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Political Leadership and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria: A Study of Imo State, 1999–2025

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ABSTRACT

The quality of political leadership is widely seen as a key determinant of whether a country or a sub-national unit turns its resources into improved living conditions. This study examined the impact of political leadership on socio-economic development in Nigeria, with particular reference to Imo State from the return to civil rule in 1999 to 2025. The study adopted a historical-documentary design and relied on secondary data, including official statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics, fiscal reports, court judgments, governance indices, peer-reviewed literature and verified press reports. The data were analysed through thematic content analysis, guided by social contract theory and the transformational-transactional model of leadership. The findings show that successive administrations in Imo State introduced important programmes in education and physical infrastructure, including the free education policy announced in 2011 and extensive road rehabilitation after 2020. However, these initiatives were weakened by poor continuity between administrations, limited transparency, heavy reliance on federal allocations and borrowing, accumulated pension and salary arrears, and insecurity. Socio-economic outcomes remained weak: Imo recorded the highest unemployment rate among Nigerian states in late 2020, while about two in five residents were multidimensionally poor in 2022. The study concludes that political leadership has contributed to aspects of human capital and infrastructural development in Imo State, but that its impact has been limited by transactional, personality-driven governance and weak accountability institutions. It recommends policy continuity through legally backed development plans, open budgeting and project monitoring, strengthened anti-corruption and audit institutions, and a deliberate focus on job creation and security.

Keywords: Political Leadership; Socio-Economic Development; Human Capital; Infrastructure; Accountability; Imo State

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Introduction

Nigeria returned to civil rule on 29 May 1999, after a long period of military government that had begun in 1966 and was interrupted only by the Second Republic from 1979 to 1983. Military rule left behind a legacy of centralised power, weak institutions, corruption, poverty and unemployment. Democratic government was expected to reverse these trends by giving citizens a voice in choosing their leaders and by making those leaders accountable for the use of public resources (Ake, 1996; Diamond, 1999).

Development has been the stated goal of every Nigerian government since independence. Yet, despite substantial oil revenues and a large and young population, Nigeria's development record remains disappointing. In 2019, about 40.1 per cent of Nigerians, or roughly 82.9 million people, lived below the national poverty line (National Daily, 2020), and in 2022 about 63 per cent of the population was classified as multidimensionally poor (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). Many scholars and commentators have linked this record to the quality of political leadership. Achebe (1983, p. 1) put the point most memorably when he wrote that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership".

Leadership is a process of social influence through which a person or group mobilises others towards shared goals (Burns, 1978). Political leadership refers to those who hold or seek authority over public

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decisions and resources, and who set priorities for the use of those resources (Ogbeidi, 2012). The quality of this leadership shapes the policies a government adopts, the integrity with which public funds are managed, and the extent to which programmes continue from one administration to the next.

Socio-economic development refers to sustained improvement in the material well-being and life chances of citizens. It includes reductions in poverty, unemployment and inequality, as well as improvements in education, health, housing, infrastructure and personal security. Development, in this sense, is about people, not only about economic growth (Ake, 1996).

State governments occupy an important place in this relationship. Under Nigeria's federal constitution, states are responsible for much of the delivery of education, health, roads and other services that affect daily life. Imo State, created in 1976 and with its capital at Owerri, has had five elected governors since 1999: Achike Udenwa (1999–2007), Ikedi Ohakim (2007–2011), Rochas Okorocha (2011–2019), Emeka Ihedioha (May 2019 to January 2020), and Hope Uzodimma (from January 2020, re-elected in November 2023). Each administration announced programmes aimed at improving the welfare of the people. The extent to which these leaders advanced socio-economic development in the state is the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

Imo State is endowed with fertile land, oil and gas deposits in parts of the state, a highly educated population and a strong tradition of community self-help. Yet the state faces serious socio-economic challenges. In the fourth quarter of 2020, the National Bureau of Statistics estimated Imo's unemployment rate at 56.64 per cent, the highest of any state in Nigeria at the time (The Eagle Online, 2021). In 2022, about 40.7 per cent of the state's population was classified as multidimensionally poor (Innonews, 2022; NBS, 2022). Pensioners and public servants have repeatedly complained of unpaid entitlements, and the state has faced serious insecurity since 2021.

These conditions raise questions about the role of political leadership. Successive governors have each introduced flagship programmes, but programmes have often been abandoned or altered by their successors, and the outcomes of public spending have not always been transparent. There is limited systematic evidence on how political leadership in Imo State since 1999 has affected human capital and infrastructural development, and on the factors that have limited its impact. This study seeks to address that gap.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to examine the impact of political leadership on socio-economic development in Imo State. The specific objectives were to:

1. examine the contribution of political leadership to human capital development in Imo State;
2. assess the contribution of political leadership to infrastructural development in Imo State; and
3. identify the factors that have limited the impact of political leadership on socio-economic development in Imo State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has political leadership contributed to human capital development in Imo State?
2. To what extent has political leadership contributed to infrastructural development in Imo State?
3. What factors have limited the impact of political leadership on socio-economic development in Imo State?

Conceptual Review

Political Leadership

Ogbeidi (2012) described political leadership as the ruling class that bears responsibility for managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by setting and influencing policy priorities through decision-making structures and institutions. Broadly understood, political leadership goes beyond those who formally hold office. It includes the wider political class, such as party leaders and influential financiers,

who can shape government decisions from behind the scenes. In Nigeria, the influence of political godfathers on the selection and conduct of office holders is well documented (Ahmed & Adam, 2024).

Burns (1978) distinguished between transactional and transformational leadership. Transactional leaders exchange benefits for support: jobs, contracts and favours for loyalty and votes. Transformational leaders seek to raise the aspirations of followers, build institutions and pursue long-term collective goals. Both types are present in politics, but development requires leadership that is at least partly transformational, able to look beyond the next election and to build systems that survive changes of government.

Socio-Economic Development

Socio-economic development is a process of sustained improvement in the living conditions of a population. It is measured by indicators such as income and poverty, employment, educational attainment, health status, access to infrastructure and personal security. Sen (1999) argued that development should be understood as the expansion of the real freedoms that people enjoy, including freedom from hunger, illiteracy and preventable disease, and freedom to participate in economic and political life. This view shifts attention from aggregate growth to the capabilities of individuals.

Two dimensions of development are emphasised in this study. Human capital development refers to investment in people's knowledge, skills and health, mainly through education, training and health care. Infrastructural development refers to the provision and maintenance of physical facilities such as roads, power, water, schools and hospitals, which support economic activity and improve quality of life.

Political Leadership and Socio-Economic Development

The relationship between leadership and development has been widely studied. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argued that the long-run prosperity of nations depends on inclusive institutions that protect property rights, enforce contracts and allow broad participation, and that leaders who build extractive institutions enrich a narrow elite at the expense of development. In the Nigerian context, Ekeh (1975) argued that colonialism produced a "civic public" that people tend to view as a resource to be exploited for private or communal benefit, which helps to explain the persistence of corruption in public office.

Recent Nigerian studies support the view that leadership quality is a major determinant of development outcomes. Ivorgba (2024) reviewed Nigeria's leadership history and argued that transparent, accountable and ethical leadership is essential for sustainable growth and inclusive development. Obilor and Amadi (2024) surveyed Nigerians and found that political leadership had failed to facilitate national development, judging by levels of poverty, insecurity and unemployment. Ekpo et al. (2024) found that, in Akwa Ibom State, political leadership had a significant positive effect on health, education and living standards, but that this effect was undermined by corruption, which contributed to poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on social contract theory, supported by the transformational-transactional model of leadership.

Social Contract Theory

Social contract theory, associated with Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, holds that legitimate government rests on the consent of the governed. Rousseau (1762/1968) argued that sovereignty lies in the general will of the people and that government is simply an agent appointed to carry out that will. On this view, political leaders hold power in trust and are obliged to use it for the common good.

The main assumptions of the theory, as applied in this study, are that: (a) people are by nature free and equal; (b) government exists by agreement and derives its authority from the people; (c) the primary purpose of government is to secure the welfare and security of the people; and (d) leaders who persistently fail to fulfil this purpose lose their claim to legitimacy. The 1999 Constitution reflects these ideas. Section

14(2)(b) states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government", and Chapter II sets out fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, including the promotion of economic well-being, education and health.

The theory is relevant because it provides a standard against which the performance of political leaders can be judged. A governor elected to office enters into an implied contract with the people of the state to promote their welfare. The provision of education, health care, roads, security and employment opportunities is part of that contract. When leaders use public office mainly to reward supporters or enrich themselves, they break the terms of the contract. A known limitation of the theory is that it does not explain why leaders behave as they do. For this reason, the study also drew on the transformational-transactional model of leadership (Burns, 1978), which helps to explain how leadership style affects whether development programmes are pursued in a sustained and accountable manner.

Application of the Framework

Together, the two perspectives suggest that development outcomes in Imo State will depend on whether political leaders treat public office as a trust held on behalf of citizens, and on whether their leadership style is oriented towards long-term institution building or short-term exchange. Transformational leadership would be expected to produce sustained investment in human capital and infrastructure, continuity across administrations and transparent management of resources. Transactional leadership would be expected to produce visible but short-lived projects, frequent policy reversals and weak accountability.

Empirical Review

Studies on political leadership and development in Nigeria have used a range of designs. Obilor and Amadi (2024) used a descriptive survey of Nigerians and found that respondents judged political leadership to have failed in reducing poverty, insecurity and unemployment. Egesi et al. (2025), using secondary data and social contract theory, examined political leadership and socio-economic development in Nigeria and concluded that more effective use of political leadership in human capital and infrastructural development was needed, recommending stronger action against corruption. Ekpo et al. (2024) surveyed 379 public officials in Akwa Ibom State and found a significant positive effect of political leadership on economic indicators in health, education and standards of living, which was undermined by corruption.

Studies focused on Imo State reach similar conclusions. Obialor and Ozuzu (2026), using a historical design and content analysis, concluded that the development crisis in Imo State is largely a product of leadership failure, reflected in corruption, heavy borrowing, poverty, high unemployment and decayed infrastructure. Ebiziem et al. (2020) examined unemployment in Imo State and identified corruption, weak leadership, neglect of agriculture and poor infrastructure as major causes, with poverty and insecurity as major consequences.

On corruption and leadership more broadly, Ogbeidi (2012) traced the history of political leadership and corruption in Nigeria since 1960 and argued that corruption has been a consistent feature of both military and civilian regimes, with harmful effects on socio-economic development. Eborka (2015) argued that Nigeria's leadership and development problems are rooted in a political culture that promotes particularistic, rather than collective, interests. Abah and Nwoba (2016) found that Nigerian leaders tended to pursue selfish goals rather than integrity, which undermined sustainable development.

These studies suggest that leadership quality, corruption and institutional weakness are central to Nigeria's development challenges. However, few have systematically compared the record of successive administrations in a single state across the whole of the Fourth Republic. This study attempts such an assessment for Imo State.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a historical-documentary design. This design is appropriate for examining the performance of successive governments over a long period, because it allows evidence from different administrations to be compared using records produced at the time.

Area of Study

Imo State is located in South-East Nigeria and is made up of 27 local government areas in three senatorial zones: Owerri, Okigwe and Orlu. It was created in 1976, and its capital is Owerri. The state is largely Igbo-speaking, with an economy based on agriculture, trading, public service employment and, in some LGAs, oil and gas.

Sources of Data

The study relied on secondary data drawn from: (a) official statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics on unemployment and poverty; (b) fiscal and budget reports, including BudgIT's State of States reports; (c) legal documents and court judgments; (d) governance indices, including Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index; (e) peer-reviewed journal articles and books; and (f) verified reports and interviews published in national newspapers and by reputable policy institutions.

Method of Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Evidence was organised under three themes that correspond to the objectives of the study: human capital development, infrastructural development, and factors limiting the impact of leadership. Within each theme, the records of successive administrations were compared, and the evidence was interpreted in light of social contract theory and the transformational-transactional model of leadership. Claims made by governments about their own performance were treated with caution and, where possible, compared with independent evidence.

Findings and Discussion

Leadership Succession in Imo State, 1999–2025

Table 1 summarises the succession of elected governors in Imo State during the Fourth Republic.

Table 1. Elected Governors of Imo State, 1999–2025

Governor	Period in office	Party at election	Mode of exit
Achike Udenwa	May 1999 – May 2007	PDP	Completed two terms
Ikedi Ohakim	May 2007 – May 2011	PPA (later PDP)	Lost re-election
Rochas Okorocha	May 2011 – May 2019	APGA (2011); APC (2015)	Completed two terms
Emeka Ihedioha	May 2019 – January 2020	PDP	Removed by Supreme Court judgement
Hope Uzodimma	January 2020 – date	APC	Re-elected November 2023

Note. PDP = Peoples Democratic Party; PPA = Progressive Peoples Alliance; APGA = All Progressives Grand Alliance; APC = All Progressives Congress.

Two features of this record are relevant to development. First, the state has experienced frequent changes of ruling party, and each change has tended to bring a new set of flagship projects and the neglect or reversal of earlier ones. Second, the abrupt change of government in January 2020, when the Supreme Court set aside Ihedioha's election and declared Uzodimma governor (*Uzodinma v. Ihedioha*, 2020), interrupted policies that had only just begun. Frequent discontinuity of this kind makes long-term planning difficult and is characteristic of transactional, personality-driven leadership.

Political Leadership and Human Capital Development

The first objective was to examine the contribution of political leadership to human capital development in Imo State. The evidence shows that education has received considerable political attention, but that the sustainability and outcomes of the main initiatives have been uneven.

The most prominent initiative was the free education policy announced by the Okorocha administration in 2011, which was intended to cover tuition in state-owned primary and secondary schools and in state tertiary institutions. At a Chatham House event in 2016, Governor Okorocha described the policy as covering primary, secondary and university education in state institutions, and attributed a fall in the state's poverty rate largely to it (Chatham House, 2016). These claims were not independently verified at the time. The policy was popular, but critics raised concerns about how it was funded and about its effect on the quality of schooling, and its scope was later reduced, including by limiting it to indigenes of the state (National Daily, 2016).

The free education policy shows both the potential and the limits of leadership-driven development. On the one hand, it reflects a transformational aim: removing financial barriers to education in a state where education is highly valued. On the other hand, it was introduced and later modified mainly at the discretion of the governor, without a durable legal and financial framework, which made it vulnerable to fiscal pressure and changes of government. From a social contract perspective, the policy fulfilled part of the state's obligation to promote education, but its uncertain funding limited its long-term value.

Labour market outcomes suggest that investment in education has not been matched by investment in job creation. Imo's unemployment rate of 56.64 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2020 was the highest among Nigerian states (The Eagle Online, 2021). Ebiziem et al. (2020) linked unemployment in the state to corruption, weak leadership, neglect of agriculture and poor infrastructure. A highly educated but under-employed population is a sign that human capital is being formed but not fully used, which may encourage emigration and contribute to insecurity.

The poverty data give a more mixed picture. With about 40.7 per cent of its population classified as multidimensionally poor in 2022, Imo fared better than the national average of 63 per cent and ranked among the less poor states (Innonews, 2022; NBS, 2022). This relative position may reflect long-standing community self-help, remittances and private investment in education, as well as public programmes. However, it still means that about two in five residents experience multiple deprivations in health, education, living standards or work. The evidence therefore suggests that political leadership has contributed to aspects of human capital development, especially through education policy, but that its contribution has been limited by weak continuity and by the failure to create enough jobs for the educated population.

Political Leadership and Infrastructural Development

The second objective was to assess the contribution of political leadership to infrastructural development in Imo State. Roads and urban development have been central to the claims of successive administrations, and the record shows visible activity alongside concerns about planning, cost and continuity.

The Okorocha administration (2011–2019) carried out an extensive urban renewal programme in Owerri and other towns, including road construction, the expansion of some city roads and the building of public structures. Supporters credited the programme with changing the face of Owerri, while critics questioned the planning of some projects and the limited public disclosure of their costs and contracts. When Emeka Ihedioha took office in 2019, his administration announced reviews of several projects of the previous government, an example of how infrastructure in the state has often become a site of political contest between administrations.

The Uzodimma administration, under its "3R" agenda of reconstruction, rehabilitation and recovery, has made road infrastructure a central claim. In a statement reported in 2022, the governor said his administration had rehabilitated 99 roads across the state in two years, of which 32 had been fully completed (Pulse Nigeria, 2022). Major projects included the 36-kilometre dualised Owerri–Orlu road and the first phase of the 53-kilometre Owerri–Okigwe road, both federal roads reconstructed by the state

government and presented for commissioning by President Muhammadu Buhari in September 2022 (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 2022). These projects are visible and, if well built and maintained, are likely to improve movement and commerce across the state. However, claims of this kind are made by governments about their own performance, and independent audits of project costs, quality and completion are not publicly available.

The pattern revealed by this evidence is one of considerable infrastructural activity under successive governors, but limited transparency and continuity. In terms of the transformational-transactional model, large and visible infrastructure projects can serve both transformational and transactional purposes. They can improve the lives of citizens, but they can also be used to reward contractors and supporters and to demonstrate performance before elections. Without open contracting and independent monitoring, it is difficult to judge which purpose dominates. The evidence therefore indicates that political leadership has contributed to infrastructural development in Imo State, but that the value of this contribution cannot be fully assessed because of weak transparency.

Factors Limiting the Impact of Political Leadership

The third objective was to identify the factors that have limited the impact of political leadership on socio-economic development in Imo State. The evidence points to five main factors.

Policy Discontinuity

As shown in Table 1, Imo State has experienced frequent changes of ruling party. Each administration has tended to emphasise its own flagship projects and to review or abandon those of its predecessor. This pattern reflects a political culture in which projects are associated with individual leaders rather than with the state, and in which there is no binding long-term development plan to guide successive governments.

Fiscal Weakness and Accumulated Arrears

Imo State, like most Nigerian states, depends heavily on monthly allocations from the Federation Account and has a limited internal revenue base. Fiscal pressure has repeatedly appeared in the form of unpaid entitlements. Shortly after taking office in 2019, Governor Ihedioha stated that the state owed pensioners more than ₦60 billion in arrears (The Guardian, 2019). In its 2025 State of States report, BudgIT ranked Imo among the five weakest states on its fiscal performance index (TheCable, 2025). Arrears of pensions and salaries reduce household spending, weaken morale in the public service and undermine the credibility of government.

Corruption and Weak Accountability

Corruption remains a major constraint on development across Nigeria. In Transparency International's 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria scored 26 out of 100 and ranked 142nd (ThisDay, 2026). Within states, the institutions meant to hold governors to account, such as state Houses of Assembly, auditors-general and local governments, are often weak or dominated by the executive (Madueke, 2026). In Imo State, local governments were run for long periods by appointed transition committees and sole administrators rather than elected councils, which removed an important layer of local accountability (Agiri & Morka, 2022). Where accountability is weak, public resources are more easily diverted, and the link between spending and development outcomes is broken.

Insecurity

Since 2021, Imo State has faced serious insecurity, including attacks on police stations, correctional facilities, electoral offices and local government secretariats, as well as killings and kidnappings in several communities. The "sit-at-home" orders associated with separatist agitation have disrupted markets, schools and transport across the South-East. Insecurity discourages investment, interrupts farming and trading, and diverts public spending from development to security (Ogechi & Ndaage, 2025). It also signals a breakdown in the most basic term of the social contract: the protection of life and property.

Weak Electoral Accountability

Finally, the capacity of citizens to reward or punish leaders for their performance has been limited by disputed elections. The 2019 governorship contest was decided by the Supreme Court, and observers

reported serious irregularities in the 2023 governorship election, including the upload of results from polling units where no voting took place (Sahara Reporters, 2023). When leaders do not depend mainly on the votes of citizens to stay in office, they have weaker incentives to deliver development.

Discussion

The findings indicate that political leadership in Imo State has contributed to human capital and infrastructural development, especially through education policy and road construction, but that its impact has been limited by discontinuity, fiscal weakness, corruption, insecurity and weak electoral accountability. These results are consistent with Obialor and Ozuzu (2026), who attributed Imo's development crisis largely to leadership failure, and with Ekpo et al. (2024), who found that the positive effects of leadership on development in Akwa Ibom State were undermined by corruption. They also agree with Egesi et al. (2025) on the importance of human capital and infrastructure as areas in which leadership can make a difference.

From the perspective of social contract theory, the record suggests that successive governments have fulfilled parts of their obligations to the people of Imo State, but have fallen short in the areas of security, timely payment of workers and pensioners, transparency and job creation. In terms of the transformational-transactional model, the evidence suggests that leadership in the state has combined transformational aims, such as free education and large infrastructure programmes, with transactional practices, such as personalised projects, weak disclosure and the use of appointed local officials. The persistence of transactional practices helps to explain why development initiatives have often failed to outlive the administrations that started them.

These findings support Achebe's (1983) argument that leadership is central to Nigeria's development challenges, but they also suggest that leadership operates within an institutional environment that shapes its choices. Strong institutions of accountability can encourage leaders to pursue long-term development, while weak institutions allow short-term and self-serving behaviour to persist (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Improving development outcomes in Imo State will therefore require both better leaders and stronger institutions.

Lessons from the Imo Experience

Three broader lessons emerge from the Imo experience. The first is that development initiatives tied closely to the personality of a governor rarely survive that governor's exit. The free education policy, urban renewal projects and road programmes of successive administrations were each presented as the signature achievement of a particular leader. When the leader left office, his successor often had little political incentive to continue or maintain them. Development planning that is backed by law, owned by the state civil service and monitored by the legislature is more likely to outlast individual governors.

The second lesson is that visible projects are not the same as development. Roads, buildings and monuments can be seen and photographed, and they are easy to present as evidence of performance before elections. Outcomes such as employment, learning, health and security are harder to display, and they take longer to change. A leadership culture that rewards visible projects over measurable outcomes may produce many structures but limited improvement in the lives of citizens. Independent tracking of outcomes, rather than outputs alone, is therefore needed if citizens are to judge leaders fairly.

The third lesson is that leadership operates within, and is shaped by, the wider federal system. Imo State's heavy dependence on federal allocations, the dominance of the governor over the state legislature and local governments, and the weakness of electoral accountability all reduce the pressure on leaders to perform. Reforms aimed at improving leadership quality in Imo State will therefore have limited effect unless they also strengthen the institutions through which citizens hold leaders to account. This conclusion links the present study to wider debates on the quality of governance and democracy in Nigeria (Madueke, 2026; Ogechi & Ndaage, 2025).

Contribution to Knowledge

This study adds to the literature in two ways. First, it provides a structured comparison of the records of successive administrations in one South-East state across the whole of the Fourth Republic, rather than a general discussion of leadership at the national level. Second, by combining social contract theory with the transformational-transactional model of leadership, it offers an explanation of why leadership initiatives in the state have often produced visible activity without lasting improvement in socio-economic outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of political leadership on socio-economic development in Nigeria, with particular reference to Imo State from 1999 to 2025. Using documentary evidence and drawing on social contract theory and the transformational-transactional model of leadership, it found that successive administrations have contributed to human capital development, particularly through education policy, and to infrastructural development, particularly through road construction and urban renewal. However, the impact of these efforts has been limited by policy discontinuity, fiscal weakness and arrears, corruption and weak accountability, insecurity and disputed elections.

The study concludes that political leadership is an important determinant of socio-economic development in Imo State, but that its positive contributions have been constrained by transactional and personality-driven governance and by weak accountability institutions. Sustainable development in the state will depend on leaders who treat public office as a trust held for the people, and on institutions that require them to do so.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Imo State Government should adopt a long-term development plan, backed by a law of the State House of Assembly, so that major programmes in education, health and infrastructure continue across changes of administration.
2. The state government should practise open budgeting and open contracting by publishing budgets, contract awards, project costs and completion reports, and by allowing independent monitoring by civil society and professional bodies.
3. The State House of Assembly, the Office of the Auditor-General and anti-corruption agencies should be strengthened to ensure that public funds are audited and that officials found guilty of corruption are prosecuted in accordance with the law.
4. The state government should give priority to clearing pension and salary arrears and to improving internal revenue generation, so that the state is less dependent on federal allocations and borrowing.
5. Job creation should be placed at the centre of development policy, through support for agriculture, small and medium enterprises, technical and vocational training, and partnerships with the private sector.
6. Federal and state governments should address insecurity through community-based policing, dialogue with aggrieved groups and respect for human rights, so that citizens can work, trade and participate in public life safely.
7. Local government councils should be democratically elected and allowed to manage their resources, in line with the Supreme Court judgement of 11 July 2024, so that development programmes are closer to the people and more accountable to them.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

The study relied on secondary data, and detailed state-level statistics on education, health and infrastructure in Imo State are limited and not always up to date. Some of the evidence on infrastructure comes from statements by governments about their own performance, which could not be independently verified. Future studies should collect primary data through surveys of residents and interviews with public officials, civil society and community leaders, and should make use of project-level data on costs and completion. Comparative studies of states in the South-East would also help to show whether the patterns identified here are specific to Imo State or common across the region.

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