

"Me-first" governance

Widening of social gaps

Scenario 1
Fire on the Mountain

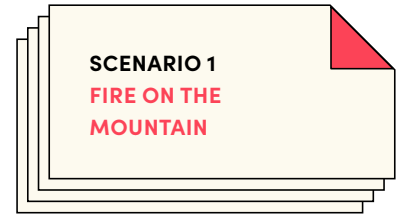


Widespread poverty



Lack of technological development

Imagine Futures: Four Scenarios For Nigeria
is a section from the main report **Imagine Nigeria**

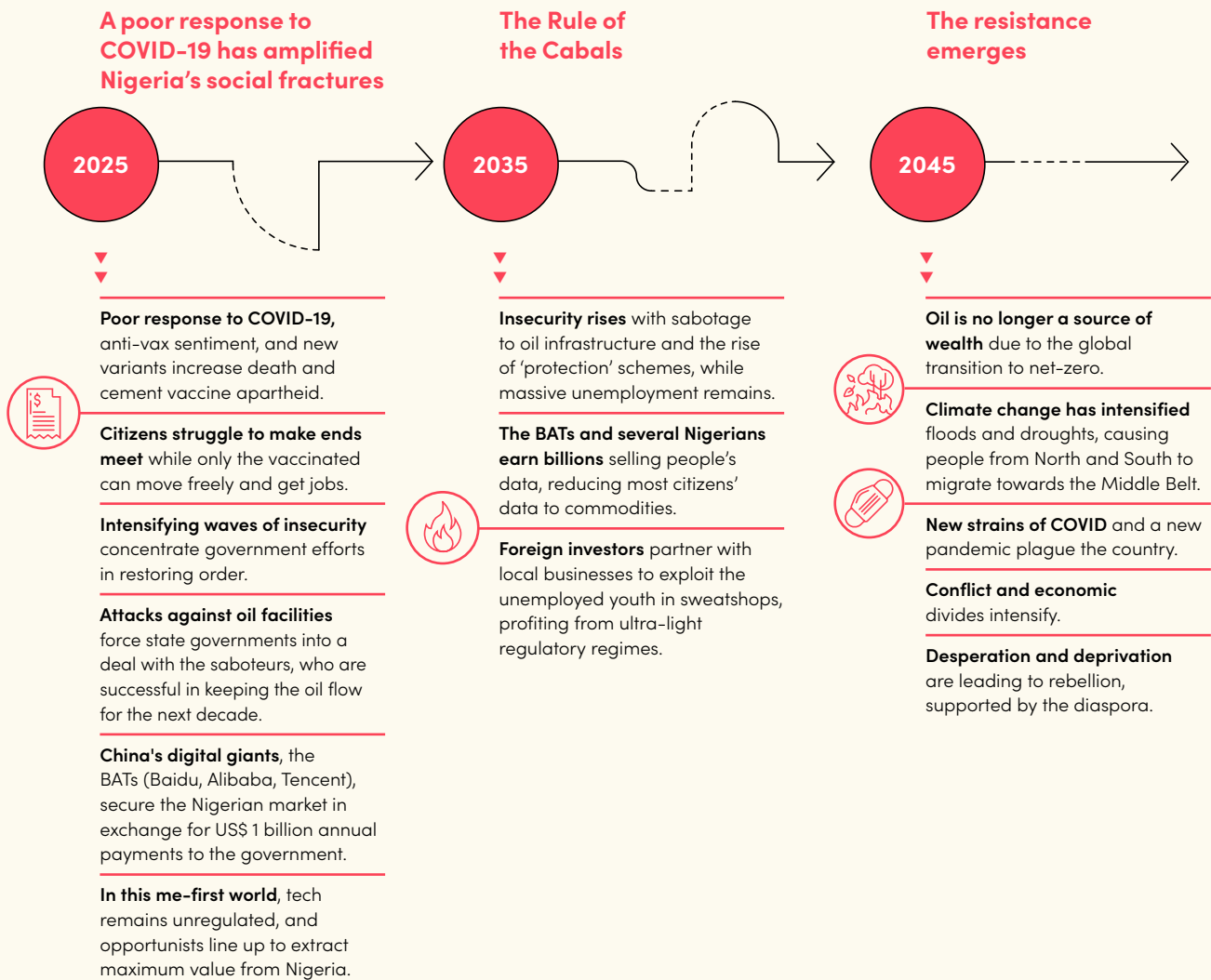


→ **This scenario explores a “me-first” governance approach in a closed technology environment.**

It is named after the Nigerian expression “Fire on the mountain, but no one is running,” which denotes an extreme emergency with no apparent attempt to prevent or contain it.

Timeline

Fire on the Mountain



2025

A poor response to COVID-19 has amplified Nigeria's social fractures

It is 2025 and while the COVID-19 pandemic and its many variants remain a huge concern, two related priorities have floated to the top of Nigeria's discourse.

For the authorities, intensifying waves of insecurity have concentrated minds on suppressing insurgencies and restoring a semblance of order.

For the majority of ordinary citizens, making ends meet is the only priority.

The impacts of on and off lockdowns have been severe and many think it is better to risk a small chance of dying from COVID or the new variants than the certainty of starvation.

Government's overall response to the initial pandemic and the later waves suffers from a lack of attention, imagination, seriousness, and resources. The huge gap between rhetoric and reality has cemented vaccine apartheid and endless pandemics.

Vaccines arrived a little late and inadequate in number for the large and growing population. However, the uptake by the people was quite low, providing space needed for the emergence of new variants of the COVID pandemic over time. As a public relations move, the vaccines were administered first to political leaders and health workers 'in order to raise awareness.' But they did not trickle down much due to trust issues and a sizable share of the population simply did not accept to be vaccinated.

Still in 2025, Nigeria's public health system cannot handle the wide vaccine deployment nor convince a sizable portion of the population to be vaccinated. Distribution is chaotic and the bad state of the country's roads, electricity and health system makes it a challenge to get a handle of growing health pandemics. The emergence of vaccine resistant as well as more deadly and infectious variants compounded the challenges.

With the gaps and increasing severity, opportunists emerge with ineffective vaccines and in some cases outright fake vaccines. Information trickling out was that those who received ineffective vaccines were re-infected, as the virus mutates. Old suspicions about polio inoculations continue to fuel anti-vax sentiment and many citizens continue to avoid being vaccinated. Stories about the vaccines being a means by the "West" to control Nigeria have added fuel to the fire. The fact that there are 'fake' vaccines in circulation only compounded the challenges. With the epidemic largely handled in the West, interest and investment in producing vaccines wane. The focus shifted to controlling entry.

Nigerians are divided between those very few who have received a proper vaccine and carry a Digital Vaccination Passport (DVP) on a mobile device to prove it¹, meaning they can move freely both within and outside the country, and everyone else who has received a questionable jab or none at all. Getting a job, already difficult, has become almost impossible without the DVP and moving between states faces serious restrictions (let alone international travel).

The yawning gap between rich and poor, urban and rural, healthy and sick, secures wealth and power for a few, but everyone else – the pandemic underclass – is permanently locked out of all but the most basic (and often back-breaking) opportunities.

Faced with these crises, Nigeria's leaders are overwhelmed. Their paramount objective is to maintain the Nigerian 'ship of state', at least in form, even if not in function. They are desperately open to suggestions, interventions, proposals and solutions – from any corner.

The election of 2023 took place as a powerfully virulent strain took hold, expanding infections and increasing deaths. Within three weeks of the elections, one of the crude oil storage facilities in Port Harcourt came under rocket fire. The degree of deadly insecurity in the South went up a significant notch and newly elected state governors were desperate to secure their oil assets. They knew

that the window of opportunity to make money from oil was closing. Within the next three decades, the world would accelerate its energy transition away from hydrocarbons.

They instructed their security chiefs to identify the Big Men behind the rocket attacks. But rather than arresting the saboteurs, the governors proposed a deal. They handed over the keys to the oil infrastructure in exchange for a share of the revenues from sales. Without the resources for a protracted fight to secure the oil installations, they just wanted peace and the chance to sell as much crude oil as fast as possible.

In this me-first world, where tech remains unregulated, opportunists – known as the Cabals – line up to capture and extract maximum value from this flailing giant of a nation.

2035

The Rule of the Cabals

Despite the sporadic sabotage, the deal with the new Oil Barons has guaranteed that over the last decade (2025–2035) the oil has flowed uninterrupted, exported to other countries around the world which have been slower at achieving their energy transition.

The new generation of Oil Barons have amassed tremendous wealth, a fraction of which is used to create job opportunities in the protection business for the pandemic-ravaged young men.

While cruder forms of sabotage against the oil infrastructure have continued sporadically, carried out by bands of desperate young men who had no other way of earning a living, a classic protection racket has also emerged for a disciplined militia. Instead of attacking the assets, a few local ‘big men’ began to organise militia to offer “protection” services.

The Digital Dons

Sensing a series of major, long term opportunities, China’s digital giants, the BATs (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent), swooped in just after the 2023 elections, acutely aware of the government’s desperate need to be seen to be managing both the pandemic and deepening insecurity. They wanted to secure the attractive Nigerian market against western competitors, offering everything from digital entertainment platforms to biometric verification services.

So they approached the new government with two proposals. First, to roll out a Digital Vaccination Passport (DVP) accepted by major airlines, immigration and health authorities around the world. Second, to deploy a domestic Digital Health Pass (DHP) containing detailed information on an individual’s health status. Now, in 2035, while the DVP confers freedom for those who have it, the DHP can be used to effectively control people.

In exchange for deploying these platforms and securing exclusive rights to all of the data they collect, the BATs pay an annual concession payment of \$1 billion. Given the light regulations on privacy, the BATs have extracted maximum value from Nigerians’ personal health data. They hit the jackpot by selling the data containing biological and behavioural insights to the pharmaceutical industry seeking to test new vaccines and therapies. As a veritable petri dish of the virus, Nigeria was a perfect laboratory. In exchange for a series of upfront payments to continue funding election campaigns, federal and state governments have authorized the testing of vaccines and therapies on ordinary Nigerians. The modest stipend offered for participating in these clinical studies has attracted massive crowds.

The BATs also use the data to offer health-profiling services – anyone seeking to hire a worker can receive a full digital health profile of the prospective candidate. Over the last 10 years, the vast majority of Nigerians have been reduced to a stream of health and related data; disembodied and turned into commodities. Having developed a valuable goldmine of health, physiological and behavioural data for millions of Nigerians, a local subsidiary of a BAT has just launched a hugely successful initial public offering on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. Several new Nigerian

digital billionaires were created overnight on the backs of their compatriots' intimate personal data.

The Sweatshop Kingpins

On top of everything else, the country still faces a massive unemployment problem. While the vaccinated well-off continue to enjoy job opportunities, the vast majority are excluded from formal economic activity.

Capitalising on this massive pool of schooled, but unemployed youth, a group of foreign investors from Asia has teamed up with local business leaders to create special manufacturing zones, promising to create hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs, and to turn Nigeria into the factory to the world, making both low-tech garments and hi-tech digital gadgets.

They call themselves “the Conglomerate” and their proposition is irresistible for a government seriously short of both cash and credibility.

The Conglomerate negotiated a 20-year concession with the government to develop a series of factory enclaves. They have now developed, at their own cost, the physical infrastructure to support a huge build out of manufacturing facilities – roads, electricity, water treatment, and runways large enough to handle large cargo planes. They developed these factory enclaves in the most deprived and pandemic-prone locations of Nigeria. In exchange, government provides land and an ultra-light regulatory regime, effectively exempting all factory enclave areas from labour and environmental standards.

The country is desperate for work.

And the Conglomerate's Sweatshop Kingpins provide it. During the building of the factory enclaves many hundreds of thousands of manual labour jobs were created, and it has taken five years to complete the infrastructure. Today the factories are humming, making electronic devices for the huge Asian market, personal protective equipment for the African market now struggling with new epidemics, and garments for the American and European market which take advantage of the relatively short supply chains from Nigeria to their online retail warehouses.

Working with the BATs, the Conglomerate uses digital health and ID platforms to identify and vet the factory workers they need. Workers are hired on zero-hour contracts which means they are paid only for those hours they spend on the factory floor. Should they fall sick or are absent for any reason, they are easily replaced at a moment's notice. There are jobs, but no job security, and no job satisfaction. Those who get hired are grateful for the work, however uncertain the terms. It is better than scratching out a living within their pandemic prone locations. The Conglomerate is enriching itself on the back of a large pool of desperate Nigerians.

2045 The resistance emerges

It is 2045 and over the last 10 years the economics of the oil industry have changed radically as the energy transition towards renewables accelerates. Oil prices have fallen permanently. The oil barons have abandoned the infrastructure they have been milking during the previous decades, unwilling to invest in maintaining assets which are no longer generating income. Nowadays there is no oil industry to speak of in the country, only a large wasteland of abandoned infrastructure.

Climate variability has intensified floods and droughts. The south gets too much rain. Lagos, Port Harcourt and other densely populated coastal areas are daily losing more land to the sea as polar ice caps continue to melt.²

Migrants are moving from Lagos and the South West northwards to the Middle Belt, bringing with them their regional strains of COVID, further accelerating mutations.

Nigeria's North is even more vulnerable to climate change, facing increasing aridity, more frequent multi-year droughts, and accelerating desertification. Herding and farming are less viable. So migration from the North to the Middle Belt has also intensified. Competition for resources (land, water, and opportunities) has been worsened by the identity dynamics of ethnicity and faith³.

Meanwhile, another pandemic (which some believe is related to COVID) surges in waves of varying severity, eroding confidence and sapping the energy of a large swathe of Nigerians. With limited movement, urban slums expand, causing greater economic divides.

- Stopping the plunder of their country
- Taking back their land and dignity
- Making Nigeria Proud Again

Their appeal for self-determination cuts across location, ethnicity and religion. The nascent movement is overwhelmingly young, and it is attracting growing material, digital and global communications support from Nigerians in the diaspora.

The Patriots and Refugees have begun to target the factory enclaves and their supply chains and the network infrastructure running the digital data systems. Careful not to cause harm to people, their dedication to revolution is attractive and their numbers are growing.

How will it end? Will the resistance gather momentum and easily take over power? Will it be able to disrupt the systems of exploitation that have rendered Nigerians mere commodities? Or will the powerful fight back, leading to an all-out war causing death and destruction on a scale unimaginable?

Without economic opportunities, the urban slums have grown to become a veritable problem area.

Resistance

Desperation and deprivation are leading to rebellion. A group styling itself Nigerian Patriots has emerged from the fringes of the declining oil sector in the South, and there are the Climate Refugees in the Middle Belt – many of whom have not known a permanent home for almost twenty years.

Angry at being abandoned by local, state and federal governments, exhausted by the unrelenting pandemics and tired of being exploited by politicians, Oil Barons, Digital Dons and Sweatshop Kingpins, the Patriots and Refugees have found common cause and committed themselves to three main objectives:

Imagining Futures: Four Scenarios For Nigeria

Scenario-building processes focus on the long term. Scenarios are a creative way of shining a light on the critical factors that will drive countries in one direction or the other. They don't make predictions, nor even explore which future is most likely. They help decision makers think through how to better manage uncertainty and complexity, the only constants in today's world.

In imagining alternative futures for Nigeria, four (4) scenarios were developed. They include Fire On The Mountain, One Chance, Which Way Nigeria? and African Giant Awake. The scenarios visualise Nigeria over a 25-year period (2025 - 2050) under varying conditions of technology and governance.

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