

## The Hits and Misses of the Russia-Africa Tie: A Comparative Analysis of Socio-Economic Participation

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**Abstract.** In the past ten years, under Putin’s leadership, Russia has made a comeback to Africa, the second-largest and most populous continent in the world. To fulfil its goal of becoming a worldwide powerhouse, Russia has altered its perspective on Africa. Russia is now more prosperous and stable than it was in the 1990s. The assessment and evaluation of many body of literature led to the development of the research technique. The paper’s main objective was to examine how Russia’s foreign policy toward African countries changed after the turn of the millennium and helped to advance its quick actions. The article also fills a gap in the literature on Russian foreign policy toward African governments after 2000. It assesses the socioeconomic interactions between the two nations’ strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and dangers. It also shows that Russia’s efforts in Africa have had a greater impact on the dysfunctional incapacity of African nations to fit in with normative settings. The text concludes by urging African nations to unite and embrace African socialism.

**Keywords:** Africa-Russia, Foreign Policy, Natural Resources, Russia-Nigeria, Comparative Politics.

### INTRODUCTION

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Russia found it difficult to scramble for African countries to colonize. However, African countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Mozambique, Angola, Egypt, and Libya took solace in the Soviet Union’s anti-imperialistic ideology. In the mid-19th century, the then Soviet Union supported African anti-colonial movements as part of its ideology by providing military aid and advisors to ailing/war countries after World War II. Russia increased its concentration on Ethiopia due to Western penetration into Africa by providing arms, military advisers, and medical aid. Consequently, the relationship between Russia and Ethiopia during the Italian-Ethiopian war positively impacted the two ‘countries’ economies. For Ethiopian students, Russia has also offered technical assistance in gold mining operations, geological surveys, and career acquisition. After the 1917 revolutionary turmoil, the skills mentioned above gave the Ethiopians an edge over other African countries to serve as consultants to the Government of Ethiopia [13]. In the 1980s, the economy of Africa was under strain, and relations with Western countries jeopardized the Soviet interest in Africa. Like

other world superpowers, Russia has the same interest and mindset to influence Africa and exploit its enormous economic potential with untapped natural resources.

In the 21st century, several leaders, officials, and foreign ministers visited many African countries, such as Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Kenya [6]. In 2006, Russia hosted the G8 Summit; after the Summit, Putin persistently showed interest in Africa and offered solutions to Africa’s energy problems to enhance the continent’s development. In 2007, President Vladimir Putin was the first Russian leader to visit Sub-Saharan Africa and he gestured Russia’s intention to boost socio-economic ties with the Africans. In 2015, President Vladimir Putin posited, “The Russian Federation is developing political, trade and economic, and military-technical cooperation, and alliances in terms of security, humanitarian, and educational friendship with Latin America and African states.” Societal evolution brought a new approach to handling contentious African issues to propel positive change and show Russia’s rising power internationally after Ukraine and the Syrian War. The struggles against ISIS in Syria have given Moscow credence to being a superpower in countering terrorism in Africa. This status has strengthened the country’s quest

to indirectly or explicitly render Russian military and economic aid to the Somalian and Malian governments to ensure a positive atmosphere for regional security [14].

Aside from the United States, Russia is the second-largest producer and exporter of armories globally [16]. Since the global financial crisis, several sanctions and other international policies have improved Russian economic activities. Taking into account the arms sales deal, this is a panacea for Russia to actively rebuild economic, political, and military relationships across Africa. To gain more ground in Africa, the ideology of armory sales has given Moscow business concessions in several African countries such as Sudan and Eritrea. Currently, the Russia-Africa policy is focused on bilateral trade and economic and political partnership and is interested in humanitarian services in education and military advice and security aid (Giles, 2013).

## SWOT ANALYSIS EVALUATION OF RUSSIAN-AFRICA

### Economic Activities

Russia and African countries thrived in economic ties. The diversification of geographical distribution in the range of goods traded in terms of rail material, fertilizer, pipes, and high technology equipment was adopted by both economies to boost bilateral trade relationships and economic activities. The tie is upheld by some African countries such as Senegal, Eswatini, Gabon, Cameroon, and investment agencies; it also has representatives in Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana [8]. In 2019, the Joint declaration adopted at the First-African Summit in Sochi supported the increase in Russian-African trade volume. The Secretariat of the Russia-Africa partnership forum in 2020 created an association of Economic Cooperation with African States (AECAS) by the President of the Russian Federation, and this unites Russian companies and financial institutions with trade activities in the African market.

Russian mining companies across Africa signed deals with twenty African countries to extract minerals such as diamond in Angola; platinum in Zimbabwe; Aluminum in Guinea; Central African Republic gold, diamond, and uranium; and the Democratic Republic of Congo diamond, copper, cobalt, and coltan. It also signed an oil deal with African countries like Algeria, Egypt, Mozambique, and Nigeria. Russian parastatals such as Rosneft and Lukoil accepted the negotiation deal because these resources are difficult to access and are located under deep water or in Arctic regions. Such a partnership with Russia brings capital and technical know-how to tap into the aforementioned natural endowments. These agreements' details made it confidential and difficult to evaluate the actual value or the trade benefits to African treasuries.

Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal, and Zambia are among the top African nations that purchase Russian weapons, accounting for the majority of the continent's total arms market (49%), which is dominated by Russia (Fleurant et al., 2019). In order to confront various types of violence and internal and regional conflicts, African countries are increasingly willing to acquire more advanced weapons and military equipment, such as fighter planes, helicopters, tanks, and air defence systems (Waruru, 2019). Russian weapons are reasonably priced, simple to maintain, dependable, and enduring. It is extremely unwise for Russia to use its riches as leverage in an "arms-for-resources" agreement. The \$20 billion in commerce between Russia and Africa is wildly unbalanced when it comes to arming African nations.

The Rosatom project injected new energy and pragmatism into the Africa-Russia partnership tie. On the continent, Russia has also signed a number of nuclear power agreements; in 2020, Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation did not just use fossil fuels. It is documented that only South Africa has an operational nuclear power plant. However, several African countries considered nuclear energy a more cost-effective way to meet growing energy demand. Rosatom, a Russian-owned Industrial player, offered a \$25 billion loan to start building Egypt's first nuclear power plant, the facilities for which would cost an additional \$60 billion. An agreement to construct two more in Nigeria has also been reached. Nonetheless, Russia proposes negotiations with more than seventeen African countries with pilot nuclear energy plant projects in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan, and Zambia (Sukhankin, 2019).

### Education

During the Soviet era, the soft-power effort supported 50,000 Africans to gain tertiary education in their universities from 1960 to 1991. It also gave 200,000 scholars from other African countries various training to aid the continent's development. In the quest for Russia to assist the education of Africans, more than 8,000 African students gained full scholarships to study diverse courses in Russian high schools [5, para.5]. For instance, its graduates include Thabo Mbeki, past president of South Africa; Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, former president of Angola; and Bharrat Jagdeo, ex-president of Guyana, to mention but a few.

In the 21st century, over 20,000 students were enrolled in most Russian universities and cooperating with various Russia-Africa university education. For African military personnel, it provides a professional military education program that annually trains 500 African service members. The limited number of courses in their career provides Russia a platform to impact meaningfully on civil-military training and technics in Africa, not nuclear engineering. Russia maintains a strong relationship with Africa and encourages a bilateral tie in education with

the continent. Statistics have shown that annually about 15,000 Africans study at Russian universities, mainly from Nigeria, Angola, Morocco, Namibia, and Tunisia [3].

### Humanitarian Aid

One of the crucial aspects of assistance to Africa was reducing the debt burden for countries such as Ethiopia in the region that were heavily indebted to Soviet countries. Russia provided humanitarian aid to countries like Ethiopia, Mali, and Somalia in exchange for a debt waiver of \$20 billion in Soviet-era debt [9]. These aids have positively affected the relationships between Russia and the countries of the region, gaining people's hearts and minds. Putin announced debt forgiveness and a tripling of commerce with Africa in the next five years at the Russia-Africa Summit.

Furthermore, Russian foreign policy is preoccupied with several critical concerns, including the conflict in Syria, Ukraine, and relations with the United States, Europe, and China. The increasing involvement of the influential actors of the world politically and economically on the African continent is more of a materialist tendency. The relationships between developed and developing countries have never been balanced [5]. Despite the renewed interest that Russia and Africa need, there are traces of imperialistic ideology, especially in arms sales, natural/minerals exploration, and nuclear energy cooperation.

### Disinformation Campaigns to Weaken Democracy

Russia's interest in Africa has intensified as a result of its annexation of Crimea and forays into eastern Ukraine. The invasion provided a platform for multilateral agreements between countries that uphold rules-based norms and promote liberal democracy. This foreign policy enhanced Putin's vision that supports the post-liberal International World Order [4]. Russia has shown a divergent interest in Africa at the political level because it is inclined democratically. Therefore, it has employed a longer-term strategy of meddling in Western pro-democracy and non-support of human rights and election interference in African countries to dislodge the idea of adopting universal suffrage to select leaders. It accomplished this by contesting democratic norms and the tenets of an international order based on rules. It expressed worry over Russian backing for the dictatorial regime's opposition to democracy. The Russians fostered mistrust of democracy and, from a political perspective, saw it as a more efficient, just, open, and inclusive form of government. This worldview, which holds all political systems to be morally and politically equal, benefits from the elite-focused, transactional, and uncontrolled model of Moscow.

Thrilled supporters of the military coup descended on Bamako's streets during the coup in Mali in 2020 to celebrate their temporary win over the government. Many

Malian celebrators raised Russian flags and portraits of Vladimir Putin, paying tribute to Putin for Malian-Russian collaboration and support. The act showed Mali's robust joint, cultural, and historical ties. After the Mali incident, Russia sponsored disinformation campaigns in Africa; these began in 2018 with an intense effort to influence the presidential election in Madagascar. After signing a security cooperation agreement with Russia, it was achieved through social media in the Central African Republic (CAR), thereby distorting democracy in Africa.

The disinformation campaign in Africa continued in Libya in 2019 to attract both domestic and international attention to viewers and followers to support the message of anti-western democracy in Africa [1]. On Libyan social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, to name a few, there was a lot of criticism of the West, the United Nations, and UN ideas. Russia has started "franchising" its misinformation operations, which include fostering pro-Russian and anti-Western sentiment in African nations. The disinformation tactics, meanwhile, are placing further stress on already shaky political institutions in other African nations.

### Conservative Actions

Vladimir Putin used his soft power during the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit by promising millions of COVID-19 vaccinations to African nations to help immunize African populations. This high-profile outreach and conventional engagements kept the African continent on track, considering Africa's most incredible geopolitical long- and short-term advantages and gains. Apart from its participation in a number of traditional security, economic, and cultural projects throughout Africa, all these outreach and aids are exchanged for votes at the United Nations. Notably, the support for African countries constitutes the largest voting bloc in the United Nations.

## RUSSIA AND NIGERIA

### Arms and Security Acquisitions

From 2000, Russia became the largest arms supplier to Africa, accounting for 35% of all arms exports to the region. Russia has signed over 20 bilateral military agreements with African states to sell arms and security services to the area. African leaders take to the Russian armory because it is relatively affordable, easy to handle, has low maintenance costs, and delivery-in-time tenets. For instance, when the United States was lackadaisical in selling arms to Nigeria to fight Boko Haram in 2014, Nigeria turned to Russia because of human rights abuses by Nigerian soldiers. Nigeria placed an order for 12 Mi-35 helicopter gunships from Russia.

## Oil Sector

The oil boom in Nigeria since 1957 has relatively displaced agriculture, which was the foremost source of the nation's revenue. In 2019, Russia-Nigeria had a bilateral trade tie to improve the efficiency of the Nigeria oil sector. Both governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding that seals the agreement to lift crude from the Nigerian oil company offshores to produce the finest products from the crude (Vanguard, 2019). The deal was to revitalize the epileptic oil refineries through a collaborative relationship between the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and Russian-based companies "Lukoil and Gazprom" to promote collaboration and rehabilitation between the two countries across the oil and gas value chain. The two countries' partnership covers the oil and gas industry's upstream, midstream, downstream, and service sectors. The aim of these ties foresees the movement of the crude in deep offshore exploration to enhance the refining of production products. The synergy helped make petroleum products readily available since the various refineries were worn and malfunctioning.

The inefficiency in the technology of the Nigerian nation to manage the refineries and relatively lapses on the side of the leaders over time led to the entire deplorable state of these facilities. It is very imperative to mention that after the United States and Europe opted out of the purchase of Nigeria's crude, between 2015 and 2020, India was one of the largest buyers and consumers of her crude; spending about N2 trillion per annum ranked India first among the top five buyers of Nigerian crude (NBS, 2021). Russia's supply of its petroleum product at a cheaper rate, cum accepted payment in Indian rupees against the dollar, made the Indian government call off her agreement with Nigeria and opt for Russian oil and gas. The economic implication of Indians opting out of the deal due to Russia's decision to sell more oil to Indians at a discounted official Brent crude oil price of \$107 per barrel in 2022 led to a backdrop in Nigeria's oil earnings (Financial Times, 2022).

The saying of what "affects one country affects the other" in a nutshell, "no nation is an island." Nigeria's dependence on foreign countries such as Russia for purifying crude can throw a developing nation out of balance and has a triple effect on economic development; the multiplier effect on the government, exporters, and consumers of these products faces a hard-hitting situation. The Russia-Ukraine crisis that commenced on February 24, 2022, has thrown the Nigerian nation into a limited supply of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), as vessels supplying the product face delays in leaving the warring zones as scheduled. This situation has negatively impacted the NNPC's ability to meet its crude oil supply obligations to the nation and the downstream sector.

Furthermore, shipowners avoid allocating vessels to receive, transport crude, and bring back refined products

to and from Russia due to hits by air fighters on sailing ships. Also, the refusal to offer vessels to sail across the Black and Mediterranean Seas attracts huge premiums from the insurers to move the crude and refined products. The escalating tension in the war zones led to a significant increase in the freight rate; the freight rate on tanker vessels rose from \$10,000 to \$30,000 per day (Financial Times, 2022). Sequel to Russia's conduct in selling her crude, it is pretty obvious it is scrambling for a broader market to maximize her revenue. Concerning the tie between the Russian and Nigerian governments to refine her crude has no balance of trade; instead, it's more of Russian interest.

## Education

The Second Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, attended by 40 African leaders, encouraged Nigeria to build a stronger tie with Russia to expand human capital development. The Nigerian government admitted that the relationship (link) should go beyond trade and business to address security challenges like counter-terrorism, poverty eradication, human trafficking, illicit financial flow, climatic change, and migration. In a nutshell, aside from nation-building, it is imperative to establish a humane and inclusive affiliation. In 2020, there was a Bilateral Education Agreement via the Federal Scholarships Board to offer a scholarship, fully funded to fewer more than 78 students to take up courses in different areas of specialization such as general medicine, aeronautic engineering, chemical technology, nuclear physics, and technology, mechatronics and robotic, and nanotechnology and microsystem engineering (News Agency of Nigeria, 2021).

The idea of education and technological advancement is one both countries craved to revitalize and add value to the educational sector and explore new ideas that support technical advancement and innovation. The bilateral agreement holistically expanded human capital development and enhanced research and development in Nigeria. However, looking at the slim opportunities for tertiary education allocated to many African countries, Nigeria benefits from the Russia-Nigeria full scholarship, representing a steady growth of Nigerian recipients in the undergraduate and postgraduate scholarship awards. So far, more than 200 Nigerian university students have benefited from the Bilateral Education Programme [7].

## Rosatomi Nigeria

The "Rosatom Nigeria" project involved adopting nuclear power to revitalize and expand the power sector. It intends to use the small and modular reactors to fix off-grid power challenges and restore Nigeria's electricity power chain. It aims at using science and technology to enhance socio-economic development in Nigeria in terms of building and infrastructure maintenance. Furthermore, the Russian government collaborated with Nigeria via the project to

initiate an effective action plan to enhance an environmentally friendly society to contain pollution that affects the ecosystem.

### Inferences of Russian Activities in Africa

Africa's weak legal and regulatory policies, such as Wagner Disinformation and elite base diplomacy influence have expanded Russian activities in Africa. Lack of unity among African leaders, long-term stay in office, and ill-administration oppression of the masses have triggered a high level of protest and violence in the form of terrorism, insurgency, and multiple coups to overthrow the existing government. In this regard, Russia displayed a reputational concern with its intervention. The fact remains that Russian meddling in the conflict in Africa is more profit-seeking through the sale of arms than security advice or services. Nigeria is the 11th largest oil producer globally and the largest producer in Africa and produces high-value, light crude oil due to its low sulphur content (NNPC, 2000).

From 2018 to date, war-torn African countries like Mali and Mozambique, to mention but a few, have experienced political instability and slowed economic growth and development. Therefore, the bilateral agreement on the inflow of crude and outflow of refined products across the Mediterranean /Black Sea cannot be balanced. It is one of the ways to have a "slice of cake" from Nigeria's resource endowment. Russia secured seaports to access the Black Sea to expand its capacity to be a disruptive force along the coast of Africa for naval and maritime activities. The Russian ideology of anti-democracy is a weapon to destabilize the Western ideas on democracy and human rights laws on the African continent. Therefore, the Russian government advocates authoritarianism over democracy. This has become Russia's basis of argument; it posits that "democratic norms and values" such as the rule of law, fighting corruption, enhancing sustainable economic growth, and living standards of her citizens. All of these have direct implications for African society and development.

The Russians aimed at reversing democratic governance, norms to authoritarian leadership where the principle of blind submission to authority, rejection of plurality as opposed to the individual of freedom of thought, separation of powers, democratic opinions, and action rules. It supports disinformation campaigns by meddling in the electoral processes, disrupting and sabotaging the tenets of democracy, bolstering unlawful and dishonest leaders, and continues violence in war-torn nations. The resultant impact of the violation of the principles of good governance on fragile countries is long-term political, economic, and developmental lapses.

Russia is the key player in global trade and had an added advantage. It is the 14th largest global economy exporting oil, coal, wheat, and sunflower seeds. The Sanctions

Acts have detrimental effects on international trades; the imposed sanctions increase Russia's penalties for destabilizing economic and political activities in Africa. These sanctions are not punishments or a deterrent against future aggression but rather an intervention in active conflicts. The Global Fragility Act (GFA) was passed in 2019 by the U.S government to improve the global security and reduce the threats of conflict spillover by creating a way to wake the fragile states to provide odds. However, Russia has used Syria to establish a base in the middle east and fight a proxy war with the United States to gain diplomatic and economic recognition. The (GFA) provided countries faced violent protest, governance failure, exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic, and democratic recession. In the fragile/weak states, the political elites created weakness, divided society, and abetted corruption, low productivity, and thuggery.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Realist theory emphasizes that 'states' are the most critical actors in global politics. It pursues power to secure states' interests. It is of the view that states and governments should exercise supreme or sovereign authority over a defined territory (Morgenthau, 1978). The countries at the core control the activities of the countries at the periphery for their interest using the expert power. For realists, pursuing leadership power and political interest are separate from the economic, moral, and any spheres of human endeavors. However, power consideration must come first; action taken in the name of economic wealth must be evaluated on how they contribute to or detract from national interest. Realists, for example, may be concerned about their state's economic ties with other countries regarding trade agreements and direct investments, making them dependent on them.

The ideologies of moral principles and human rights policies are not accepted by realists as the power of dependent states might even be threatened. This proved that conflict and coercion to achieve its aim remain dominant in this perspective. Furthermore, since economic analysis hardly explains why the protectionist actions were implemented in the first place and also exhibits strong dependencies between the actors, these policy reforms will continue to yield counterproductive results [10].

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since 2006, Russia has sought to build its presence and role in Africa. The age of imperialism and scramble for Africa significantly impacted Africa's continent and left a considerable positive and negative legacy concerning contemporary society. Russia-Africa tie made an impact in terms of project/infrastructural development and humanitarian aid to African countries. These projects and aid

were given in return for natural resources from Africa. The scholarship awards across different African regions benefited many who subjugated Africans to be loyal to the Russians and built a sphere of influence on the continent by promoting foreign policies against the United States and European Union. The terms of trade were very imbalanced between Africans and Russians. The economic policies favored the Russians and expressed much superiority against the Africans.

Also, Western education is a tool that changed Africa's social and economic values regarding developmental processes. It instilled confidence and appropriate knowledge to improve the growth of African society to reject poverty, diseases, and ignorance in all sectors of the economy. In this context, the influencers use the referent and expert powers to control and manipulate the activities of the Africans. These trigger leadership heights because of the high level of expertise, capabilities, and abilities to transfer knowledge, skills, and information to the beneficiaries for a reasonable duration and purpose. The Actors (Russians) attracted Africans by rendering humanitarian and developmental aid to them to build loyalty. The Russians refused to share acquired knowledge, skill, and experiences to avoid self-defection or become experts.

Occasionally holders of their type of powers can be rigid, dogmatic, and even selfish. The Russians primarily focused on the "gains" that accompany their exploits. Aside from the positive values of the Russian scholarship aid, western education colonizes the mind of the Africans to adopt western ideologies and culture, thereby abandoning the African culture and tradition. There is a need to go back to the drawing board and promote African education as much as western knowledge plays out. African societies face economic impact from Russian activities. The actor focused on and initiated policies and technologies that support extracting resources such as gold, diamond, cobalt, platinum, magnesium, and crude, to mention a few, from Africa [6].

The disinformation campaign aims to disrupt Africa's internal political and social systems to thwart U.S policies and objectives. Where democratic values, be it hate speech or voters' manipulations, are poorly upheld by the state. The idea mostly created vote support for Russia in the United Union Congress. Notably, in 2019, countries contributed 30 out of the 79 votes in support of Russia in the United Nations Congress (Kremlin Document, 2019); this idea is mainly for political gains. To show concern for fragile states, diplomatic, economic, and security deals have been stuck in several countries like Angola, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Mozambique to show concern for fragile states. This deal involves the contribution of many to infrastructural investment, political cooperation, counter-insurgency training, weapon exchange, and campaign and policy advice. It is also tailored to meet the desires of the local elite and, most notably, a top-down interest.

The mercenaries' support activity financed by Russia to deal with Libya, Syria, and eastern Ukraine conflicts was for personal interest. The UN investigators accused the Wagner group of abetting human abuses in fragile countries. The operations of the Wagner mercenaries in Mali were in line to push disinformation about France's counter-terrorism operation in the country. The Kremlin's effectiveness in seeding its preferred vaccine narratives among African audiences underscores its concerted effort to undermine them. It discredits western power by pushing or tapping anti-western sentiments across Africa. All of the above political and economic aids to the continent ball down to the personal interest of the Russians.

Furthermore, the social-economic ideas introduced by the Russians were more of capitalism. Against all odds, propagating excessive individualism and exploitative activities in vulnerable countries intends to divide society into hostile groups that generally promote inequality via strict foreign policies, creating competitiveness instead of encouraging cooperation and trade balance between countries. The divided society has propelled disunity in most African nations; these gaps have given the Russian the edge to employ diverse manipulative tendencies to explore gains from the African continent. Therefore, the paper advocates much for unity among Africans to achieve a common goal to enhance the Africanization of the continent. African countries should strive for liberation. An independent society is self-reliant and has freedom from other nations' economic and cultural dependence.

Additionally, contemporary African countries are characterized by corruption, exploitative nature, selfishness, and uneven distribution of resources within the nation; these ill behaviors are attributed to Africans facing retard development and growth on the continent. There is a need for the discipline of minds and selves of African leaders to promote sanity in the system. Also, the idea of African socialism should be promoted. It entails sharing African resources in an African way distinct from classical socialism.

## DISCLOSURE

The author reported no conflicts of interest for this work.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author made substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; took part in drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; agreed to submit it to the current journal; and gave final approval of the version to be published.

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