

# THE ROLE OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM IN ADDRESSING NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES: RETHINKING OBAFEMI AWOLOWO'S IDEALS

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## Abstract

Nigeria's socio-economic challenges, including widespread poverty, inequality, unemployment, and inadequate social services, have persisted despite numerous governmental efforts. This paper explores democratic socialism as a potential solution to these issues, drawing on the political philosophy of Obafemi Awolowo. Awolowo advocated for state intervention in key sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, alongside equitable distribution of resources, to foster national development. Through a combination of democratic governance and socialist economic policies, democratic socialism can address Nigeria's developmental crisis by reducing poverty, promoting social justice, and driving economic equity. The textual and expository research design will be adopted for the study. Data will be sourced using qualitative data sources, such as books, journals articles, and internet sources. By analysing Awolowo's ideals, this paper highlights how democratic socialism can provide sustainable solutions to Nigeria's socio-economic problems, offering a framework for reducing inequality, improving access to essential services, and fostering inclusive growth. Ultimately, this approach could pave the way for greater national unity and long-term socio-economic transformation.

**Keywords:** Democratic-socialism, Development, Education, Health, Socio-economic Challenges.

## Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and largest economy, is endowed with abundant natural and human resources. Yet, it remains plagued by profound socio-economic challenges, including widespread poverty, income inequality, unemployment, inadequate healthcare, and an underperforming educational system

(Opafola, 2022). These challenges, exacerbated by systemic corruption, poor governance, and mismanagement of resources, have resulted in a cycle of underdevelopment that hampers the nation's progress and the well-being of its citizens (Chukwujekwu, 2021).

Amid these challenges, the philosophy of democratic socialism emerges as a potential solution, advocating for social justice, equitable distribution of wealth, and inclusive governance (Ogba, 2024). Democratic socialism, with its emphasis on balancing individual freedoms and collective welfare, aligns with the ideals of one of Nigeria's most influential political figures, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Renowned for his visionary leadership and commitment to human-centered development, Awolowo envisioned a Nigeria where the government plays an active role in addressing social inequalities, ensuring that basic needs such as education and healthcare are accessible to all (Opafola, 2022).

This paper explores the relevance of democratic socialism in addressing Nigeria's socio-economic challenges through the lens of Awolowo's ideals. By examining his policies and vision, this study highlights the potential of adopting a system that prioritizes the welfare of the people while fostering sustainable economic growth and national unity. The study seeks to examine the principles of democratic socialism and their applicability in the Nigerian context; analyse Obafemi Awolowo's socio-economic vision and its relevance today; explore specific areas where democratic socialism can address Nigeria's challenges, including poverty, inequality, unemployment, healthcare and education; assess the challenges and feasibility of implementing democratic socialism in Nigeria; and provide recommendations for integrating democratic socialist principles into Nigeria's governance framework.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Democratic Socialism**

Democratic socialism is a leftist economic and political ideology that advocates for political democracy alongside some type of socially owned economy (Abjorensen, 2019). It prioritizes economic democracy, workplace democracy, and worker self-management within systems like market socialism, decentralized planning, or democratic centralized planning (Anderson & Herr, 2007). Proponents argue that capitalism fundamentally conflicts with ideals like freedom, equality, and solidarity, asserting that these principles can only be fully realized in a socialist society (Alt, Chambers, Garrett, Kurian, & Levi, 2010). While most democratic socialists favor a gradual transition to socialism, the ideology can also accommodate revolutionary or reformist strategies to achieve socialist goals (Abjorensen, 2019).

The rise of democratic socialism was driven by socialists who rejected the trend toward one-party states in the Soviet Union and similar regimes during the 20th century. Its roots trace back to 19th-century European socialist thinkers and the British Chartist movement, which, while differing somewhat in objectives, shared a commitment to

democratic governance and public ownership of production. From the late 19th century into the early 20th century, democratic socialism was significantly shaped by the gradualist approach of the British Fabian Society and Eduard Bernstein's evolutionary socialism in Germany (Busky, 2000).

The Democratic Socialists of America (2022) defines democratic socialism as a decentralised socially-owned economy and rejecting both authoritarian socialism and social democracy. Democratic socialism combines the principles of democracy with socialist ideals, advocating for an economic and political system that prioritizes social welfare, public ownership of key resources, and equitable wealth distribution. Unlike orthodox socialism, democratic socialism emphasizes participatory governance and respects individual liberties, ensuring that state interventions are balanced with democratic accountability. In practice, democratic socialism seeks to reduce income inequality, provide universal access to basic needs, and foster a society where resources are equitably distributed for the common good.

Democratic socialism is a term with multiple interpretations. Broadly, it encompasses all forms of socialism that reject Marxist-Leninism and authoritarianism (Prychitko, 2002), aligning more closely with the historical notion of libertarian socialism. This broad definition includes anti-authoritarian versions of social democracy, liberal socialism, utopian socialism, market socialism, reformist socialism, revolutionary socialism, state socialism, left populism, Trotskyism, and Eurocommunism (Anderson & Herr, 2007; Moller, 2023). In a narrower sense, democratic socialism specifically refers to the anti-capitalist faction within social democracy that seeks to move swiftly beyond the welfare state (Page, 2007).

Democratic socialism is distinct from Marxism-Leninism, which critics view as authoritarian, bureaucratic, and undemocratic (Volle, 2022). Democratic socialists oppose the Stalinist political system and the centrally planned economic model associated with the Soviet Union and other Marxist-Leninist regimes of the 20th century (Prychitko, 2002). Unlike Third Way social democracy, democratic socialists aim for a systemic transition from capitalism to socialism, whereas social democrats work within capitalist frameworks to establish a robust welfare state, leaving much of the private sector intact (Volle, 2022). Even so, many democratic socialists support regulations and welfare policies as interim measures to mitigate the negative effects of capitalism and gradually transform the economy (Volle, 2022).

Some moderate democratic socialists, while holding socialism as a long-term goal, focus on mitigating capitalism's excesses through progressive reforms aimed at making it more humane in the short term (Lamb, 2015). Conversely, other democratic socialists argue that policies such as economic interventionism and reforms to reduce social inequalities may unintentionally intensify capitalism's contradictions or cause them to manifest in new forms (Schweickart, 2007). These democratic socialists contend that capitalism's fundamental flaws can only be resolved through revolutionary change,

replacing private ownership with collective ownership of the means of production and extending democracy into the economic realm via workplace or industrial democracy (Alt et al., 2010).

Liberal democrats often critique democratic socialism by questioning whether democracy and socialism are compatible, while Marxist-Leninists challenge the feasibility of achieving socialism or communism through democratic means without suppressing counter-revolutionary forces (Malycha, 2000). Some scholars and commentators have noted that Western countries such as France, Sweden, and the United Kingdom have been governed by socialist parties or adopted social democratic mixed economies, which are occasionally described as "democratic socialist" (Kendall, 2011; Sanandaji, 2021). However, it has been argued that many of these nations shifted away from socialism after the Cold War, as a neoliberal consensus replaced the earlier social democratic consensus in advanced capitalist societies (Klause-Jackson, 2019; Best et al., 2011).

Democratic socialism emphasizes the active involvement of workers and the general population in managing the economy, distinguishing it from administrative-command systems (Ellman, 2007; Alt et al., 2010). Nicos Poulantzas similarly explores this idea in greater depth (Poulantzas, 1978). Hal Draper identifies revolutionary-democratic socialism as a "socialism from below," highlighting figures like Rosa Luxemburg, who championed the spontaneous struggle of a free working class, rejecting the myth of a "theory of spontaneity" attributed to her (Draper, 1966). Draper also praised Eugene V. Debs for inspiring widespread grassroots support for revolutionary-democratic socialism, though noting that Debs left no comparable successor (Draper, 1974).

Some Marxist socialists draw on Karl Marx's commitment to democracy, identifying as democratic socialists (Sarkar, 2019; Sargent, 2008). The Socialist Party of Great Britain and the World Socialist Movement define socialism in its classical sense as a society based on common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution, operated in the community's interest (Barker, 2019). They describe socialism as characterized by classlessness, statelessness, the elimination of wage labor, and a post-monetary economy based on calculation in kind, workplace democracy, and free access to goods and services produced solely for use, not exchange. While these traits are often associated with communism, Marx, Friedrich Engels, and others used the terms "socialism" and "communism" interchangeably (Hudis et al., 2008).

### **Awolowo's Vision for Nigeria**

Obafemi Awolowo remains a towering figure in Nigeria's history, not just for his role in the fight for independence but also for his pioneering vision of socio-economic development. His leadership as the Premier of Western Nigeria showcased his commitment to democratic socialism, prioritizing policies that centered on the welfare of the people (TIN Magazine, 2015). Awolowo believed that true national progress could only be achieved by addressing the fundamental needs of the masses, ensuring

equity, and fostering inclusivity in governance and resource distribution (The Guardian, 2019).

Awolowo's travails and contributions to education in Western Nigeria remain impactful, not just in Western Nigeria, but in the entire length of the country. Despite the fact that he has been written of as a politician, prophet, patriot, and philosopher, his legacies in the field of education and nation building remains quite outstanding in its own right (Osuntokun, 2002). During his early days, he noted that he had to withdraw from school, after the death of his father, as there was no money to pay his fees, despite the fact that his father left sufficient property to enable him complete the remaining years of his primary education. Thus, he suffered a setback in a twist of fate that changed his life entirely, due to his thirst to complete his primary education (Awolowo, 1968).

At the core of Awolowo's vision was his belief in the transformative power of education. He championed free and universal primary education, making the Western Region of Nigeria the first to implement such a policy in Africa. This initiative significantly increased literacy rates and laid the foundation for human capital development in the region (James, 1981). For Awolowo, education was not just a tool for individual empowerment but also a cornerstone for building a more equitable and progressive society. He famously declared, "The children of the poor you failed to train will never let your children live in peace," emphasizing the long-term societal impact of neglecting education (Toyin, 2021; Awolowo, 1960).

Awolowo also recognized the importance of healthcare as a fundamental right, not a privilege. He introduced free healthcare services for children under the age of 18 and expanded access to medical facilities, ensuring that even the most disadvantaged communities could benefit from quality care. This approach reflected his belief that the government had a moral obligation to safeguard the health and well-being of its citizens (The Guardian, 2020).

Beyond education and healthcare, Awolowo's vision encompassed industrialization and infrastructural development. He understood the need for a diversified economy and advocated for state-led investments in industries to create jobs and stimulate economic growth. Under his leadership, the Western Region established industrial estates, agricultural cooperatives, and public enterprises, demonstrating his commitment to economic self-reliance and social equity (Mailafia, 2020).

Awolowo's governance style was marked by transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership. He believed in participatory governance and encouraged policies that allowed citizens to have a voice in decision-making (Sklar, 2004). His administration was characterized by prudent fiscal management, ensuring that public resources were efficiently utilized for the common good.

His vision for Nigeria extended beyond regional development. Awolowo believed in the



potential of a united Nigeria, where diversity was a strength rather than a weakness. According to his first book, *Path to Nigeria Freedom*, he defended federalism and gave a clear indication of the type of Nigeria he wanted to see emerge after Nigeria's independence (Awolowo, 1947). He emphasized the need for self-determination, federalism, and national unity. He also criticized colonial governance and provided a blueprint for post-independence governance, advocating for education, industrialization and economic reform. However, he was a realist, acknowledging the challenges posed by ethnic and regional divides. He advocated for federalism as a governance model, allowing each region to develop at its pace while contributing to the collective progress of the nation (Awolowo, 1947; Britannica, 2022). This approach, he argued, would promote equity and reduce the tensions arising from centralized control of resources. Awolowo's vision, rooted in democratic socialism, remains profoundly relevant today. His emphasis on human capital development, social justice, and accountable leadership offers a blueprint for addressing Nigeria's persistent socio-economic challenges. By revisiting and adapting his ideals, Nigeria can chart a path toward inclusive growth and national unity.

### **Addressing Poverty and Inequality through Democratic Socialism**

Poverty and inequality remain two of the most pressing challenges facing Nigeria, with over 40% of the population living below the poverty line. The wealth gap between the privileged elite and the majority underscores a systemic failure to equitably distribute the nation's resources. Democratic socialism offers a transformative approach to addressing these issues by emphasizing equitable wealth redistribution, social welfare programs, and inclusive economic policies. Under democratic socialism, poverty and inequality are tackled through a combination of progressive taxation and targeted social spending (Opafola, 2022). A progressive tax system ensures that wealthier individuals and corporations contribute a fairer share of their income to public funds. These resources can then be reinvested into social programs designed to uplift marginalized and vulnerable populations. For example, the government could provide subsidies for housing, food security initiatives, and cash transfers to support those living in extreme poverty.

Democratic socialism also prioritizes public ownership or regulation of key industries and natural resources. In Nigeria, where oil accounts for a significant portion of the national economy, a democratic socialist approach would ensure that the proceeds from oil revenues are used to benefit the entire population rather than enriching a select few (Dayomi & Akokan, 1992). This could include funding for infrastructure projects in rural areas, improving access to clean water and electricity, and creating job opportunities for underserved communities.

Awolowo's approach to addressing poverty through democratic socialism was rooted in grassroots development. He recognized that poverty alleviation required empowering rural communities, which constituted the majority of Nigeria's population (Awolowo, 1968). A cursory look at Nigeria, and Africa's situation in general shows that the

leadership styles and policies need to change. Awolowo addressed the socio-economic and political challenges facing Africa. He also criticized the leadership styles and policies of African leaders post-independence and advocated for an ideological shift towards socialism, economic self-reliance and Pan-African unity. He noted that these are the strategies to curbing poverty in the region (Awolowo, 1977). With economic self-reliance, there would be larger investment in agricultural development, rural infrastructure, and cooperative societies, as Awolowo sought to create sustainable livelihoods and reduce urban-rural disparities (Awolowo, 1977). His policies demonstrated how targeted investments in underprivileged areas could stimulate local economies and improve overall living standards (Dayomi & Alokun, 1992).

Another critical aspect of addressing poverty and inequality under democratic socialism is the provision of universal access to essential services such as education and healthcare. These services serve as equalizers, providing everyone, regardless of their socio-economic background, with opportunities to improve their quality of life. Awolowo's free education policy in Western Nigeria serves as an example of how investing in human capital can uplift entire generations and reduce intergenerational poverty. Access to education equips individuals with the skills needed to secure better-paying jobs, thereby reducing income inequality over time (Dibie, 2008).

In addition, social safety nets, such as unemployment benefits, pensions, and health insurance, are integral to a democratic socialist framework. These programs provide a buffer against economic shocks and ensure that no individual or family is left destitute due to unforeseen circumstances. By implementing such measures, the Nigerian government could significantly reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty and create a more stable and equitable society.

Land reforms also form an essential part of addressing inequality in a democratic socialist system. Ensuring that land is fairly distributed and accessible to those who depend on it for their livelihood, particularly small-scale farmers, can enhance agricultural productivity and reduce poverty in rural areas. This aligns with Awolowo's emphasis on empowering the agricultural sector, which remains the backbone of Nigeria's economy.

Finally, addressing poverty and inequality through democratic socialism requires active citizen participation in governance. Encouraging communities to be involved in decision-making processes ensures that policies are tailored to their needs and that government programs reach their intended beneficiaries. Democratic socialism promotes decentralization and accountability, ensuring that public funds are transparently managed and corruption is minimized, which are critical to reducing inequality (Makinde, 2010).

By adopting democratic socialist principles, Nigeria can create a more equitable society where economic opportunities and resources are accessible to all. This approach not

only addresses the immediate symptoms of poverty and inequality but also tackles their root causes, laying the foundation for sustainable national development.

### **Unemployment and Economic Equity**

Unemployment is a pressing issue in Nigeria, with a significant portion of the population, particularly youth, unable to secure stable jobs. This problem contributes to rising poverty levels, social unrest, and stunted economic growth. Democratic socialism offers a framework for addressing unemployment by advocating for active state involvement in economic planning, job creation, and the promotion of economic equity (Opafola, 2022).

A core principle of democratic socialism is the recognition of employment as a fundamental right. The state is tasked with creating an enabling environment where individuals have access to meaningful work that ensures a decent standard of living. This involves government-led initiatives to stimulate job creation in key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. Awolowo's emphasis on industrialization aligns with this approach, as he advocated for establishing industries to create employment opportunities and reduce dependence on imports (Adeniran, 2016). In contemporary Nigeria, similar initiatives could include public works programs, investments in renewable energy, and support for start-ups and small businesses.

The informal sector, which accounts for a large percentage of Nigeria's economy, can also benefit from democratic socialist policies. Providing access to credit, skill development programs, and social protections for informal workers would empower them to contribute more effectively to economic growth while improving their livelihoods (Akinjide, 2022). Additionally, introducing cooperative business models, where workers have a stake in ownership and decision-making, fosters economic equity and promotes sustainable enterprises.

Economic equity, another pillar of democratic socialism, aims to close the wealth gap by ensuring fair distribution of resources and opportunities. In Nigeria, where a small elite controls a disproportionate share of the nation's wealth, policies that redistribute resources are critical. These include progressive taxation systems, land reforms to support smallholder farmers, and fair labor laws that guarantee workers' rights and equitable wages. By aligning economic policies with social justice, Nigeria can create an economy that benefits the majority rather than a privileged few (Olu-Adeyemi, 2022).

Awolowo's focus on empowering marginalized communities through rural development also provides insights into reducing unemployment and achieving economic equity. Investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare in rural areas can create local jobs, reduce urban migration, and promote balanced regional development (ThisDay, 2015). This approach ensures that economic growth is inclusive and sustainable, addressing both immediate unemployment concerns and long-term structural inequalities.



### **Healthcare and Education**

Healthcare and education are the bedrock of any society's development. Yet in Nigeria, these sectors are fraught with challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, underfunding, and limited access for the majority of the population. Democratic socialism prioritizes universal access to these essential services, ensuring that every citizen, regardless of their socio-economic status, can live a healthy and productive life.

#### ***Healthcare***

In a democratic socialist framework, healthcare is viewed as a basic human right rather than a privilege. This philosophy advocates for a publicly funded, universal healthcare system that provides free or affordable medical services to all citizens. In Nigeria, such a system could address the alarming disparities in healthcare access, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Public investment in building hospitals, training medical personnel, and equipping healthcare facilities would significantly improve service delivery and reduce the country's high maternal and infant mortality rates (Opafola, 2022).

Awolowo's introduction of free healthcare for children under 18 in Western Nigeria demonstrated the transformative impact of prioritizing health as a public good. Expanding this model nationwide would ensure that vulnerable populations, such as children and the elderly, receive adequate medical care. Additionally, preventive healthcare programs, including vaccination campaigns and health education, could reduce the burden of preventable diseases, freeing up resources for more complex medical needs (Chukwujekwu, 2021).

Democratic socialism also emphasizes equitable resource allocation to ensure that healthcare facilities in rural areas are on par with urban centers. By addressing the urban-rural divide in healthcare infrastructure, Nigeria can reduce the disparities that leave millions without access to quality medical services.

#### ***Education***

Education is another cornerstone of democratic socialism, seen as a tool for empowerment and a driver of socio-economic mobility. In Nigeria, where millions of children remain out of school, democratic socialist principles advocate for free and compulsory education at all levels. Awolowo's pioneering free primary education program in Western Nigeria serves as a blueprint for nationwide implementation. By investing in education, the government can equip future generations with the skills needed to drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and national development (Macaulay-Adeyelu, 2021).

In addition to free education, democratic socialism promotes equitable access to quality learning. This includes addressing disparities in educational infrastructure, teacher quality, and learning materials between urban and rural areas. Special attention should also be given to marginalized groups, such as girls and children with disabilities, to ensure that no one is left behind (Ogunmodede, 2011).

Vocational and technical education, a key focus of Awolowo's policies, is particularly relevant in addressing Nigeria's high unemployment rates. By aligning educational curricula with labor market needs, the government can create a workforce equipped with practical skills that meet the demands of various industries (Daramola, 2012). Scholarships, grants, and educational loans can also be provided to ensure that higher education is accessible to all, irrespective of financial status.

Furthermore, democratic socialism emphasizes the integration of civic education into the curriculum to foster a sense of responsibility, ethical behavior, and community involvement. This aligns with Awolowo's belief in education as a means of cultivating not only intellectual capability but also moral character (Omoregbe, 2007).

Thus, the interplay between healthcare and education is critical for national development. A healthy population is better able to learn and work, while an educated populace is more likely to make informed health decisions. Democratic socialism promotes policies that integrate these two sectors, such as school-based health programs that provide medical services to students and their families. This holistic approach ensures that investments in one sector amplify the benefits in the other.

By adopting democratic socialist principles in healthcare and education, Nigeria can lay a solid foundation for reducing inequality, improving quality of life, and fostering sustainable development. These sectors are not merely services but investments in the country's most valuable resource—its people.

### **Reducing Corruption and Promoting Accountability**

Corruption is one of the most significant obstacles to Nigeria's socio-economic development. It undermines governance, erodes public trust, and diverts resources meant for critical services and development projects (Banko and Onyekachi, 2020). Transparency International consistently ranks Nigeria among countries with high levels of corruption, highlighting its systemic nature in public administration, business, and politics (Transparency International, 2020). Democratic socialism, with its emphasis on equitable governance, participatory decision-making, and social accountability, offers a robust framework for combating corruption and fostering accountability.

A central tenet of democratic socialism is the redistribution of power from elites to the masses. This shift discourages monopolistic control over resources and decision-making, which are often catalysts for corruption. Democratic socialism advocates for participatory governance, where citizens actively contribute to policymaking and oversight. Involving the public ensures transparency and deters the misuse of power by political leaders and public officials. Community-level monitoring of government projects and expenditures can be institutionalized to ensure that resources reach their intended beneficiaries (Yio, 2022).

Obafemi Awolowo's leadership exemplified integrity and prudence in governance. His administration in Western Nigeria was notable for its effective financial management and commitment to the judicious use of public funds. Awolowo demonstrated that visionary and ethical leadership is critical to minimizing corruption. His emphasis on accountability through clear fiscal policies and well-monitored programs serves as a model for contemporary Nigeria (Opafola, 2022).

Another democratic socialist approach to reducing corruption involves strengthening institutional frameworks and the rule of law. Independent and well-resourced anti-corruption agencies are essential for investigating and prosecuting cases of fraud, embezzlement, and abuse of power (Ukanwah, 2018). Democratic socialism advocates for the autonomy of such institutions, ensuring they operate without political interference. In Nigeria, institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) need to be further empowered and insulated from external influence to perform effectively (Udo, 2019).

Economic reforms under democratic socialism also play a role in reducing corruption. By reducing privatization of critical sectors and emphasizing public ownership or strong regulatory oversight, the opportunities for illicit financial practices are minimized. For instance, the mismanagement and embezzlement often associated with the privatization of Nigeria's oil and gas sector can be curtailed through public ownership models that prioritize transparency and equitable distribution of revenues (Salminen, Olli-Pekka & Rinna, 2017).

A key strategy for promoting accountability under democratic socialism is the decentralization of governance. By devolving power to local governments and communities, decision-making becomes more transparent and directly accountable to the people (Samuel, 2018). Decentralization not only reduces bureaucratic bottlenecks but also makes it easier to monitor and evaluate government actions. Awolowo's advocacy for federalism and regional autonomy aligns with this principle, as it allows governance structures to be closer to the people and more responsive to their needs (Pallavi, 2017).

Educational reforms also play a role in reducing corruption. Democratic socialism places a strong emphasis on civic education to cultivate a culture of accountability and ethical behavior among citizens. Teaching values such as integrity, transparency, and public service from an early age can foster a generation that rejects corrupt practices. This aligns with Awolowo's vision of education as a tool not just for economic empowerment but also for moral and social development (Samuel, 2018).

Democratic socialism also emphasizes equitable wages and labor protections for public officials, reducing the incentive for corruption born out of economic hardship. A well-

paid and motivated civil service is less likely to engage in corrupt practices. Coupled with strict punitive measures for those found guilty of corruption, this creates a system that rewards integrity and deters malpractice (Onwujekwe et al., 2019).

Lastly, the political will to combat corruption is non-negotiable. Democratic socialism demands leaders who are committed to the principles of social justice and equity, as exemplified by Awolowo (Olu-Adeyemi, 2014). Strong leadership that upholds these values sets a precedent for accountability at all levels of governance. Awolowo's personal integrity and his insistence on accountability from his team highlight the importance of leading by example in the fight against corruption (Chukwujekwu, 2021).

### **Challenges and Feasibility of Democratic Socialism in Nigeria**

While democratic socialism offers a compelling framework for addressing Nigeria's socio-economic challenges, its implementation is not without significant obstacles. These challenges stem from systemic, cultural, economic, and political factors that shape the country's governance landscape.

#### **1. Political Resistance and Elite Opposition**

One of the primary challenges to implementing democratic socialism in Nigeria is the entrenched opposition from political elites and vested interests. The redistributive policies central to democratic socialism, such as progressive taxation, land reforms, and public ownership of key sectors, threaten the privileges of the elite class that has historically dominated Nigeria's political and economic landscape (Bolarinwa & Osuji, 2022). These elites, who benefit from the current capitalist-oriented system, are likely to resist any attempts to reduce their control over wealth and resources. Overcoming this resistance requires strong political leadership, grassroots mobilization, and public advocacy to build widespread support for democratic socialist policies (Agbaje, 2014). Leaders inspired by figures like Obafemi Awolowo must demonstrate the benefits of such reforms in tangible ways, such as improved public services, to gain public trust and counter elite opposition.

#### **2. Corruption and Institutional Weakness**

Corruption remains a pervasive issue in Nigeria and poses a significant barrier to implementing democratic socialism. The mismanagement of public funds, lack of transparency, and weak institutional capacity undermine the effective delivery of social welfare programs and equitable distribution of resources. Without addressing these systemic issues, the principles of democratic socialism may be co-opted or rendered ineffective (Adeniran, 2016). Strengthening anti-corruption institutions, enforcing accountability, and promoting ethical leadership are critical to ensuring the success of democratic socialist policies. Democratic socialism's emphasis on participatory governance and community oversight can help reduce corruption by fostering transparency and public involvement in resource allocation and policy implementation (Macaulay-Adeyulure, 2021).

### 3. Economic Constraints

Nigeria's economy, while rich in natural resources, faces several structural challenges, including overdependence on oil revenues, fluctuating global commodity prices, and high levels of debt. Transitioning to a democratic socialist system that emphasizes public ownership and extensive social programs requires substantial financial investment. Given the current state of Nigeria's economy, funding these initiatives may be challenging without comprehensive reforms and revenue diversification (Obadare, 2024).

To address this, Nigeria must prioritize economic diversification, focusing on sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology to generate additional revenue. Progressive taxation and the elimination of subsidies that disproportionately benefit the wealthy could also provide funding for social programs. Awolowo's emphasis on prudent fiscal management offers a guiding principle for ensuring resources are effectively utilized (Adeniran, 2016).

### 4. Ethnic and Regional Divisions

Nigeria's deeply rooted ethnic and regional divides present another challenge to the feasibility of democratic socialism. The country's federal structure and historical inequalities among its regions have often resulted in competition for resources and power, making nationwide policy implementation difficult. Democratic socialism's focus on equity and redistribution could be misinterpreted by some groups as favoritism or marginalization, exacerbating existing tensions.

To mitigate these concerns, democratic socialism must be tailored to Nigeria's federal structure, promoting regional autonomy and development while maintaining national cohesion (Awolowo, 1981). Policies should address the unique needs of each region, ensuring that no group feels excluded or disadvantaged (Salaudeen & Wannan, 2017). Awolowo's advocacy for federalism underscores the importance of decentralized governance in achieving equitable development.

### 5. Global Economic Pressures

Nigeria operates within a global economic system that largely favors capitalist models. International financial institutions, trade agreements, and foreign investors often impose conditions that prioritize market liberalization and privatization, which are at odds with democratic socialist principles (George-Genyi, 2015). Resistance from these external actors could complicate efforts to adopt policies such as public ownership or heavy state regulation. Thus, Nigeria would need to strategically negotiate with international partners, diversify its trade relationships, and strengthen domestic production to reduce dependency on external forces. Aligning democratic socialist policies with global sustainability and development goals could also attract support from progressive international allies (Salaudee & Wanan, 2017).



### Feasibility and Strategic Pathways

Despite these challenges, the feasibility of democratic socialism in Nigeria lies in its ability to address the country's most pressing socio-economic issues effectively (Wanan, 2013). Key strategies to enhance feasibility include:

**Incremental Implementation:** Rather than wholesale adoption, democratic socialism can be introduced gradually through pilot programs and targeted reforms in areas like education, healthcare, and progressive taxation. Demonstrating success in these areas can build public and political support for broader implementation.

**Leveraging Grassroots Movements:** Mobilizing grassroots organizations, civil society, and labor unions can create a strong constituency for democratic socialism. Community involvement ensures policies are people-centered and address local needs.

**Building Coalitions:** Forming alliances with progressive political parties, social movements, and international organizations can provide the necessary support and resources to push for democratic socialist policies.

**Investing in Education and Advocacy:** Public education campaigns highlighting the benefits of democratic socialism, using Awolowo's achievements as evidence, can shift public opinion and counter misinformation.

**Strengthening Governance:** Democratic socialism's success depends on effective governance and institutional capacity. Strengthening anti-corruption measures, promoting ethical leadership, and ensuring transparency are essential.

### Conclusion

The socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria demand bold and inclusive solutions. Democratic socialism, as envisioned by Obafemi Awolowo, offers a viable framework for addressing these issues through equitable resource distribution, universal access to essential services, and participatory governance. To integrate these principles into Nigeria's governance system, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Nigeria's government should enact progressive taxation and social welfare policies to reduce inequality and improve public service delivery.
2. There is a need to build strong institutions to promote transparency, accountability, and efficiency in governance.
3. Communities should be mobilized to participate actively in the policy-making process and hold leaders accountable.
4. The government needs to prioritize education and healthcare as foundational elements of national development.
5. The government should foster ethical and visionary leadership inspired by Awolowo's ideals, as examined in this paper. Through this, Nigeria can chart a path towards sustainable development and socio-economic justice, fulfilling the aspirations of its people and realizing its potential as a leading nation in Africa.

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