

Good Governance Principles and Democratic Development in Nigeria (2015-2023)

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Abstract: Good governance affects citizens' daily lives, in terms of access to public services, security, economic opportunities and confidence in government. Nigeria experienced political change, anti-corruption efforts, electoral reforms, and growing demands for good governance between 2015 and 2023. Between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria's political landscape was characterized by change, corruption and electoral reforms, as well as rising expectations for good governance (Bekoe, 2015; UNDP, 2018). The level of implementation of key governance principles (transparency, accountability, rule of law, citizen participation, government effectiveness) and their impact on democratic development are examined. The study makes use of qualitative research method in which the secondary data gathered from the source were government reports, policy documents, electoral records, institutional indices, and scholarly literature which were then analyzed using documentary and content analysis. Results show that though some democratic norms have been supported through reforms, including anti-corruption measures and electoral reforms, many citizens remained subjected to insecurity, economic suffering and limited access to public services, which gradually eroded public trust (BudgIT, 2021; Transparency International, 2022). Good governance is not a mere abstract concept, it has real impact on the access of the citizens to education, healthcare, jobs and security, the study claims. It finds that the principles of good governance have not been consistently practiced in the country which has reduced their influence in democratic consolidation and suggests the reinforcement of independent institutions, participatory decision making, transparency and accountability mechanisms as the way to enhance democracy and the daily life of the people.

Keywords: Good governance, democratic development, transparency, accountability, citizen participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Governance is an important part of the landscape of any democratic society and has been central in determining the direction and stability of it. Good governance is not just a theoretical aspiration in Nigeria, but what it does or does not do, impacts the lives of millions of Nigerians with respect to access to public goods, economic opportunities and security (World Bank, 2017). The nation has not made much progress since 1999 in the development of effective institutions, the strengthening of the rule of law, public accountability and inclusive participation (Adejumobi, 2010). They were further exacerbated from 2015 to 2023, which saw significant socio-economic and security pressures affecting national development and democratic stability, rising public expectations and major political transitions (International Crisis Group, 2020).

The year 2015 was one of the most historic years for Nigeria, as it witnessed the first occasion when an incumbent president was defeated at the polls, which indicated a greater acceptance of democratic norms and the possibility of strengthening institutions (Bekoe, 2015). The new government stated that it will establish good governance by combating corruption, improving security, building more robust institutions, and ensuring greater accountability of the public sector. Transparency, accountability, participation, responsiveness, rule of law and government effectiveness were considered to be key pillars of governance which would improve many of the structural issues confronting the Nigerian state (UNDP, 2018).

The ground situation, however, was not all sunny and roses, and there were mixed results. There was also a visible push for reform – some public financial management programmes, social intervention programmes and electoral reforms – but many governance issues remained (BudgIT, 2021). Insecurity further worsened in several parts, allegations of corruption continued to be commonplace, economic hardship increased and public trust was low because of a lack of perceived support between policy promises and implementation (Transparency International, 2022). The circumstances created the attitude of Nigerians towards democracy during this period; affecting their trust in the state institutions and their political engagement.

Democratic development is not just about having democratic institutions; it also means having good governance that is fair, just, accountable and provides citizens opportunities (Diamond, 2019). The history of democracy in Nigeria from 2015-2023 shows how fragile democracy is when governance issues are not addressed.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although it has been continually promised to improve governance, enhance electoral governance, strengthen and renew institutions in Nigeria, governance has remained fraught with persistent insecurity, weak accountability, contested elections and civic space, respectively, over the period 2015-2023 (Transparency International, 2023; Freedom House, 2023). A key issue arising from this disconnect between the discourse and practice of good governance is not, based on current scholarship, clear how much or how little of good governance was actually being practiced during this period as well as how these omissions in good governance techniques specifically influenced the trajectory of democratic development in Nigeria. The current body of literature tends to focus on good governance and democratic development as two distinct processes, a gap in systematic and evidence-based studies of the linkage of governance performance with democratic consolidation. The aim of this study is to fill this gap.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims at generally looking at the relationship between good governance principles and democratic development in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023. The specific objectives are to:

- i. assess the extent to which transparency, accountability, rule of law, citizen participation, and government effectiveness were practised in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023;
- ii. examine how the practice (or neglect) of these governance principles influenced Nigeria's democratic development during the period; and
- iii. recommend measures for strengthening governance practice to deepen democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. To what extent were good governance principles practised in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023?
- ii. How did these practices, or failures of practice, affect Nigeria's democratic development?
- iii. What measures can strengthen democratic consolidation in Nigeria going forward?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is an academic and practical importance study. Academically it helps build on the existing literature that explores the connection between governance theory and the ground level experiences of consolidating a democracy in a developing state, and it offers a forward-looking period-specific account that will be useful for future comparative or longitudinal analyses. In the real world, the results are useful to policymakers and electoral institutions, civil society organisations and development partners looking for research-informed recommendations on where to focus governance reform efforts to improve democratic outcomes in Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Good Governance

Good governance is a process of governance that is effective, transparent, accountable and inclusive in relation to government and manages public affairs to address the needs of citizens (UNDP, 2018). It is more than just the use of political power over others, and is also about the extent to which governments use public resources responsibly, and provide necessary services in a way that enhances the quality of life for all people. The notions highlighted are those of the rule of law, participation, responsiveness, and equity as an integral part that would help facilitate a stable and well-functioning society.

A government that is open and transparent in its decision making process, provides citizens with information and opportunities to observe the use of public power is exercising good governance. Accountability to hold public institutions and public officials responsible for their decisions and actions or inactions and inclusivity means to ensure equality of opportunities for all groups to

participate in and benefit from national development, especially vulnerable groups (UNDP, 2018). Good governance also requires efficiency and effectiveness of the administration system, so that all public programmes and policies deliver the desired results without any waste or abuse of public money. Moreover, good governance facilitates active citizen participation in civic/political life, allowing citizens and communities to express their opinions and influence policy decisions. However, if these capacities are maintained, good governance can be a catalyst for sustainable development, social stability and economic progress (UNDP, 2018).

The literature revealed four governance principles as being of paramount importance to this study. The concept of accountability inculcates the idea that the decisions and activities of leaders and institutions are held accountable and that public officials are held responsible to the citizens and act in their interest and not in their interests. It can mean that accountability systems are robust, accountability institutions are effective, the conduct of public officials is transparent and there are procedures that enable citizens to seek explanations and make things right. (Adejumobi, 2010). To ensure justice, equality and order in society, rules of law means laws are applied and enforced fairly and without discrimination, favouritism or prejudice, including against those in authority (World Bank, 2017). By encouraging citizens to take part in decision-making, elections and other governance processes, meaningful participation fosters inclusion and enhances democracy (International Crisis Group, 2020); meaningful participation enables citizens to voice their opinions about matters that concern them and boosts the acceptance of governmental decisions. Government effectiveness is related to the efficient delivery of public services, responsiveness to citizens' needs, and the successful implementation of policy, which are all essential components of a capable and development-oriented state (UNDP, 2018).

Good governance, thus, is not a theoretical concept, but it has important consequences for citizens' lives as it has an impact on the provision of services, security, economic opportunities, and citizens' participation in political processes. The efforts to apply these principles in the country Nigeria were made during the period 2015 – 2023, but with inconsistent application, with anti-corruption campaigns, electoral reform, public financial management and social intervention programmes, only diminishing the effectiveness and influencing citizens' trust in democratic institutions (BudgIT, 2021; Transparency International, 2022).

Democratic Development

Democratic development is the process by which democratic institutions, practices, and values are consolidated in a country in such a way that political power is used in ways that respect citizens' rights, freedoms, and participation (Diamond, 2019). It emphasizes establishing a political climate in which power comes from the populace, and in which its rulers are responsible to the ruled. Democratic development is an ongoing process and places a strong focus on participation, equality and the defence of civil liberties as vital foundations of a stable political system.

There are four aspects of democratic development that are applicable in this research. Political stability refers to a peaceful transfer of power and a decrease in political conflict, that fosters national unity, trust in the democratic process and enables institutions to operate without disruption. Institutional strengthening entails the creation of independent and effective institutions, including electoral bodies, the judiciary, anti-corruption institutions, that support their democratic processes and help to combat abuse of power (Osuchukwu, 2022). Civic engagement is about encouraging the people to engage in decision making and governance processes, thereby strengthening the social contract between the government and the people. Rule of law and protection of human rights ensure citizens' freedoms are respected, and that laws are fairly enforced, further strengthening the legitimacy of government action.

Democratic development is a process as well as an outcome; it is a sign of the outcome of governance practices when they are translated into benefits for citizens. Nigeria – 2015 to 2023 was a period of both achievements and challenges. Insecurity, corruption, and socio-economic challenges sometimes undermine the effectiveness of democracy reforms (Bekoe, 2015; UNDP, 2018), which highlights the need for sustained commitment, continuous improvement, and effective leadership for the advancement of democracy.

2.2 Empirical Review

There is broad empirical support for the proposition that governance quality and democratic outcomes is not parallel processes, but rather interdependent. There is existing empirical work broadly in support to the proposition that governance quality and democratic outcomes is not parallel processes, but rather interdependent. Even though democratic forms have been institutionalised since 1999, democratic consolidation of governance has been limited by low institutionalisation, elite control of the political process, and the continued existence of the old style of 'patronage politics', as found by Adejumobi (2010) in Nigeria. The importance of accountability and rule of law for the survival of a democracy, however, was highlighted by Diamond's (2019) comparison of democratic backsliding, which argues that it is more often caused by unaccountable, corrupt government than a failure of economic conditions.

Academic conclusions are supported by institutional evaluations, drawn from empirical evidence. Nigeria has been a low performer on public sector integrity as indicated by Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2022, 2023) and the restriction

of civic space, electoral integrity, and the overall rating of Nigeria by the Freedom House (2023) that has rated the country as 'partly free' on the 2023 index. The fiscal governance reviews conducted by BudgIT (2021) also identify that there are regular shortfalls between the level of public finance commitments and the quality of the services that are delivered, at both the federal and state levels. An account of the state response to the #EndSARS protests of 2020 by Human Rights Watch (2021), and the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM) finding of failures of accountability in electoral administration (2023), further indicate persisting gaps in accountability in both security governance and electoral administration. Human Rights Watch's (2021) reporting on the state response to the #EndSARS protests and the European Union Election Observation Mission's (2023) assessment of the 2023 general elections, are also pointers to continued failures to hold accountable in the fields of security governance and electoral administration.

All this empirical material points to a pattern: technical and institutional innovations have shared space with an ongoing set of governance failures, and the failures have a measurable impact on the trust and credibility of the electoral process and civic participation. Much of this literature, however, considers each governance indicator in isolation. There is very little literature that has systematically related the set of principles of good governance to the pertinent aspect of democratic development in one specific case of Nigeria bounded in time. This is an area where the present study is aimed at closing.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the Good Governance Theory that came from the global development institutions and emphasizes that quality of governance affects the degree of democratic development and national development. Good Governance Theory defines governance as a process of governance that is aimed at the well-being of the whole society. It highlights the fact that a democratic governance system is not possible if governance is corrupt, exclusionary, abusive of power and has weak institutions.

Good governance is grounded on the principles of accountability, transparency, rule of law, effectiveness in the delivery of public services, citizen participation in the decision-making process, responsiveness to the needs of citizens and equity in distribution of state resources. These principles are a set of standards to judge if a government is functioning to promote democratic development. Accountability helps to ensure that leaders are held accountable to the people and public institutions are subject to regulation. Transparency builds citizens' confidence in government by making information accessible for citizens. The rule of law is upheld; there are equal legal and institutional standards for both leaders and citizens. Citizens can fully engage in the governance process by voting in elections and/or engaging in civic involvement through participation. Responsiveness is the timely delivery and effectiveness of services to meet the needs of the people and inclusiveness is the absence of discrimination against any social group and the fair treatment of all.

It is however pertinent to ask whether governance practices in the Nigerian democratic space between 2015 and 2023, were actually reflective of these principles. Public perception of governance has been influenced by issues like electoral disputes, growing insecurity, economic difficulties, and allegations of mismanagement of public resources. This study therefore uses the Good Governance Theory as an analytical tool to examine how well governance during this period facilitated or impeded democratic development. The theory provides a framework for comprehending the contribution of the conduct of leadership, public administration reforms, anti-corruption initiatives, the management of state institutions and respect for civil liberties to the stability of democracy in Nigeria with implications that only democratic development grounded in democratic governance, which guarantees accountability, transparency, rule of law and participatory inclusion, becomes meaningful.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study is a qualitative study using documentary and content analysis approach. The study focuses on uncovering patterns, trends and meaning in governance and democratic-performance data that is already available, but the design facilitates the systematic, thematic analysis of evidence from multiple independent sources over the same time period.

4.2 Sources of Data

Only secondary sources were used for data. These include government policy documents and official reports, Electoral records and Election Observation Reports (including the European Union Election Observation Mission's (2023) final report on the general elections of 2023), Governmental and Integrity Indexes (including the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (2023) and Freedom House (2023) Freedom in the World reports), Human Rights Monitoring Reports (including Human Rights Watch 2021),

Fiscal Governance Review by civil society organisations (BudgIT 2021) and peer-reviewed scholarly literature on Nigerian Governance and Democratisation).

4.3 Method of Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used for analysing data. Documents were read and coded on the basis of the five dimensions of governance studied (transparency, accountability, rule of law, citizen participation and government effectiveness), as well as the four dimensions of democracy reviewed in the literature (political stability, institutional strengthening, civic engagement and rule of law/human rights). Themes were then constructed within and across sources to give an overall sense of the findings from the recurring patterns in these sources, which are presented in Section 5.

4.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study is based on Nigeria's governance experiences from 2015 to 2023 which covers two presidential tenures. It is a qualitative, document-based research study and thus does not produce any new survey or statistical data, but instead depends on the credibility of the existing data sources from institutional, governmental, and scholarly sources; therefore, the findings are not to be considered as empirically measured data but as a synthesis of the documented data. The patterns that are identified here would benefit from being supplemented by primary data, such as citizen surveys or elite interviews, to validate and extend patterns.

5. RESULTS/FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of the documentary evidence, Nigeria had a complex relation between governance practice and democratic performance between 2015 and 2023. The quality of democratic processes and outcomes were influenced by key governance principles of accountability, transparency, rule of law, public sector effectiveness and citizen participation. Despite some positive developments, with regards to economic policy reform and improvement in service delivery, other issues remained, including corruption, public-sector impunity, and the lack of implementation capacity (World Bank, 2024). Results are presented below by the three thematic areas identified from the evidence.

Electoral Integrity and Institutional Trust

A focus on electoral integrity and institutional trust was at the heart of democratic development in the reporting period. Electoral administration developed technically, but during big elections many irregularities and disruptions were reported, impacting public confidence in the results and the institutions that govern it (Freedom House, 2023). The role of election management institutions and judicial independence will continue to be crucial to the success of electoral processes and their contribution to good democratic consolidation.

Accountability and Control of Corruption

The accountability and corruption control remained major governance challenge for deepening of democracy. Public sector integrity was perceived low according to international indices and expert assessments, which affect citizens' trust and thus influence policy-making. Anti-corruption law and enforcement was weak, and corrupt practices were common in key sectors, undermining democratic institutions and limiting the state's capacity to provide equitably distributed public goods (Transparency International, 2023).

Civil Liberties and the State Response to Protest

Democratic development also was influenced by civil liberties and the state's reaction to protest. The #EndSARS protests of 2020, which brought together youth across the country to demand police reform, as well as more extensive governance reforms, brought the theme of civic activism to the fore of democratic life. These protests, and the failure by police to hold accountable those in charge for excessive force, contributed to a loss of faith in the state's commitment to human rights as a basis for democratic engagement (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

The findings lead to three interrelated channels that are the main ways governance performance affected democratic outcomes in 2015–2023. Institutional performance and rule based governance had a negative impact on the credibility of elections and stability of political competition. Second, outcomes of accountability and anti-corruption influenced citizen trust and government's ability to provide public goods. Third, the level of tolerance of civil liberties and the space left for civic action shaped the quality of political participation and the citizens' capacity to hold power to account.

6. DISCUSSION

The results support the hypotheses of Good Governance Theory in general: if the four fundamental elements – accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation and effectiveness – were not consistently applied, so was the development of democracy. This is observed to be in line with what Adejumobi (2010) noted to be the failure of weak institutionalisation of the democracy in Nigeria rather than the absence of formal democratic structures, and Diamond (2019) who wrote that democracies are more likely to be undermined by ineffective governance, as opposed to solely by economic downturn.

Governance deficits damage democratic progress by fostering a decline in trust of institutions and diminishing the structures and processes that enable a democracy to function. If citizens don't feel their votes are being counted, or if the public's tax dollars are being wasted, then they become cynical about joining and about the integrity of the political process. The lack of trust reduces political participation and public trust in government, thereby weakening the ability of society to hold leaders accountable (Transparency International, 2023). Limited accountability and anti-corruption efforts in the public service lead to the malnourishment of public policy and inequitable distribution of public goods, with private interests capturing public offices, and thus, allocating poorly or diverting public resources for use elsewhere, thus compromising quality of health and education, infrastructure, etc. (Osuchukwu, 2022). This contributes to the growing inequality and perception that democratic elections do not bring any clear benefits to people's lives, thereby damaging institutional credibility and reducing political participation and satisfaction (World Bank, n.d.; Transparency International, 2023).

Lack of electoral administration and low independence of oversight agencies negatively affect the credibility of elections and the stability of political competition. In addition to the technical improvements, international observers reported on continuing challenges to electoral results, such as irregularities, logistical issues and disputed outcomes, which affected the confidence in the electoral process (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). If the general impression of electoral impurity grows, it makes disputes that follow the elections more likely and makes it less attractive for opposition party to accept the peaceful transfer of power.

Civil Liberties are not sufficiently protected, and there is limited accountability for the excessive use of force, which limits civic space and democratic participation. Numerous incidents of state repression of protest left many people concerned that their rights would not be respected when they protested or came together to demand reform (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Lack of civic space and limited accountability for rights violations diminish the ability of social movements, and ordinary citizens, to shape public policy outside of the electoral arena, undermining pluralism in democratic life.

Failure in governance also has a cascading effect on democracy in relation to insecurity. Electoral processes founder and communities are less able to be secured when the state is unable to provide it. The prolonged state of insecurity can lead to displacement, interruption to livelihoods and focus of power in security institutions that may be less subject to civilian oversight, which can be warranted on security grounds but can also have the potential to consolidate the impetus of undemocratic practice. Lastly, governance gaps impede long-term democratic consolidation by reducing the capacity of institutions to provide for reform. The sustained democratic performance demands strong regulation, clear budgeting, fair and just judiciary, and a professional public service; if these elements are missing, reforms are fragile and rely on individual office-holders, not on effective institutions.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of a democratic system hinges on the accountability, transparency, responsiveness and rule-of-law of the institutions of governance. Though Nigeria has taken steps forward towards democracy since the return to democracy, there is a lack of uniformity in those gains when the principles of good governance are not fully observed, as is evident from the period between 2015 and 2023. The lack of accountability, endemic corruption, electoral lack of credibility, and curtailed civic space have dampened the trust in democratic institutions. There is also growing frustration among the citizens over the government's performance, which has been blamed on the persistent disconnect between the government and the people, especially the young who are not involved in the decision-making process. The results indicate that democratic progress cannot be achieved unless governance mechanisms are strengthened and leadership is representative of the interests of all citizens.

Based on these findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- i. Nigeria should reinforce independent institutions that oversee public finance, electoral administration, and the justice sector, insulating them from undue political interference.
- ii. Public officials must be held responsible for their actions, and corruption cases must be pursued to conclusion without political interference.

- iii. Citizens should have wider access to government information so that they can engage with and monitor public decisions effectively.
- iv. Government should continue to invest in security-sector reforms that protect human rights and guarantee the safety of voters and communities during political processes.
- v. Economic policy should prioritise inclusive growth, so that democracy is experienced not only as a political system but as a source of measurable improvement in living conditions.
- vi. Civic education and youth engagement should be strengthened to rebuild trust and encourage citizens to participate actively in governance.

With sincerity and consistency these reforms can give Nigeria the opportunity to shed the failures of the recent years of development and head towards a stable, responsive and people-oriented democracy.

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