



EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between democracy and good governance in Nigeria, focusing on the challenges and opportunities within its democratic framework since the transition to civilian rule in 1999. While democracy is expected to promote good governance through accountability, transparency, and citizen participation, Nigeria's experience has been marked by systemic issues such as corruption, electoral malpractices, weak institutions, and public distrust. Using secondary data and an analytical approach, the research explores whether democratic structures enhance or hinder governance efficiency. Findings reveal mixed outcomes, with democracy providing a framework for political participation but governance remaining weak due to institutional inefficiencies and corruption. Key challenges include electoral fraud, excessive executive power, and weak rule of law. The study highlights the importance of strengthening democratic institutions, enhancing accountability, promoting civic engagement, and ensuring judicial independence. Policy recommendations include electoral reforms, anti-corruption measures, and initiatives to boost political participation. The research underscores the interdependence of democracy, governance, and the rule of law, emphasizing the need for holistic reforms to achieve sustainable development and political stability in Nigeria. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can foster a more accountable, inclusive, and effective democratic system that serves the interests of its citizens and promotes national progress.

Keywords: *Democracy, Good-governance, Rule of Law, Accountability, Transparency*

Introduction

The connection between democracy and good governance is a central theme in political theory and development studies. Johnston (2006) defines democracy as a governance system expected to foster good governance through mechanisms like accountability, transparency, and citizen participation. Good governance, in contrast, is marked by efficient and equitable management of public resources, adherence to the rule of law, and responsiveness to citizens' needs (Sharma, 2007; Cerrillo-i-Martínez, 2023; Channuwong, 2018). This relationship has been a critical focus for scholars and practitioners, particularly in developing nations (Apter, 1980; Cheema, 2005; Panday, 2023; Haque, Shyaka, & Mudacumura, 2017). In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and a major economic player, this dynamic is complex and multifaceted. Since transitioning to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has faced



significant challenges in strengthening its democratic institutions, including corruption, electoral fraud, social unrest, and regional inequalities.

Democracy, understood as a system where power lies with the people through free and fair elections, encompasses not only electoral processes but also the promotion of civil liberties, accountability, and the rule of law (Sankatsing, 2004; Tilly, 2009; Siegle, 2012). Governance, on the other hand, refers to the systems, processes, and institutions through which individuals and groups articulate their interests, resolve conflicts, and fulfill their rights and obligations (Woods, 1999; Farazmand, 2012; Agana, Millar, & Ba-an, 2025). This study examines the interplay between democratic practices and governance efficiency in Nigeria, exploring whether democratic structures enhance or hinder good governance. The research employs secondary data and an analytical approach to data analysis.

Problem Statement

The relationship between democracy and good governance in Nigeria remains contentious. While democracy is expected to promote good governance through accountability, transparency, and citizen participation, Nigeria's experience has been mixed. Since 1999, the country has adopted democratic principles but continues to grapple with governance challenges such as corruption, weak institutions, electoral fraud, insecurity, and public distrust (Arthur, 2025; Berebon, 2025). Despite democratic structures, governance in Nigeria is often inefficient, marked by poor service delivery and weak adherence to the rule of law (Folorunsho & Samuel, 2025; John & Luma, 2025). Electoral processes, though institutionalized, are frequently undermined by vote-buying, political violence, and lack of credibility (Dan-Woniowe, 2025; Sule, 2025; Bah, 2025).

This research critically examines the extent to which democracy has contributed to good governance in Nigeria. It identifies factors that enhance or hinder governance within a democratic framework and assesses whether Nigeria's democratic institutions are structured to ensure accountability, transparency, and sustainable development. By analyzing the interplay between democracy and governance, the study provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Akmal, Soharwardi, Sarwar, and Iftikhar (2025) explored the relationship between democracy and governance in 50 developing countries using panel data and the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) estimation technique. Their findings indicate a positive correlation between the two, emphasizing the need to balance social sector reforms and governance for sustainable growth. Similarly, a study on political participation and democratic governance in rural Nigeria, using mixed methods, found a significant relationship between the variables. The study recommends government support for rural communities through infrastructure development and gender-inclusive politics (Adewale, Adebogun, Onyejelem, Gankon, & Ridwan, 2025). Conversely, Sipma and Maleki (2024) found no significant relationship between democracy and governance in their quantitative study using LISS Data Archive.



Tarverdi, Saha, and Campbell (2019) argue that while democracy influences governance quality, electoral democracies do not necessarily outperform authoritarian regimes in governance. Their study, using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and panel data from over 100 countries (1996–2012), found that political freedom and civil rights significantly impact governance levels, with democracy strengthening governance primarily in the top half of the conditional distribution.

Analysis of Democratic Values

Rule of Law

The rule of law is foundational to both democracy and governance, ensuring equal, fair, and consistent application of laws. It protects citizens' rights, prevents power abuse, and fosters trust and stability. Without it, governance becomes arbitrary, and democratic processes risk being undermined by authoritarianism or corruption. In well-functioning democracies, strong governance and the rule of law reinforce democratic principles, creating a cycle of trust, participation, and development. However, in developing nations, challenges such as corruption, ethnic divisions, and economic inequality complicate this relationship, necessitating context-specific solutions.

Accountability

Democratic governance is defined by the principles of representation, engagement, and inclusivity, while accountability pertains to the systems that hold governments responsible for their actions. The relationship between these two concepts is essential for ensuring that public officials act in the best interests of the populace and adhere to democratic ideals. Schumpeter (1942) and Dahl (1989) highlight that accountability is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance, allowing citizens to hold elected representatives accountable for their choices. Accountability can be seen as vertical (from citizens to government) and horizontal (through checks and balances among institutions) (Bovens et al., 2008). Buchanan and Tullock (1962) assert that accountability measures can help reduce the self-serving behavior of politicians, thereby enhancing effective governance. They further emphasize the need for electoral systems that encourage politicians to remain answerable to their constituents.

Empirical studies by Persson, Tabellini, and Trebbi (2003) examine how various institutional frameworks impact accountability levels in democratic systems. Additionally, Putnam (2000) posits that social capital strengthens democratic governance by promoting community involvement and accountability. Research indicates that societies with robust civic engagement networks are better able to hold leaders accountable and demand increased transparency. Transparency International's investigations (various years) have demonstrated a direct link between the degree of accountability in democratic institutions and the incidence of corruption. Studies suggest that democratic erosion, often marked by power consolidation and a decline in checks and balances, weakens accountability. Research by Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) addresses the threats posed by populist leaders who may undermine democratic principles. Similarly, studies reveal that in numerous democracies, accountability mechanisms are inconsistent and often overshadowed by socio-economic inequalities that diminish the voices of less privileged citizens (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008).



Transparency

Transparency is a core principle of democratic governance, involving the openness and accessibility of government processes, decisions, and information. The interplay between democratic governance and transparency is vital, as it promotes accountability, boosts citizen engagement, and helps reduce corruption. This literature review examines important theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that shed light on this connection. According to scholars like Androniceanu (2021) And Kumagai, Iorio (2020), transparency is crucial for enabling informed citizen participation and building trust in governmental institutions. Lee and Li (2021) suggest that transparent practices can enhance public trust by allowing citizens to examine governmental actions, thus legitimizing democratic institutions. The Open Government Partnership (OGP) underscores the importance of transparency as a fundamental element in governance improvement, highlighting how transparent governance contributes to better civic engagement and the effectiveness of public services(Onufreiciuc & Hodos (2024).

Numerous studies have confirmed the negative correlation between corruption and transparency in governance (Chen, & Ganapati, 2023; Salehi, Ammar Ajel & Zimon, 2023; Mungiu-Pippidi, (2023). Research by Transparency International indicates that increased government transparency is associated with decreased perceived corruption, particularly in democratic contexts where checks and balances exist. Additionally, Wood, and Aronczyk (2020) emphasize the significant role of media as a promoter of transparency. A research reveals that independent media can uncover government misconduct and raise public awareness, thereby strengthening democratic governance (Paskhalis, Rosenfeld & Tertychnaya, 2022), also act as advocates for transparency and accountability in government operations, ultimately reinforcing democratic practices. Other studies have indicated that transparency encourages greater citizen involvement in governance (Androniceanu, 2021). Similarly with, Fung (2013) provide evidence showing that open government initiatives that enhance transparency lead to higher public participation in policy-making, thereby enriching democratic governance with diverse perspectives in decision-making processes.

Despite the critical role of transparency, many democracies face obstacles due to political resistance. Research by Garde, Gokani, Perez-Llantada, and Souter (2025) indicates that some governments may distort information or oppose transparency initiatives that threaten their power, thereby undermining democratic values. Coleman (2005) notes that while technology can improve transparency, unequal access to digital resources can hinder marginalized groups from participating in the democratic process and accessing governmental information, which limits the effectiveness of transparency efforts. Furthermore, scholars like Hood and Heald (2006) caution that transparency can produce unintended outcomes. Further reveals, too much transparency may lead to information overload or risk exposing sensitive data, which can impede effective governance.

Findings

Secondary data analysis reveals mixed outcomes in Nigeria's democracy-governance relationship. While democracy provides a framework for political participation and institutional checks, governance



remains weak due to corruption and inefficiencies (Obi, 2020). Flawed electoral processes undermine governance legitimacy, as highlighted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Transparency International (2021). Civil society efforts have improved budget transparency and anti-corruption measures, but public dissatisfaction persists due to insecurity, economic mismanagement, and weak institutions (Afrobarometer surveys).

Policy Briefing and Policy Recommendations

Democracy and good governance are interconnected, with democracy providing the foundation for transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. In Nigeria, challenges such as weak institutions, electoral fraud, and corruption hinder this relationship.

Key issues include:

- a. **Electoral Integrity Deficit:** Electoral malpractices undermine democratic legitimacy.
- b. **Institutional Weaknesses:** Excessive executive power weakens checks and balances.
- c. **Corruption:** Mismanagement of resources reduces government effectiveness.
- d. **Weak Rule of Law:** Political interference in the judiciary erodes public trust.
- e. **Citizen Disengagement:** Low political participation limits government responsiveness.

Policy Recommendations

- a. **Strengthen Democratic Institutions:** Enhance the independence of the judiciary, legislature, and electoral commission.
- b. **Improve Governance Efficiency:** Enforce anti-corruption measures and performance-based evaluations for public officials.
- c. **Enhance Political Participation:** Promote voter education and support civil society advocacy.
- d. **Ensure Rule of Law:** Strengthen legal institutions and ensure impartial adjudication.
- e. **Reform Electoral Processes:** Introduce technological innovations and transparent party financing.

Conclusion

Democracy and good governance are vital for Nigeria's sustainable development. Addressing challenges requires institutional reforms, electoral integrity, civic engagement, and adherence to the rule of law. By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can build a more accountable, inclusive, and effective democratic system, fostering national development and political stability. For Nigeria's democratic governance reflects systemic weaknesses that hinder the realization of democratic ideals. Overcoming these challenges demands institutional reforms, political accountability, and active citizen participation to ensure democracy serves as a vehicle for good governance and national progress.



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