



## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIA

Victor-Akinyemi Helen Bidemi (Ph.D.)<sup>1</sup> and Olashupo Olamilekan Zacchaeus<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Federal College of Education, Okene, Kogi State, Nigeria.

E-mail: [bisfis13@gmail.com](mailto:bisfis13@gmail.com); Tel.: 08033689530

<sup>2</sup>Department of Educational Foundations, Federal College of Education, Okene, Kogi State

E-mail: [Oolashupo@gmail.com](mailto:Oolashupo@gmail.com); Tel.: 07037957935

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study provides a comprehensive examination of the evolution of industrial relations in Nigeria, tracing its historical development from the colonial era through post-independence fluctuations, military rule, structural adjustments, and contemporary global influences. It highlights the interplay between colonial legacies, nationalism, authoritarian governance, economic liberalisation, and globalisation in shaping Nigeria's labour landscape. Analysing the various eras—Colonial, Post-Independence, Military Interregnum, Structural Adjustment, Return to Democracy, and Contemporary Global Influences—the study underscores the dynamic interactions among government policies, employer strategies, labour union activities, and international forces. It delves into the challenges of political interference, corruption, legal inadequacies, global labour standards, and economic transformations. The study emphasises the importance of resilience, adaptability, and collaborative dialogue in navigating the complexities of industrial relations towards ensuring labour equity and economic progress in Nigeria's continuously evolving socio-economic.*

**KEYWORDS:** Historical, Perspective, Industrial, Relationship, Nigeria



## INTRODUCTION

The narrative of industrial relations in Nigeria is a complex one marked by a series of transformative periods, each leaving an indelible imprint on the nation's labour landscape. The interplay of colonial legacies characterises this intricate history, the fervour of post-independence aspirations, the regulatory impulses of successive military dictatorships, the liberalising forces of structural adjustment programs, and the catalytic effects of globalisation. It is a history that has witnessed the convergence of diverse actors—governments, employers, labour unions, and international agencies—each vying to inscribe their interests on the policies and practices governing work and employment. As we unravel this rich history in this ensuing chapter, we will explore the genesis of industrial relations during the Colonial Era, where the British colonial administration instituted the first formal employment structures, forging the rudiments of labour relations that would evolve over decades (Colling, 2004). The narrative will transition to the Post-Independence Flourish, a time brimming with nationalist zeal, which saw the establishment of foundational labour laws and the burgeoning of trade unionism as a potent force in Nigerian society.

We will examine the tumultuous Military Interregnum and its Impact, where the labour movement faced stringent legislative constraints, even as the institutional mechanisms for dispute resolution, such as the National Industrial Court, came into being. The chapter will then consider the Structural Adjustment Era, where neoliberal policies under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund wrought significant and controversial changes, catalysing economic dynamism and social disquiet. The Return to Democracy and Labour Activism section will recount the resurgence of labour's voice in the public sphere, marked by a more assertive and confrontational stance against the backdrop of a fledgling democracy. This will lead us to the discussion of Contemporary Trends and Global Influences, where we will dissect the impact of globalisation, technological innovation, and changing work patterns on the industrial relations system.

In addressing the Challenges and Prospects, we will critically assess the current political, economic, and legal hurdles that shape and constrain the industrial relations environment in Nigeria. We will contemplate the necessary strides that must be taken to ensure the alignment of international labour standards with indigenous realities and the imperative of safeguarding workers' rights amidst the relentless tide of economic change. The chapter will culminate in a conclusion that reflects on the historical journey of industrial relations in Nigeria. It will underscore the importance of resilience and adaptability as vital attributes of a system that seeks to navigate the complexities of both global and local industrial dynamics. This system's robustness will be instrumental in determining the future contours of work, labour, and industrial harmony in Nigeria, a nation perennially balancing the scales of tradition and modernity.

### **The Colonial Era: The Genesis of Industrial Relations**

The Colonial Era in Nigeria, is a period that is marked by the stark imposition of imperial rule, which laid the groundwork for the country's initial foray into the realm of industrial relations. In its quest for economic expansion and resource extraction, the British Empire introduced the first formal employment structures to a region previously dominated by agrarian and trade-based economies (Obikili, 2018). This seminal period in Nigerian history witnessed the birth of a system that juxtaposed modern industrial methods with traditional labour practices, setting



the stage for a complex evolution of work and workers' rights. The introduction of the wage labour system, particularly evident in the nascent mining and railway sectors, was a radical departure from the indigenous systems of labour that had existed prior (Oso, 1986). In its pursuit of efficiency and profit, the British administration imported a capitalist mode of labour that was alien to the local populace (Vickers, 2021). This system was characterised by its reliance on regularised employment, wages as compensation for labour, and the demarcation of roles within a structured organisational hierarchy. The wages offered were often minimal, barely sufficient to meet the basic needs of the workers, and the labour demanded was gruelling and hazardous.

Under colonial rule, the concept of work transitioned from a communal, shared responsibility into a monetized transaction (Wallace, 1997). This shift necessitated the creation of an industrial relations framework to govern this new economic relationship. However, the initial framework was rudimentary at best, designed primarily to serve the interests of the colonial enterprises. Labour was largely unorganised; workers were dispersed, their occupations varied, and their awareness of rights within the new system needed to be improved. The power dynamics were heavily skewed in favour of the colonial employers, who enforced their policies with little to no recourse for the labourers (Mustapha, 2006). The conditions under which the workers toiled were often dire. In the mines, men delved into the bowels of the earth, facing the perils of cave-ins and lung diseases. At the same time, the construction and operation of the railways had them labouring in inhospitable terrains, subjected to the elements and the dangers of the machinery they barely understood (Gilroy, 2010). Their labour fueled the colonial economy, laying the tracks for trade and commerce that benefited the empire, yet they remained on the periphery of the prosperity they helped create (Duffield & Hewitt, 2013). Amidst these oppressive conditions, the seeds of collective action were sown. The workers, driven by a common plight, began to find solace and strength in unity. Nigeria's nascent trade union movement emerged as a beacon of hope, a collective voice against the exploitative practices that had become endemic within the colonial enterprises. These early unions were rudimentary, often informal groupings that sought to provide mutual support and advocate cautiously for better conditions and fairer wages.

The response from the colonial administration to these early stirrings of labour organisation was a mix of repression and reluctant concession. On the one hand, union activities were met with suspicion and often outright hostility, with leaders being harassed and activities disrupted (Nnoli, 2003). On the other hand, the persistent agitation and the fear of widespread unrest led to incremental reforms, albeit implemented to appease rather than to transform (Thomas, 2012). Therefore, the industrial relations landscape of the Colonial Era in Nigeria can be characterised as a period of nascent struggle, where the labour force began to awaken to its potential power but remained shackled by colonial governance structures. It was a time of paradox, where the imposition of a foreign labour system sowed the seeds of industrial discord but also planted the roots of organised labour movements. The era set a precedent for the following struggles: the fight for fair labour practices became intertwined with the larger struggle for independence and self-governance.

### **The Post-Independence Flourish**

The dawn of independence in Nigeria unfurled a new chapter in the annals of the nation's history, particularly in industrial relations. The year 1960 heralded political sovereignty and the inception of a transformative era in the labour background. The departure of colonial rule



and the subsequent rise of nationalism infused the Nigerian industrial relations system with a newfound vigour, catalysing a period often referred to as the Post-Independence Flourish. In this atmosphere brimming with patriotic fervour, the Nigerian government, now in the hands of its citizens, undertook significant strides to redefine the fabric of work and labour. One of the pivotal legislative landmarks of this era was the enactment of the Trade Union Act of 1965 (Okpaluba, 1977). This Act was not merely a piece of legislation but a declaration of intent, a codification of the government's recognition of trade unions and their indispensable role in the industrial sphere (Okpaluba, 1977). It provided a legal framework that legitimised the existence of unions and empowered them with the right to collective bargaining, setting the stage for a more democratic and organised approach to industrial relations.

The Trade Union Act was a beacon of empowerment for the Nigerian workforce. It heralded an era where workers' voices could not just whisper in the shadows but could now speak with the authority of legality. The establishment of numerous unions across various sectors burgeoned during this period, signalling a new epoch where labour could negotiate wages, working conditions, and terms of employment on a more equitable footing with employers (Seidman, 2007). This vibrant proliferation of unions also brought about a more structured approach to industrial relations. A hierarchy of unions emerged sectoral representations took shape, and the foundations for a robust labour movement were laid. Workers' rights became a subject of national discourse, and industrial democracy seemed within reach. For the first time, the Nigerian worker had protection and a platform for participation in the industrial decision-making process.

However, the burgeoning democratic ethos within industrial relations soon confronted a new challenge. The winds of change ushered in by independence carried with them the tempest of political instability. The ensuing military coups and the consequent military regimes gripping Nigeria introduced a more centralised and authoritarian approach to governance (Osaghae, 2018). This shift had profound implications for the industrial relations landscape. The military's ascension to power brought about a paradigm shift in labour governance. Trade unions, which had been burgeoning centres of power and representation for workers, were now viewed with suspicion by the military government, perceived as potential threats to the new order's stability (Busch, 1983). With their command-and-control ethos, the military rulers were inclined towards regimentation and control, which extended to their handling of industrial relations.

Under military rule, the labour movement faced a constriction of its freedoms. The government sought to bring unions under its aegis, imposing regulations that stifled the independence of the labour movement. Trade union elections, once a democratic process, became subject to governmental oversight and, in some cases, direct intervention (Unger & Chan, 1995). The right to strike, a powerful tool in the arsenal of labour negotiation, was curtailed, with the government often invoking national interest to suppress industrial actions. The centralized approach of the military had a dichotomous effect on industrial relations. While it ensured a semblance of order and stability in the industrial arena, it also smothered the spirit of collective bargaining. It dampened the dynamism that had characterised the post-independence period. The trade unions, once the vanguards of worker's rights, found themselves navigating an increasingly narrow path between representation and regulation (Greenhalgh, 2020).

In retrospect, the Post-Independence Flourish in Nigeria was a period of contrasts. It was a time when the seeds of industrial democracy were sown amidst the euphoria of newfound freedom, only to be tempered by the authoritarian undertow of military rule. The era laid the foundational



stones for modern industrial relations in Nigeria. These stones would be tested during political upheavals and economic transformations in the following years. As such, this period remains a defining chapter in Nigeria's journey towards an equitable and representative industrial relations system.

### **The Military Interregnum and its Impact**

The era of military rule in Nigeria, particularly throughout the 1970s and 1980s, stands as a period of stark transformation in the sphere of industrial relations—a time when the pendulum of labour dynamics swung towards stringent regulation and control (Barchiesi, 1996). The military interregnum, characterised by a series of coups that saw the military establishment wrest control from civilian governments, introduced a new paradigm in managing labour relations that would have enduring ramifications.

As the military assumed the reins of governance, they brought with them a predilection for order and discipline, which translated into an authoritarian approach to industrial relations. The military leadership, concerned with national stability and economic development, viewed the burgeoning power of trade unions as a potential threat to their regime. To consolidate power and preempt labour unrest, the military government enacted laws that sought to curtail the influence and autonomy of trade unions.

According to Anyim (2009), the Trade Disputes Act of 1976 was one such legislative instrument. It imposed stringent measures on resolving industrial disputes, mandating a more bureaucratic process that often circumvented the direct negotiation between employers and labour representatives. By channelling disputes through governmental mechanisms, the Act effectively diluted the power of collective bargaining—a fundamental tenet of industrial democracy. Further constricting the space for union activity was the Trade Unions (Amendment) Decree of 1978. This decree centralised unionism, compelling all trade unions to affiliate with a single national body (Afolayan, 2016). This move was designed to weaken the grassroots power of individual unions, making it easier for the government to exert control over the labour movement as a whole. The decree also introduced a check-off system for union dues, which, while ostensibly a means of streamlining funding, also served as a tool for government oversight of union finances.

Perhaps the most consequential measure taken by the military regime was the outright ban on strike actions. Strikes, long seen as the ultimate expression of worker dissent and a key bargaining chip in labour disputes, were deemed illegal. The government's rationale was that strikes posed a threat to the economy and national security. However, this prohibition effectively muzzled the labour movement, depriving workers of their most potent means of protest and redress. The impact of these regulations on the industrial relations climate was profound. Once a vibrant and influential force in Nigerian society, the labour movement found itself in a straitjacket of legal and political constraints. Union leaders who resisted these measures faced harassment and sometimes imprisonment. Meanwhile, the rank and file of the labour force became increasingly disenchanted, perceiving the unions as impotent in the face of government dominance.

Despite the repressive atmosphere, the military interregnum was not devoid of positive developments in industrial relations. One such advancement was the establishment of the National Industrial Court in 1976 (Anyim, 2009). This judicial body was tasked with



adjudicating industrial disputes, providing a formal mechanism for resolving labour conflicts (Anyim, 2009). The court was intended to offer a semblance of fairness and legal recourse in a climate where direct negotiation had been stifled. Over time, it would come to play a crucial role in interpreting labour laws and setting precedents in industrial jurisprudence. In analysing the legacy of the military interregnum on Nigeria's industrial relations, it is clear that a paradoxical mix of suppression and institutional development marked the era. On the one hand, the military's legislative interventions repressed the labour movement and curtailed workers' rights, setting a precedent for government overreach into labour affairs. On the other hand, the period saw the establishment of critical institutions and legal frameworks that would become fixtures in industrial relations (Yusuf, 2018).

The military interregnum thus stands as a watershed in the history of Nigerian industrial relations—a time when the state asserted its might over the mechanisms of labour yet also laid down new legal pathways that would eventually be used to navigate the complex terrain of industrial disputes. As the nation would later transition back to civilian rule, the structures and strictures put in place during this period would continue to influence the dynamics of labour governance and worker-state relations for years to come.

### **The Structural Adjustment Era**

The mid-1980s in Nigeria heralded a seismic shift in economic philosophy and policy, as the nation grappled with a burgeoning fiscal crisis precipitated by plummeting oil prices and rising external debt (Barisitz, 2014). In a bid to resuscitate the ailing economy, under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Nigeria embarked on the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP)—a suite of neoliberal reforms intended to liberalise the economy and promote sustainable growth (Babatunde, 2018). This era of structural adjustment would leave an indelible mark on the nation's industrial relations landscape. At the heart of SAP was a series of radical policy shifts: the deregulation of the labour market, the privatisation of numerous state-owned enterprises, and the removal of consumer subsidies, particularly on fuel and essential commodities. These policies fostered a more competitive and efficient economic environment, drawing foreign investment and bolstering private sector-led growth.

Deregulating the labour market sought to remove the rigidities that impede investment and job creation. It facilitated more flexible labour practices, allowing for greater employer discretion in hiring and firing, and diminished the role of unions in wage determination (Rubery *et al.*, 2016). The government, keen on attracting foreign capital, touted these reforms as necessary to create a more dynamic and responsive labour market. The privatisation of state-owned enterprises was another pillar of the SAP. It was argued that the private sector could manage these entities more effectively, thus improving service delivery and reducing the fiscal burden on the government. As these enterprises transitioned into private hands, thousands of workers found their jobs on the line, with privatisation often accompanied by downsizing and restructuring.

The removal of subsidies, particularly on fuel, was the most contentious of the SAP policies. Subsidies were seen as unsustainable government expenditures that distorted market prices and incentivized inefficiency (Akinrele, 2016). Their removal led to immediate and sharp increases in the cost of living, fueling widespread discontent and frequent clashes between the government and the populace. While succeeding in certain economic quarters, these reforms had profound implications for industrial relations. On the one hand, the SAP era did usher in a



period of economic liberalisation that saw an influx of foreign direct investment and the expansion of the private sector (Nsehe, 2017). For some, this represented a much-needed diversification of Nigeria's oil-dependent economy and promised a future of economic prosperity and opportunity.

On the other hand, the SAP policies engendered significant upheaval in the labour market. The deregulation measures eroded job security as employers were emboldened to engage in labour practices prioritising cost-cutting and flexibility over job stability. This increased part-time, temporary, and casual labour at the expense of full-time, secure employment, fostering a climate of uncertainty and vulnerability among workers. Labour standards, too, suffered under the weight of neoliberal reforms. In a rush to attract investment and reduce costs, there was a tendency to overlook labour rights and protections. Workplace conditions in many sectors deteriorated, and the enforcement of labour laws became lax, as the government was wary of scaring off potential investors with stringent regulatory demands (Adepoju, 2002).

The SAP era also saw an uptick in industrial actions. Workers, faced with the erosion of their livelihoods and dismantling of the protections they had fought for, frequently took to strikes and protests. Despite being weakened by the deregulation of the labour market, the labour movement found renewed purpose as the defender of workers' rights in the face of SAP's harsher realities (Lipsig-Mummé, 1991). Trade unions, which had previously enjoyed a more collaborative relationship with the state, are now at odds with government policies. The tripartite system of industrial relations—comprising the government, employers, and unions—was strained as each stakeholder vied to assert their interests in the new economic order.

In retrospect, the Structural Adjustment Era was a period of profound transformation and contradiction. It was a time when the tenets of neoliberalism were tested against the socio-economic realities of Nigeria. While it promised economic revitalisation and growth, the SAP also laid bare the vulnerabilities of a workforce subjected to the vagaries of global economic doctrines. The era redefined industrial relations in Nigeria, setting the stage for future debates and struggles over balancing economic liberalisation and labour protection. The chapter taught Nigeria the complex lessons of globalisation and the importance of safeguarding the social contract between the state, the market, and the worker.

### **The Return to Democracy and Labour Activism**

The year 1999 marked a pivotal moment in Nigeria's history as the nation turned a significant corner, transitioning from decades of military rule to civilian government (Falode, 2012). This shift, heralding the return to democracy, was not just a political renaissance but a catalyst that reinvigorated the labour movement and reshaped the landscape of industrial relations. In the wake of this newfound freedom, trade unions, once shackled by the restrictive and often oppressive decrees of military juntas, emerged as potent forces of activism and negotiation. No longer muffled by authoritarianism, these unions began vigorously exercising their autonomy, championing the cause of the Nigerian worker with a fervour unseen in the preceding years of military governance (Ogunade, 1981).

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), the twin colossi of Nigeria's labour movement, assumed centre stage in this new era (Nwoko, 2009). They became the standard-bearers for a labour force eager to assert its rights and claim its share of the nation's economic progress. With the changing of the guard came a more assertive posture



from these labour centres, which saw an opportunity to redress past injustices and secure a more equitable future for workers.

A more confrontational and negotiation-based industrial relations system began to unfold. Trade unions leveraged their strengthened position to engage in more robust dialogue with employers and the government. The negotiation tables became arenas where the might of labour could be felt, leading to tangible gains for workers. Minimum wage debates took on a new intensity, with unions pushing for increases that would ensure workers could live with dignity amidst the rising cost of living (Caraway *et al.*, 2019). The call for better working conditions also gained momentum. Unions became more insistent on the enforcement of occupational health and safety standards. They argued that a healthy workforce was indispensable for sustainable economic development and that the welfare of workers was non-negotiable. Advocacy campaigns and industrial actions punctuated the labour landscape as unions sought to hold employers and the government accountable.

The democratisation of Nigeria also heralded an era where trade unions could more freely form alliances and coalitions within and beyond the country's borders. This allowed them to amplify their voice and extend their influence. The NLC and TUC became key players in regional and international labour organisations, bringing global attention to the concerns of Nigerian workers. However, the journey was not without its tribulations (Rasaki, 2015). The newfound assertiveness of the unions sometimes led to confrontations with employers and the government, resulting in strikes and lockouts that tested the resilience of the democratic system. While such actions indicated a more open and democratic space for labour relations, they also highlighted the challenges inherent in balancing workers' demands with economic realities.

Moreover, the labour movement had to contend with internal dynamics and the challenge of maintaining unity amidst a diverse and sometimes fragmented membership. The multiplicity of interests within the labour force required careful navigation to prevent fissures that could weaken the collective bargaining power of the unions. Despite these challenges, returning to democracy re-energised labour activism and brought significant achievements. The minimum wage saw increments, albeit periodically and with resistance. Labour laws were revisited, with some reforms introduced to enhance workers' rights. The labour movement also became a vocal participant in the national discourse, weighing in on governance and economic policy issues. The NLC and TUC, through their activism, advocacy, and negotiation, played a critical role in shaping a more democratic and equitable industrial relations system. They championed the cause of workers when Nigeria was redefining its identity and seeking a path towards sustainable development.

### **Contemporary Trends and Global Influences**

As the new millennium unfolded, Nigeria's industrial relations landscape encountered a confluence of forces that reshaped its essence. Globalisation and the rapid advancement of technology introduced complex dimensions to the world of work, compelling a reevaluation of established norms and practices within the industrial sector. These twin phenomena have influenced employment patterns and dictated the pace and direction of change in labour relations. Globalisation, the process by which businesses or other organisations develop international influence or start operating internationally, has had a multifaceted impact (Brooks *et al.*, 2010). It has ushered in an era where the Nigerian labour market is no longer insulated but is part of a more extensive, interconnected global system. Nigerian workers compete in a





broader arena where skills, costs, and productivity are measured against international standards. This global integration has attracted multinational corporations (MNCs) to Nigerian shores, bringing new employment opportunities and challenges regarding labour standards and practices (Akorsu & Cooke, 2011).

The influence of MNCs has been particularly poignant. While they have contributed significantly to job creation and the transfer of knowledge and technology, their presence has also raised concerns about the potential for exploiting local labour laws and practices. Issues such as precarious work conditions, union busting, and inadequate compensation have become subjects of contention, compelling trade unions and regulatory bodies to advocate for stricter oversight and more robust enforcement of labour laws. Technological advancements, on the other hand, have catalysed a shift towards the gig economy—an environment where temporary, flexible jobs are commonplace and companies tend toward hiring independent contractors and freelancers instead of full-time employees. In Nigeria, this has been evident in the rise of platform-based work, where digital platforms act as intermediaries between freelance labour and consumer demand. While this model offers flexibility and the potential for entrepreneurship, it also poses risks related to job security, benefits, and workers' rights as the traditional employer-employee relationship becomes increasingly blurred.

The informal sector, a mainstay of the Nigerian economy, has also expanded due to these contemporary trends. Many Nigerians have turned to informal employment as formal job opportunities have yet to keep pace with the growing labour force (Fapohunda, 2013). This sector, characterised by unregulated work and a lack of social security, has become an area of concern for labour activists who seek to extend legal protections to the multitudes working within this grey area of the economy. Nigeria has been compelled to revisit its labour laws and regulations in response to these dynamic changes. The need to address contemporary issues such as remote work and digital rights has become apparent. Remote work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has challenged traditional labour models, necessitating discussions on work-life balance, data protection, and the right to disconnect. Digital rights, encompassing privacy, freedom of expression, and access to digital resources, have also become part of the labour dialogue as technology becomes increasingly integral to the workplace (Taylor, 2017).

Moreover, labour unions and advocacy groups have had to adapt their strategies to remain relevant. They are now focusing on capacity building to better understand and leverage technology for labour activism (Ubels *et al.*, 2010). Online platforms are being used for organising and mobilising workers, and there is a growing recognition of the need to collaborate across borders to address the transnational nature of contemporary labour issues. In the face of these trends, the Nigerian government, labour unions, employers, and civil society are grappling with crafting a regulatory framework that balances the imperatives of economic flexibility with the need to protect workers' rights. The ongoing discourse encompasses a wide array of considerations—from the implications of artificial intelligence on employment to the regulation of transnational labour practices. Therefore, the contemporary era has presented Nigeria with opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the global economy offers prospects for growth and innovation; on the other, it raises pressing questions about the future of work, the stability of employment, and the protection of labour rights in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.



## Challenges and Prospects

Today, as Nigeria stands at the crossroads of economic transformation and social change, its industrial relations system grapples with many challenges that must be addressed to ensure a future where labour equity and economic progress go hand in hand. Political interference stands as one of the most prominent challenges facing Nigeria's industrial relations (Okolie & Akbefe, 2021). The undue influence of political actors in labour matters often undermines the independence of unions, distorts the course of fair negotiation, and compromises the implementation of labour laws. This interference can skew the balance of power in favour of employers or the state, leaving workers' interests unprotected and their voices unheard. Corruption exacerbates these issues, eroding trust in institutions safeguarding workers' rights and welfare. The need for legal reforms is another significant hurdle. The labour market in Nigeria is witnessing a shift fueled by globalisation, technological innovation, and changing work patterns (Aggarwal, 2018). These trends necessitate reevaluating and updating existing labour laws to address issues such as the gig economy, remote work, and the rise of digital platforms. Current legislation may need to adequately cover these new forms of employment, creating gaps in protection and regulation.

In the face of these challenges, Nigeria must also reconcile global labour standards with its local socio-economic realities (Lado, 2000). The country is a signatory to various international labour conventions that set standards for fair labour practices. However, implementing these standards is often at odds with Nigeria's economic and cultural context. Striking a balance between adhering to these global benchmarks and tailoring them to fit the Nigerian context is a delicate task that requires nuanced policymaking and stakeholder engagement. The protection of workers' rights amid economic transformations is paramount. As Nigeria seeks to diversify its economy and attract foreign investment, there is the risk that labour rights could be sidelined in the quest for economic competitiveness (Abdullahi, 2018). Ensuring that workers' rights are upheld during this transition is crucial to maintaining social cohesion and securing the social contract between the state, the labour force, and the private sector.

Furthermore, fostering a collaborative environment among employers, employees, and the government is essential. Industrial relations thrive on dialogue and mutual respect. Nigeria's tripartite relationship must be nurtured to create a system where all parties can contribute to and benefit from economic growth. Employers must recognise the value of a satisfied and well-protected workforce, employees must engage constructively and responsibly, and the government must act as an impartial arbiter that enforces laws and facilitates fair negotiations. Looking ahead, Nigeria's industrial relations prospects are inextricably linked to its ability to surmount these challenges. There is the potential for an inclusive, dynamic, and resilient labour market that can serve as a model for other emerging economies. The prospect of leveraging technology for labour management, enhancing workers' skills for a changing economy, and creating jobs that can withstand economic fluctuations is within reach if Nigeria can navigate the current challenges effectively.



## CONCLUSION

The historical trajectory of industrial relations in Nigeria reflects complex colonial influences, post-independence nationalism, military authoritarianism, economic reforms, and democratic activism. As Nigeria continues to navigate the intricacies of global and local industrial dynamics, the resilience and adaptability of its industrial relations system will be critical in shaping the future of work and labour in the nation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Labour laws should be updated to address contemporary challenges such as the gig economy, remote work, and digital rights, ensuring comprehensive protection and regulation for all forms of employment.
2. Promote constructive dialogue and mutual respect among employers, employees, and the government to foster a balanced and fair industrial relations system.
3. Implement measures to shield labour matters from undue political influence, ensuring union independence, integrity, and fair negotiations.
4. Strengthen governance and accountability mechanisms within labour institutions to restore trust and effectiveness in protecting workers' rights and interests.
5. International labour standards should be tailored to Nigeria's socio-economic context, balancing global benchmarks with indigenous needs and capacities.
6. Upholding labour rights should be a priority in pursuing economic diversification and competitiveness, ensuring that economic growth does not come at the expense of workers' welfare.
7. Utilize technological advancements to improve labour management, skill development, and job creation, preparing the workforce for the demands of a changing economy.

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