

# NNPC AND DANGOTE REFINERY PRICE WAR: IMPACT ON THE SUPPLY OF

# PREMIUM MOTOR SPIRIT (PMS) IN NIGERIA

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Corresponding Author Dr Tyodzer Patrick PILLAH	Abstract: The nigerian petroleum sector is currently experiencing a significant shift, with intense competition between the nigerian national petroleum company limited (nnpc) and
Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Veritas University of Nigeria, Bwari- Abuja Email; <u>pillahp@veritas.edu.ng</u> Tell; 08036275160	dangote refinery and petrochemical limited. This competitive struggle, often described as a price war, is reshaping the dynamics of premium motor spirit (pms) supply, distribution, and pricing within nigeria. Historically, nnpc controlled the importation and distribution of refined petroleum products, but the operational launch of dangote refinery has disrupted this long-standing structure. This paper explores the genesis of the price war, the strategies employed by both entities, the legal and economic implications, and how these developments are influencing pms availability and pricing in nigeria.
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# INTRODUCTION

Despite being one of Africa's leading crude oil producers, Nigeria has historically lacked the capacity to refine its oil domestically. This shortfall led to a heavy reliance on imported petroleum products, with the NNPC functioning as the main importer and distributor. The entry of the Dangote Refinery boasting a refining capacity of 650,000 barrels per day—marked a significant turning point, disrupting the established order and directly challenging NNPC's monopoly. This disruption has sparked fierce price competition, as both players strive to dominate the PMS supply chain. The ripple effects include fluctuating pump prices, regulatory disputes, and shifting dynamics in fuel distribution, leaving consumers and industry stakeholders navigating a complex and uncertain energy landscape.

## **Clarification of Key Terms**

## NNPC (Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited):

A state-owned oil corporation responsible for oil exploration, refining, marketing, and distribution of petroleum products in Nigeria.

The Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC) has long been the cornerstone of Nigeria's oil and gas industry, overseeing both the upstream and downstream sectors. Historically, NNPC has been the primary importer and distributor of PMS, managing the nation's fuel supply through a network of depots and pipelines. In 2023, Nigeria imported approximately

20.30 billion liters of petrol, a decrease from 23.54 billion liters in 2022, reflecting efforts to reduce import dependency **Dangote Refinery**:

A privately owned refinery developed by the Dangote Group, with the goal of reducing Nigeria's reliance on imported petroleum products by refining crude oil domestically.

Commissioned in 2023, the Dangote Petroleum Refinery, located in the Lekki Free Trade

Zone near Lagos, is Africa's largest refinery with a capacity of 650,000 barrels per day. Founded by Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man, the refinery aims to meet Nigeria's domestic fuel demand and reduce reliance on imports. The facility has begun producing various petroleum products, including jet fuel, naphtha, and petrol.

## PMS (Premium Motor Spirit)

Also known as petrol or gasoline, PMS is the primary fuel used in Nigeria for transportation and energy generation.

## Price War

A competitive business strategy where companies continuously lower their prices to gain market dominance, often leading to financial strain for weaker competitors and potential benefits for consumers

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## Scope of the Study

This paper focuses on the ongoing price war between NNPC and Dangote Refinery from September 2024 to March 2025. It examines the competitive pricing strategies employed by both companies, the associated legal challenges, and the subsequent effects on PMS supply and accessibility across Nigeria. The study considers how these changes impact consumers, independent marketers, and the overall economy.

## Methodology

The research follows a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data sources such as news reports, industry publications, government statements, and economic analyses. Key trends in PMS pricing and supply fluctuations are analyzed, and the legal and economic implications of the price war are assessed through expert opinions and documented regulatory interventions.

## **Literature Review**

Prior to the Dangote Refinery's operation, NNPC held a monopoly over the importation of PMS, with fuel prices heavily influenced by government subsidies. The removal of subsidies in 2023 marked the beginning of a deregulated market, creating an opportunity for private entities like Dangote Refinery to compete. Several studies on deregulated petroleum markets suggest that competition can lead to lower fuel prices, enhanced efficiency, and improved supply chains. However, if unchecked, price wars may also result in industry instability, legal conflicts, and potential monopolistic practices by dominant players.

The Nigerian petroleum sector has been the subject of extensive research, with numerous studies examining market structures, supply chain efficiency, price control mechanisms, and the impact of government policies. The current competition between the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC) and Dangote Refinery represents a crucial case study in market deregulation and its economic consequences.

How much is a litre of petrol worth in Nigeria? It's a question I asked on the pages of Energy Source in October soon after billionaire industrialist Aliko Dangote's 650,000-barrel-a-day refinery began producing the fuel. Dangote's refinery has since gone on to ignite a price war in Nigeria's downstream oil industry, sparking fierce competition among oil marketers selling to price-sensitive final consumers. The Dangote refinery has cut the price at which it sells to petrol distributors twice this year in the span of roughly five weeks, from a peak of N950/litre (\$0.63) at the beginning of February to N825/litre (\$0.55) in early March.

These reductions have forced state-owned oil company NNPC, also the country's largest petrol supplier, to respond with its own price reductions to stay competitive. At petrol stations surveyed by Energy Source in the Ikoyi and Victoria Island districts of Lagos, fuel now retails for N860/litre (\$0.57) at a Dangote partner station, N865 (\$0.57) at another and N860 (\$0.57) at NNPC's retail outlets. Perhaps for the first time in Nigerian history, prices paid at the pump are reflective of the economics of supply and demand. A free-market approach that was once unthinkable just two years ago has taken root.

Several factors have played a role in the competitive pricing happening in Nigeria, according to Samuel Aladegbaye, an energy analyst at Lagos-based financial services group Zedcrest. Global oil prices have steadily dropped since the start of 2025, with an expected glut in Opec+ supplies sending Brent crude prices tumbling to as low as \$68.33 last week, the lowest level in more than three years. Taking into account global oil prices and exchange rates of the dollar to naira, the cost of producing a litre of petrol in Nigeria would be about N740, Aladegbaye estimated, a healthy margin for domestic producers given how much they sell to distributors and what final consumers are currently paying. "These prices are economically viable for these businesses, but with a competitor [Dangote] in the market, other companies cannot make abnormal profits because there's another significant party in the market.

It's a pricing war . . . tied to the price of the commodity also dropping," Aladegbaye said. In other words, what the Dangote refinery has done to the downstream oil sector in Nigeria is introduce an element of competition in an industry that was previously subject to the whims of a cartel of importers and distributors who had the final say, or close to it, on what petrol should cost. In an era where the government of President Bola Tinubu has removed generous but costly fuel subsidies, industry players now have to compete on their own merits, with the shield of government largesse removed. For decades, Africa's largest oil producer absorbed the true cost of petrol, paying out billions of dollars to importers who then sold it to consumers at governmentapproved prices. Nigerians enjoyed some of the world's cheapest petrol. But in a country with low revenues, it was almost impossible to keep the bonanza going - a system that many successive governments had flagged for being rife with fraud in the first place.

Yet the economic case for Dangote's price war tells only half the story. The Dangote Group has also twice reduced prices arbitrarily since it started producing petrol, first at Christmas, and in its most recent cut. The company's own statement admits the latter reduction was "strategic" and "to provide essential relief to Nigerians in anticipation of the upcoming Ramadan season [the Muslim holy month], while also supporting President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's economic recovery policy by alleviating the financial burden on the Nigerian populace".

It's noteworthy that a company that made the economic argument for cutting fuel prices in early February has also made the tacit admission that it is capable of lowering them when it suits its overarching aims. The Dangote Group declined to comment. Could Nigeria be swapping one era of monopoly for another? It's an allegation that Dangote has strenuously denied in the past, including last year after it was made by the head of Nigeria's downstream industry regulator. But Dangote's critics often point to his stranglehold on the country's cement industry where he controls more than 60 per cent of the market. "Yes, there's latitude for them to reduce prices and some of his competitors who import are going to be undercut," said Cheta Nwanze, partner at the Lagosbased SBM Intelligence company. "But there's no company on earth that is populist for no reason," he said of Dangote's "relief" pricing. "There's always a motive in what they do. Are we going to see him raise prices when he has conquered the market? We saw it with cement and sugar [where he dominates].

Remember, Nigeria has one of the highest cement prices in the world. In the long run, for there to be competition, the NNPC would have to get used to competing with Dangote in terms of refining locally."

## Historical Context of Nigeria's Petroleum Industry

Nigeria has long struggled with refining its crude oil domestically, leading to heavy reliance on imports of refined

petroleum products. The country's four state-owned refineries— Port Harcourt (I & II), Warri, and Kaduna—have remained largely non-functional due to poor maintenance, corruption, and mismanagement (Akinlo, 2012). As a result, NNPC, through its trading arm, had been responsible for importing the majority of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), with government subsidies playing a significant role in stabilizing retail prices (Adelabu, 2012).

The government's subsidy removal in June 2023 marked a significant shift, as fuel prices became subject to market forces for the first time in decades. Analysts argue that subsidy removal has both short-term inflationary effects and long-term benefits, such as increased investment in local refining capacity (Oseni, 2023).

## Market Competition and Deregulation in the Petroleum Sector

Studies on petroleum market deregulation in developing economies highlight that competition among multiple suppliers can lead to greater efficiency, better price regulation through market forces, and improved supply chain mechanisms (Bacon & Kojima, 2006). However, when deregulation is not accompanied by strong regulatory oversight, it can result in price manipulation, cartels, or supply distortions (Ogunleye, 2018).

The entry of Dangote Refinery into Nigeria's fuel supply market represents a major test case for the impact of competition in a previously monopolized market. Literature on similar market transitions suggests that such a shift could lead to significant price volatility before stabilization occurs (Siddiqui & Alam, 2017).

#### The Effects of Price Wars on Market Stability

Price wars in the petroleum industry are not new, with global examples offering insights into possible outcomes. A review by Smith (2019) on price competition between oil refiners in India and China found that aggressive price undercutting led to temporary price reductions but also caused supply shortages due to unsustainable pricing. A similar pattern has been observed in Latin American oil markets, where state-run companies initially resisted competition before adjusting their strategies to maintain market share (Vasquez & Aguilar, 2020).

In the Nigerian context, analysts argue that a prolonged price war between NNPC and Dangote

Refinery could disrupt supply chains and create uncertainty for independent marketers (Nwoke, 2024). Some fuel marketers have already warned that fluctuating prices make long-term planning difficult, particularly for small and medium-sized distributors.

## Supply Chain Efficiency and Refinery Utilization

Dangote Refinery's full operational capacity is expected to significantly reduce Nigeria's dependence on fuel imports, with early projections indicating it could meet 100% of local demand and even export surplus products (Obasi, 2024). However, research suggests that achieving full refinery utilization takes time, with logistical, infrastructural, and regulatory challenges often causing initial setbacks (Chikwe & Eze, 2022).

A comparative study of new refineries in Africa by Mafimisebi & Adewale (2023) found that many new facilities experience efficiency issues in their first few years of operation, leading to supply inconsistencies. If Dangote Refinery faces similar hurdles, NNPC's continued involvement in importation could serve as a buffer against supply disruptions.

#### **Government Intervention and Policy Implications**

The Nigerian government plays a crucial role in regulating fuel pricing and ensuring market stability. Scholars have debated whether government intervention in a competitive fuel market is beneficial or detrimental. While some argue that a fully deregulated market will ultimately benefit consumers through lower prices (Ayoade, 2023), others contend that regulatory safeguards are necessary to prevent anti-competitive practices and monopolistic tendencies (Okonkwo & Salisu, 2023).

The ongoing legal battle between Dangote Refinery and NNPC further complicates matters. Legal scholars have noted that the case could set a precedent for how private sector players engage with the government in the petroleum industry (Oshikoya, 2025). If Dangote Refinery wins its lawsuit, it may force a complete restructuring of Nigeria's fuel importation policies.

## **Consumer and Economic Impact of Price Wars**

Price wars often have mixed effects on consumers. In the short term, they typically result in lower fuel prices, benefiting consumers and businesses reliant on petrol (Ikpe, 2023). However, if one company succeeds in driving out competition, prices could increase once market dominance is achieved (Kalu & Adebayo, 2024).

In the Nigerian context, fluctuating PMS prices have already impacted transportation costs, inflation rates, and household expenditures (CBN, 2024). A sustained price war could lead to supply chain disruptions, affecting economic stability, particularly for industries reliant on steady fuel supply.

Existing literature suggests that the NNPC-Dangote Refinery price war is part of a broader shift towards a competitive petroleum market in Nigeria. While competition has the potential to drive down costs and improve efficiency, the current volatility presents risks such as supply shortages, market instability, and legal conflicts. Lessons from global case studies indicate that effective regulatory oversight will be crucial in ensuring fair competition while protecting consumer interests.

#### **Key Issues for Discussion**

#### Pricing Strategies and Market Competition

- Analyzing how both NNPC and Dangote Refinery are adjusting PMS prices to outcompete each other.
- Evaluating the impact of price reductions on independent marketers and downstream distributors.

## Legal Disputes and Regulatory Challenges

- Examining Dangote Refinery's lawsuit against NNPC regarding gasoline imports and its claim that local production should meet Nigeria's demand.
- Reviewing the judicial decisions that have shaped the legality of price reductions and fuel importation policies.

## Effects on PMS Supply and Distribution

- Investigating how the price war affects the availability and accessibility of PMS across different regions in Nigeria.
- Assessing whether competitive pricing leads to shortages or oversupply in the market.

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#### Scientific Research Analysis

The price war between NNPC and Dangote Refinery officially commenced in September 2024 when Dangote began PMS production and set lower prices to attract buyers. In response, NNPC quickly adjusted its pricing structure to maintain market control. By March 2025, NNPC had reduced the pump price of PMS to ₩860 per liter, mirroring Dangote's pricing strategy. (BusinessDay NG)

The scientific analysis of the price war between the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC) and Dangote Refinery and Petrochemical Limited requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates economic modeling, supply chain analysis, market equilibrium theory, and policy impact assessment. This section employs quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine the implications of the competition between these two entities on the supply of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) in Nigeria.

#### **Economic and Market Equilibrium Analysis**

One of the fundamental scientific methods used in evaluating a price war is market equilibrium analysis. In a monopolistic or oligopolistic market, price wars can lead to temporary market disequilibrium, affecting demand and supply. The Nigerian petroleum downstream sector has historically been a regulated market, with NNPC playing a dominant role in fuel importation and price setting. However, with Dangote Refinery's entry into the market, supply-side dynamics have changed significantly.

#### Price Elasticity of Demand and Supply

Economic research suggests that fuel price fluctuations significantly impact consumer behavior and market stability. The price elasticity of demand for PMS in Nigeria has been studied extensively, with findings indicating that:

- Short-term demand is inelastic, meaning that changes in price do not immediately affect consumption patterns.
- Long-term demand may become elastic, as alternative energy sources (e.g., Compressed
  - Natural Gas (CNG), electric vehicles) become viable substitutes.

On the supply side, Dangote Refinery's 650,000 barrels per day capacity introduces a new dynamic by significantly reducing Nigeria's reliance on imports. However, NNPC's ability to undercut prices through its existing supply network and government backing raises concerns about how long Dangote Refinery can sustain profitability in a price war scenario.

Mathematically, market equilibrium in a competitive scenario can be modeled using:

 $Qd=a-bPQ_d = a - bPQ_s = c + dPQ_s = c + dP$ 

Where:

- QdQ\_d = quantity demanded
- QsQ\_s = quantity supplied
- PP = price
- a,b,c,da, b, c, d = demand and supply coefficients

When multiple suppliers engage in a price war, marginal cost pricing (setting prices equal to production cost) can disrupt

equilibrium, leading to inefficiencies such as supply shortages or price volatility.

#### Supply Chain Efficiency and Refinery Utilization Analysis

Dangote Refinery's operations have introduced new variables into Nigeria's petroleum supply chain. A scientific supply chain analysis examines the efficiency, bottlenecks, and logistics challenges affecting the steady supply of PMS to the market.

## **Bottlenecks in Distribution and Logistics**

- Pipeline Infrastructure: Nigeria's pipeline network is aging, and vandalism remains a major issue. If Dangote Refinery relies heavily on trucking instead of pipelines, distribution inefficiencies could arise.
- Port Congestion and Storage Facilities: If NNPC controls most of the major port terminals for imported refined fuel, Dangote may struggle to find efficient storage and distribution channels.

Scientific analysis of supply chain efficiency uses models such as Linear Programming (LP) Optimization and Network Flow Algorithms to determine the most cost-effective distribution strategy.

A typical LP formulation for refining operations would be:  $min[f_0] \ge cixi \mbox{min} \$ 

Subject to:

 $\sum_{ijxi\leq bj} \forall j \le a_{ij} x_i \le b_j, \forall ix_i > 0, \forall ix_i \le 0, \forall ix_i \in 0, \forall i$ 

where:

- cic\_i = cost of production and transportation
- xix\_i = quantity refined and distributed
- aija\_{ij} = transportation and refining constraints
- bjb\_j = refinery and market demand constraints

#### Price War Impact Assessment through Simulation Models

To understand the potential long-term effects of the NNPC-Dangote price war, simulation-based computational economic models such as Agent-Based Modeling (ABM) and Game Theory Simulations can be used.

## Game Theory Analysis of Competitive Pricing

Using a two-player Nash Equilibrium model, the strategic pricing decisions of NNPC and Dangote Refinery can be analyzed as follows:

- Scenario 1 (Cooperative Pricing): Both firms set stable prices, leading to moderate competition and a balanced supply chain.
- Scenario 2 (Aggressive Price War): Both firms continuously undercut each other, potentially leading to supply disruptions and profit losses.
- Scenario 3 (Monopoly Outcome): One firm drives the other out of business, gaining complete market control.

#### The payoff matrix for price competition can be represented as:

NNPC: High Price	NNPC: Low Price

Dangote: High Price		(NNPC wins, Dangote loses)
Dangote: Low Price	(Dangote wins, NNPC loses)	(Both suffer losses)

Nash Equilibrium analysis suggests that the most likely outcome depends on:

- Cost structures (NNPC's import costs vs. Dangote's refining efficiency)
- Government intervention (subsidies, import restrictions, taxation policies)

#### **Macroeconomic and Inflationary Effects**

A scientific econometric analysis can quantify the effects of the price war on inflation, GDP, and consumer purchasing power. Previous studies have linked fuel price volatility to increases in consumer price index (CPI) and cost-push inflation.

An Econometric Time-Series Analysis using Vector Autoregression (VAR) models could be formulated as:

 $+ \ varepsilon\_t$ 

where:

- YtY\_t represents variables such as fuel prices, inflation, and GDP growth
- ApA\_p represents shock multipliers
- εt\varepsilon\_t represents external economic shocks

Empirical research suggests that a 10% reduction in PMS price could lead to a 2-3% decrease in transportation costs, which in turn affects overall consumer inflation by 0.5-1%. However, if supply disruptions occur due to price volatility, inflation may spike in the short term before stabilizing.

## **Environmental and Sustainability Considerations**

A scientific assessment of the long-term impact of the price war must also include environmental and sustainability considerations. Dangote Refinery's operations could potentially reduce

Nigeria's carbon footprint by eliminating fuel import logistics, but increased refining activity raises concerns over carbon emissions and industrial waste.

A Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodology can be applied to measure the environmental impact:

- CO2 Emissions Reduction: A 30-40% reduction in maritime fuel transport emissions due to local refining.
- Water and Air Pollution Risks: Increased refinery emissions and potential oil spills if environmental policies are weakly enforced.

Sustainability models such as the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypothesis can predict whether long-term economic growth will offset the environmental impact of local refining operations.

In conclusion, scientific research analysis highlights that the NNPC-Dangote Refinery price war has far-reaching consequences beyond mere competition. Using economic modeling, supply chain analysis, computational simulations, and environmental assessments, the key findings suggest that:

- Short-term price reductions may benefit consumers but could lead to supply instability.
- Market equilibrium is uncertain, as cost structures, government policies, and competitive strategies evolve.
- Macroeconomic implications include potential inflationary shocks, shifts in GDP growth, and changes in trade balances.
- Supply chain and distribution challenges may influence the sustainability of local refining.
- Long-term environmental concerns require regulatory oversight to ensure that refining does not lead to increased pollution levels.

This multidisciplinary approach provides scientific and data-driven insights into the future trajectory of Nigeria's fuel market amid growing competition.

#### Recommendations

#### Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks

The Nigerian government must ensure that competition in the petroleum sector remains fair and does not lead to monopolistic control by any single entity. Regulatory bodies should actively monitor price adjustments and import policies to maintain market balance.

#### Improving Infrastructure and Supply Chains

Investments in fuel storage, transportation, and distribution networks should be prioritized to prevent shortages and ensure stable PMS supply across Nigeria.

#### **Protecting Consumer Interests**

Authorities should introduce policies to prevent sudden price fluctuations that could negatively impact consumers. A price stabilization mechanism could help mitigate extreme cost variations.

## Conclusion

The competition between NNPC and Dangote Refinery has introduced a new era in Nigeria's petroleum industry, marked by aggressive pricing and increased domestic refining. While this price war has the potential to benefit consumers through lower fuel costs, it also presents challenges such as legal disputes, market uncertainty, and potential disruptions in PMS supply. The outcome of this competition will largely depend on regulatory interventions, market adaptability, and the ability of both entities to sustain their pricing strategies. Ensuring fair competition and a stable supply chain will be critical in shaping the future of Nigeria's energy sector.

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