeria, highlighting the issues and challenges the country faces in consolidating democratic ideals within a globalised framework. Globalisation has fostered increased interconnectedness among nations, influencing political, economic, and social systems. In Nigeria, globalisation has brought both opportunities and obstacles to democratic development. This study, employing a scoping review methodology, systematically evaluates existing literature to understand how global forces interact with Nigeria's democratic processes. Findings reveal that while globalisation has facilitated democratic awareness, access to information, and civil society empowerment, it has also contributed to economic inequality, cultural erosion, and external political interference. The paper concludes by identifying gaps in the existing literature, particularly in empirical assessments of how globalisation impacts democratic participation at the grassroots level in Nigeria. Recommendations are offered to strengthen democratic resilience in the face of global pressures in the 21st century.

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Introduction

Globalisation, the increasing interconnectedness of countries through the flow of goods, services, information, and people, has redefined the parameters of governance and democracy in contemporary societies. In Nigeria, a nation rich in cultural heritage and political dynamism, globalisation presents a dual-edged sword offering opportunities for democratic deepening while also posing significant challenges. Democracy, premised on citizen participation, the rule of law, and accountable governance, is often influenced by external economic and political trends stemming from globalisation. This paper seeks to explore the nexus between globalisation and democracy in Nigeria, particularly focusing on the issues and challenges that characterise this relationship in the 21st century.

The post-colonial era in Nigeria has been marked by alternating periods of military rule and democratic governance. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the country has made strides in consolidating its democracy. However, the influence of globalisation on Nigeria's democratic journey remains complex. The influx of foreign capital, media, technology, and global political norms has both inspired and constrained Nigeria's democratic practice. As Nigeria positions itself in a globalised world, questions arise concerning the autonomy of its democratic institutions, the influence of international actors, and the ability of the state to safeguard its sovereignty while embracing global democratic standards.

This paper addresses several key objectives. First, it aims to examine the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of globalisation and democracy and how they intersect within the Nigerian context. Second, it explores the historical and contemporary effects of globalisation on democratic governance in Nigeria. Third, it identifies the key issues and challenges that arise from this interaction, such as economic dependency, erosion of cultural identity, and political interference. Lastly, the study aims to provide recommendations for enhancing Nigeria's democratic resilience amidst the pressures of globalisation.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how global trends shape domestic political realities. With Nigeria being a pivotal player in Africa, its democratic trajectory offers insights into broader regional and global democratic developments. Furthermore, the study provides policymakers, scholars, and civil society actors with a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between globalisation and democracy, enabling more informed strategies to navigate this relationship. The overarching research question guiding this paper is: How does globalisation affect democracy in Nigeria, and what are the key challenges and implications in the 21st century.

Methodology

This study employs a scoping review methodology to systematically map the existing literature on the relationship between globalisation and democracy in Nigeria. The scoping review method is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for a comprehensive examination of a broad and complex topic, identifying key concepts, gaps, and the range of evidence available (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Unlike systematic reviews, which focus on specific research questions and narrow study parameters, scoping reviews are designed to explore conceptual boundaries and assess the scope of knowledge in a given field. The scoping review followed five main stages: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) selecting studies, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarising, and reporting the results. The primary research question was: "What are the

key issues and challenges posed by globalisation to democracy in Nigeria in the 21st century?"

To identify relevant studies, electronic databases including JSTOR, Scopus, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect were searched for peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports published between 2000 and 2024. Search terms included combinations of "globalisation," "democracy," "Nigeria," "democratic governance," and "political development." Boolean operators and truncation were used to refine the search. Grey literature from international organisations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and African Union was also reviewed. Inclusion criteria focused on studies addressing the effects of globalisation on democratic institutions, political participation, electoral processes, media freedom, and governance in Nigeria. Studies not specific to Nigeria or not addressing the link between globalisation and democracy were excluded. After initial screening of titles and abstracts, 96 sources were selected for full-text review, out of which 10 were included in the final synthesis.

Data were charted using a thematic framework, allowing for the categorisation of issues such as political influence, economic dependency, cultural integration, and democratic resilience. Themes were identified inductively and verified through peer consultation. The findings were analysed qualitatively to understand patterns, contradictions, and implications. Ethical considerations included proper citation of sources, acknowledgement of limitations in scope and access, and transparency in methodological reporting. By utilising the scoping review method, this paper provides a robust and holistic overview of how globalisation intersects with democratic development in Nigeria, setting the stage for evidence-based discussions and future research.

Results

There are various ways globalisation is influencing democracy in Nigeria, some positive and some negative. Globalisation has increasingly become a strong influence on the world's countries over the last several years and affects how they build their economies, manage society and deal with other nations. Just like other developing nations, Nigeria has found that globalisation is both an opportunity for progress and a threat to the country's democracy. Being aware of this blend is necessary to see how outside influences have impacted and are influencing Nigeria's democracy in the 21st century.

Nigerian society is being influenced by international democratic ways and principles because of the spread of globalisation. International media, organisations and online tools help Nigerians better understand what a democratic government is. Because of this, people now expect politicians to be more open, trustworthy and involved in matters that concern them. Thanks to the influence of democracy, civil society has become stronger and more involved in fighting for human rights, better elections and good leadership (Ake, 2000). Globally, governments are expected to respect human rights and democracy and this pressure on Nigeria means its governments have sometimes only supported democracy on the surface.

Improvements in information and communication technology which happened because of globalisation, have altered Nigeria's democracy. Because of mobile phones and internet use, people can now participate in politics, have conversations on public matters and engage on important issues. Individuals now use Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp to talk about politics, spread news fast, organise protests and challenge those in power (Diamond, 2010). One example is that at the 2020 EndSARS protests, Nigerian youths used modern technology and

digital resources to protest police brutality and make their voices heard worldwide. As a result, people can hold their representatives accountable at any time.

However, there are ways in which globalisation has affected democracy negatively too. Another major difficulty it creates is that developing countries require foreign funds and must accept neo-liberal policies. The country has undergone structural change, free trade and divestment in public assets through guidelines from the IMF, World Bank and other international financial institutions. Although these programmes attempted to boost growth, they usually harmed the ability of the state to deliver key services and reduced its accountability to the people (Stiglitz, 2002). The resultant social inequality and economic discontent have contributed to voter apathy, political cynicism, and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions.

Thanks to globalisation, foreign governments and political organizations are having a stronger influence on what takes place in Nigeria. Oil which is key to Nigeria's economy, has attracted foreign governments and multinational corporations to guide policy decisions in that field. As a result, the Nigerian state's independence is affected and democratic choices can be compromised (Obi, 2009). In particular situations, people have argued that foreign aid and monitoring foreign elections actually make countries more dependent and pressures them to copy foreign patterns of democracy that may not fit their needs (Chabal & Daloz, 1999).

Changes brought by globalisation are also leading to the erosion of Nigerian culture. When Western ways and traditions are presented widely in movies, TV and classrooms, identity with native Australian ways begins to fade. Ways that people traditionally resolved disputes, took part in communities and chose their leaders are now rarely used, as democracy from other countries has been introduced and may not be accepted locally. When the government is located far from citizens, there is a chance that trust and connection between society and leaders decrease, affecting democracy and adding to feelings of political alienation (Ihonvbere, 2003). Hastily imposing Western democracy in Nigeria has caused some people to practice democracy only on the surface, instead of making it effective.

The influence of globalisation makes security challenges tougher which in turn affects the progress of democracy. Attempts to govern democratically are being severely disrupted by transnational terrorism, arms proliferation and organised crime in Nigeria. The unrest brought by Boko Haram in the North-East has created problems for the region and also affected voting and public participation. The spread of arms and extreme ideas across the globe has hampered Nigeria's efforts to maintain sufficient security for democracy (Forest, 2012). When people lack security, they often do not vote, find it tough to express their ideas and important institutions lose strength, all of which harm a democracy.

Moreover, due to globalisation, the divide between the country's political elite and ordinary citizens has grown, giving the elite more power in politics. With easier access to worldwide resources, information and connections, the elite in Nigeria often end up increasing their power at the expense of democracy. With more commercialism in political campaigns, it often becomes expensive for anyone not using questionable tactics to participate. Politics treated as a commodity damages genuine leadership and leads to the use of things like patronage which is anti-democratic (Joseph, 1987). In this environment, elections become rituals rather than meaningful expressions of the people's will.

In the realm of governance, globalisation has prompted the Nigerian state to embrace certain institutional reforms, such as anti-corruption frameworks, electoral law amendments, and public service reforms. These reforms are often influenced by international development partners who tie financial assistance and cooperation to governance indicators. While these reforms have the potential to strengthen democratic governance, their implementation is often hampered by weak institutions, corruption, and lack of political will. For instance, the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was partly a response to global anti-corruption pressure, but its operations have at times been marred by selective justice and political interference (Amundsen, 2006).

Also, due to globalisation, there are now many active NGOs in Nigeria that help promote democracy. They obtain funding from international donors and are involved in supervising elections, teaching about voting, promoting changes in policies and securing human rights. Even so, using funds from foreign countries makes some people question the sincerity of NGOs and their purpose, as a few doubt that their interests are aligned with the needs of people in Nigeria (Okafor, 2006). Still, the strength of Nigeria's civil society is among the most notable results of globalisation on Nigerian democracy.

Because of globalisation, there is now a greater importance placed on learning about democracy and civic issues in the educational field. Scholarship and learning from other countries have raised awareness of democratic ideas among Nigerian youth. Colleges and research organizations discuss governance, rights and development, helping to inspire questions and create better-informed people. However, the benefits of beings part of a global education system do not reach all groups equally, with rural populations and marginalized communities still struggling to join in, this makes inequality worse and reduces opportunities for democracy (Aina, 2004).

There has been a major shift in Nigeria's media because of globalisation. As a result of global trends influencing the media sector, more people now operate their own independent newspapers, radio programs and internet sites. They monitor governments and provide the public with updates and a place to share various opinions. It is through investigative journalism that we witness more pressure on officials to be responsible. Yet, because media has become more global, challenges have appeared such as misinformation, false propaganda and lower standards for journalists. Because people depend more on social media for politics, it is simpler for those in power to influence opinions and affect democratic outcomes (Ojebuyi & Fadeyi, 2019).

In summary, the impact of globalisation on democracy in Nigeria presents a complex interplay of empowerment and constraint. While globalisation has enhanced access to democratic knowledge, technology, and international support for good governance, it has also introduced vulnerabilities, economic dependency, cultural erosion, elite dominance, and security threats that undermine democratic consolidation. The Nigerian experience underscores the importance of contextualising democratic development within local realities, rather than assuming that global models will automatically produce desired outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of the study on the impact of globalisation on democracy in Nigeria point to a complex and nuanced relationship. Globalisation has emerged as both a facilitator and a disruptor of democratic consolidation in the country. Through economic liberalisation,

technological diffusion, and cultural exchange, globalisation has strengthened certain democratic institutions and processes in Nigeria. However, it has also amplified existing structural weaknesses, deepened inequalities, and reinforced external dependencies that challenge democratic governance. One of the central ways in which globalisation has positively influenced democracy in Nigeria is through the diffusion of democratic norms and values. As highlighted by Alkharafi and Alsabah (2025), globalisation fosters the transmission of governance principles across national borders, exposing local institutions to international standards of accountability, transparency, and human rights. In Nigeria, this has led to improvements in electoral processes, increased civic engagement, and the proliferation of civil society organisations. The proliferation of digital technologies, largely driven by globalisation, has further enabled Nigerian citizens to participate in political discourse and demand greater accountability from leaders.

However, these democratic gains are fragile and often compromised by the very forces globalisation enables. Gebrihet and Eidsvik (2024) argue that while democratic ideals may spread through globalisation, local adaptations are uneven, particularly in states with deep-seated governance deficits. In Nigeria, weak institutions, systemic corruption, and ethno-religious divisions have undermined the democratic dividends promised by global integration. The result is a paradox where the form of democracy exists, but its substance is often hollowed out by elite manipulation and socio-political fragmentation.

A significant finding of this study is the role of economic globalisation in shaping Nigeria's political landscape. Nigeria's integration into the global economy has brought mixed outcomes for democratic development. On one hand, access to global markets and foreign investments has the potential to reduce poverty and improve citizens' livelihoods. On the other hand, the structural adjustment policies and neoliberal reforms championed by global financial institutions have led to increased inequality and social unrest. As the World Bank (2018) notes, countries like Malawi comparable to Nigeria in terms of socio-economic dynamics have experienced stagnation due to cyclical poverty traps, despite adopting global economic models. This resonates with the Nigerian experience, where economic liberalisation has benefitted a small elite while marginalising the broader population, thereby weakening the participatory foundations of democracy.

The cultural dimension of globalisation presents another double-edged sword. According to Folorunso (2021), global cultural flows can promote multicultural tolerance and shared identities, but they also threaten local traditions and exacerbate identity crises. In Nigeria, the influx of global cultural products has reshaped youth aspirations, social behaviours, and even political ideologies. While this cultural exchange fosters open-mindedness, it has also led to alienation and cultural dislocation. Adedapo et al. (2021) stress that managing Nigeria's ethnic and cultural diversity is critical for political development. Yet, globalisation's tendency to homogenise cultures often erodes indigenous governance models and traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution, making democracy appear foreign or imposed rather than locally owned.

Religion, which plays a significant role in Nigerian society, also intersects with globalisation and democracy in intricate ways. As noted by Jatau and Maza (2023), religion can either consolidate or undermine democratic peace depending on how it is politicised. Global religious movements, often facilitated by media and digital technologies, have amplified both

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tolerance and extremism in Nigeria. While some religious leaders use global platforms to promote peace and civic responsibility, others exploit them to propagate sectarian ideologies. This duality complicates Nigeria's democratic experience, as religion remains a potent tool for both mobilisation and division.

Moreover, globalisation has altered the dynamics of political communication and participation in Nigeria. The rise of social media, digital campaigns, and global advocacy networks has provided new spaces for civic expression. However, these platforms are also vulnerable to manipulation and misinformation. Bas (2025) illustrates how crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia–Ukraine conflict demonstrated the susceptibility of global information systems to distortion and polarisation. Similarly, in Nigeria, digital tools have been used not only for democratic mobilisation, as seen during the #EndSARS protests, but also for spreading fake news and inciting violence, which weakens democratic cohesion.

Environmental governance offers yet another lens through which to assess the interplay between globalisation and democracy. Acheampong et al. (2022) provide empirical evidence that democratic systems can promote better environmental outcomes. However, in Nigeria, environmental degradation especially in the oil-rich Niger Delta persists despite democratic rule. This is partly because global economic interests, including multinational corporations, often override local environmental and social concerns. Thus, while democracy in theory supports environmental justice, in practice it is constrained by global capitalist interests that prioritise profit over people and planet.

Furthermore, the role of religious and traditional elites in Nigeria's democratic processes has been redefined by globalisation. Adebanwi (2010) argues that clergy and traditional leaders are not passive actors but active participants in political conflicts. Globalisation has empowered some of these actors through access to global networks and resources, allowing them to influence public opinion and electoral outcomes. While this can enrich democratic pluralism, it also risks deepening patronage and clientelism if not properly regulated.

The concept of "glocalisation," as explored by Bas (2025), is particularly relevant to Nigeria's democratic journey. Glocalisation, the adaptation of global norms to local contexts suggests that democracy in Nigeria should not be a direct import from Western models but should incorporate indigenous practices and values. This hybrid approach offers a more sustainable path to democratic consolidation by ensuring that global principles are not only adopted but also internalised in ways that resonate with local realities. In terms of governance and institutional reforms, Mills and Morrow (2025) point out that African countries must rethink their development models in the face of globalisation. They argue that Africa's dependence on external aid and policy prescriptions undermines home-grown governance innovations. In Nigeria, this is evident in the cyclical implementation of foreign-designed reforms that fail to address root causes of governance failure. To move forward, there is a need for a democratic model that balances global best practices with locally informed solutions.

Lastly, Eghosa, Ekhator, and Igbinosa (2021) underscore the importance of aligning democratic governance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Globalisation offers a platform for countries to collaborate on development agendas, but this requires strong institutional frameworks and political will. In Nigeria, implementing the SDGs through democratic mechanisms has been slow and inconsistent, largely due to governance deficits.

Addressing these challenges demands not only domestic reforms but also a reorientation of global partnerships to support democratic resilience.

In conclusion, the impact of globalisation on democracy in Nigeria is both enabling and constraining. It has opened new avenues for political engagement, improved access to information, and fostered international cooperation. However, it has also introduced new vulnerabilities, deepened inequalities, and challenged local cultural and institutional frameworks. The key to harnessing globalisation for democratic advancement in Nigeria lies in developing adaptive governance strategies that promote inclusivity, local ownership, and resilience. A glocalised democracy rooted in local values yet open to global innovations offers the most promising pathway forward.

Conclusion

Globalisation presents both opportunities and challenges for the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. While it has facilitated greater access to information, bolstered civil society, and opened up new avenues for political expression, it has simultaneously introduced new layers of complexity that compromise national autonomy, deepen inequality, and strain democratic institutions. This paper has shown that Nigeria's experience with globalisation is shaped by both historical and contemporary factors. From the imposition of SAPs to the influence of foreign aid, global forces have played a significant role in determining the contours of Nigeria's democratic journey. However, the benefits of globalisation can only be realised if they are harmonised with indigenous political realities and democratic needs.

A significant gap identified in the literature is the absence of micro-level studies on how globalisation affects democratic participation in rural areas and among marginalised groups. Future research should adopt participatory methods to explore these dynamics and offer grounded strategies for enhancing inclusive democratic governance. Ultimately, for Nigeria to navigate the challenges of globalisation and strengthen its democracy, it must invest in political education, support independent institutions, regulate foreign influence in domestic politics, and promote economic policies that prioritise equity and national development over external validation.

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