PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES, INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS AND PROSPECTS FOR REFORM

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Abstract
Public accountability is a central condition for democratic governance because it connects the exercise of public power to the interests, rights and welfare of citizens. In Nigeria, the return to civilian rule in 1999 created expectations that democratic institutions would restrain corruption, improve public-service delivery and make officeholders answerable to the people. However, more than two decades into the Fourth Republic, accountability remains uneven and frequently contested. This paper examines the meaning and importance of public accountability, analyses the challenges confronting democratic governance in Nigeria, evaluates the institutional mechanisms established to promote accountability, and assesses prospects for reform. The paper argues that Nigeria possesses a relatively extensive legal and institutional architecture for accountability, including the Constitution, the legislature, the judiciary, audit institutions, anti-corruption agencies, procurement and fiscal-responsibility laws, the Freedom of Information Act, the media and civil society. Nevertheless, these mechanisms are weakened by executive dominance, political interference, weak enforcement, corruption, inadequate funding, limited citizen participation, insecurity and a culture of impunity. The paper concludes that meaningful reform requires stronger institutional independence, transparent appointments, adequate funding, digital transparency, judicial reform, civic education, protection for whistleblowers and journalists, and sustained political commitment to the rule of law.
Keywords: Public accountability, Democratic governance, Corruption, Institutional reform, Rule of law

1. Introduction

Democratic governance is commonly associated with periodic elections, constitutionalism, separation of powers, respect for human rights, citizen participation and responsive public institutions. Yet elections alone do not guarantee democracy. A political system may conduct elections while public officials remain unaccountable, public resources are mismanaged, institutions are captured by powerful elites, and citizens are excluded from decisions that affect their lives. Public accountability therefore constitutes one of the most important tests of democratic governance.

Nigeria returned to democratic civilian rule in May 1999 after several years of military government. The 1999 Constitution established a presidential system with executive, legislative and judicial branches, as well as federal and state levels of government. “It also created institutions intended to check the abuse of power, including the National Assembly, the courts, the Code of Conduct Bureau, the Code of Conduct Tribunal and the Office of the Auditor-General for the Federation” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Subsequent laws established or strengthened bodies such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), the Fiscal Responsibility Commission and the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI).

Despite these arrangements, public accountability in Nigeria remains fragile. Corruption, electoral malpractice, weak public institutions, insecurity, poverty, unemployment and poor service delivery continue to undermine public confidence in democratic governance. Scholars have observed that “democratic governance in Nigeria has been confronted by electoral malpractice, inter- and intra-ethnic cleavages, religious crises and insecurity, weak democratic institutions and institutionalized corruption since 1999” (Adeyeri, 2012, p. 55). Similarly, research on accountability in Nigeria finds an “absence of strong counteracting power and effective institutional mechanisms, to hold public officials accountable for resources expended in the course of their service to the citizenry” (Ojo, 2018, para. 1).

This paper addresses four main questions. First, what is public accountability and why is it important for democratic governance? Second, what challenges limit public accountability and democratic governance in Nigeria? Third, what institutional mechanisms exist to promote accountability, and how effective are they? Fourth, what reforms are necessary to strengthen accountability and democratic governance in Nigeria?
The paper is organised into eight sections. Section 2 explains the conceptual framework. Section 3 examines the relationship between public accountability and democratic governance. Section 4 analyses the historical and political context of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. Section 5 discusses the major challenges to accountability and

democratic governance. Section 6 evaluates institutional mechanisms. Section 7 assesses prospects for reform. Section 8 presents recommendations and conclusions

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Public Accountability

Public accountability refers to the obligation of public officials, institutions and officeholders to explain, justify and answer for their decisions, actions and use of public resources. It also involves the possibility of sanction where officials abuse power, violate the law or fail to perform their duties. Accountability is therefore not merely about reporting; it requires consequences for misconduct and remedies for those harmed by poor governance.

A widely cited distinction is that between *vertical* and *horizontal* accountability. Vertical accountability refers to the ability of citizens and civil society to hold leaders accountable, especially through elections, public debate, protest, media scrutiny and civic participation. Horizontal accountability refers to the capacity of state institutions, such as legislatures, courts, audit offices and anti-corruption agencies, to oversee and restrain other state institutions. O'Donnell (1998) describes "horizontal accountability as the existence of state agencies that are legally enabled and empowered to take actions that span from routine oversight to criminal sanctions or impeachment in relation to actions or omissions by other agents or agencies of the state that may be qualified as unlawful" (p. 117).

Accountability also has several dimensions. Political accountability concerns the responsibility of elected officials to voters and representative institutions. Administrative accountability concerns the responsibility of civil servants and public agencies to follow rules, procedures and performance standards. Financial accountability concerns the proper management, recording and auditing of public funds. Legal accountability concerns compliance with the constitution, statutes and judicial decisions. Social accountability concerns the engagement of citizens, communities, the media and civil-society organisations in monitoring public institutions.

Schedler (1999) argues that "accountability contains three related elements: answerability, monitoring and enforcement. Public officials must be required to explain their conduct; their conduct must be monitored; and violations must attract meaningful consequences. Without enforcement, accountability becomes ceremonial." As Schedler (1999) explains, "accountability involves the ability to punish as well as the obligation to answer" (p. 14).

2.2 Democratic Governance

Democratic governance refers to a system of collective decision-making in which political authority derives from the people, is exercised under constitutional limits, and is directed toward the public good. It includes not only electoral democracy but also the quality of institutions, public participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness and respect for rights.

The World Bank (1992) defines governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (p. 1). This definition is important because it links governance to development outcomes. A government may be formally democratic but still perform poorly if it cannot manage public resources transparently, deliver services effectively or protect citizens' rights.

Democratic governance therefore requires more than elections. It requires functioning institutions that can restrain executive power, protect fundamental rights, resolve disputes peacefully, manage public finances responsibly and respond to citizens' needs. In the Nigerian context, democratic governance is closely connected to federalism, ethnic and religious diversity, resource control, insecurity and the legacy of military rule.

2.3 Transparency, Integrity and Participation

Public accountability depends on transparency, integrity and participation. Transparency means that government decisions, budgets, contracts, procurement processes and performance information are accessible to the public. Integrity means that public officials act honestly, impartially and in accordance with the public interest. Participation means that citizens have meaningful opportunities to influence public policy and monitor government performance.

"The relationship among these values can be expressed simply: transparency enables citizens to see what government is doing; participation enables them to question and influence it; and accountability ensures that wrongdoing has consequences. Where any of these elements is absent, democratic governance becomes weaker." (Ojo, 2018).

Public Accountability and Democratic Governance

Accountability as a Foundation of Democracy

Public accountability is foundational to democracy because it prevents public power from becoming private power. Elected officials exercise authority on behalf of citizens, not as personal property. Accountability reminds officeholders that they are trustees of public resources and servants of the public interest.

> In representative democracy, elections are the principal mechanism of vertical accountability. Citizens vote leaders into office and can remove them through the ballot. However, elections occur infrequently and may be influenced by money, ethnicity, religion, insecurity, voter suppression or manipulation. Between elections, citizens require other channels through which to demand explanations and seek redress. These include a free press, civil society, public hearings, freedom-of-information laws, courts, ombudsman institutions and participatory budgeting (Schedler, 1998).

Accountability and the Rule of Law

The rule of law requires that government officials be subject to the same laws as ordinary citizens. No public official should be above the law. Accountability strengthens the rule of law by ensuring that violations of law by powerful persons are investigated, prosecuted and punished.

"In Nigeria, the Constitution provides for the separation of powers and establishes mechanisms of checks and balances. Section 4 vests legislative powers in the National Assembly, Section 5 vests executive powers in the President, and Section 6 vests judicial powers in the courts" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). These provisions are intended to prevent the concentration of power in one branch of government. However, constitutional design alone does not guarantee accountability. Institutions must be independent, competent, adequately resourced and willing to act.

Accountability, Corruption and Development

Corruption is one of the most serious threats to public accountability and democratic governance. It diverts public resources from education, health care, infrastructure and security into private hands. It also distorts public policy, weakens institutions, discourages investment and deepens inequality.

"Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index has consistently ranked Nigeria poorly, reflecting widespread perceptions of public-sector corruption. In the 2024 index, Nigeria scored 26 out of 100 and ranked 140th out of 180 countries and territories" (Transparency International, 2025). Although perception indexes do not measure corruption directly, they indicate the seriousness of the accountability problem and the public's limited confidence in institutions.

Corruption also undermines democracy by creating patronage networks. When public offices are used to distribute contracts, jobs, licences and money to supporters, political competition becomes less about ideas and public welfare and more about access to state resources. This weakens political parties, encourages electoral violence and reduces citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

3.4 Accountability and Public Service Delivery

Accountable governance improves service delivery because it creates incentives for officials to perform. When budgets, procurement processes and project implementation are transparent, citizens and oversight bodies can identify waste, delays, inflated contracts and abandoned projects. When officials know that they may be audited, investigated or removed, they are more likely to act responsibly.

Poor accountability, by contrast, produces poor services. Roads may be poorly constructed, hospitals may lack equipment, schools may lack teachers, and security agencies may be under-equipped even when large sums are allocated. Citizens then experience governance not as a public good but as a system that benefits a small political and bureaucratic elite.

4. Historical and Political Context

4.1 Military Rule and Institutional Weakness

Nigeria's accountability problems cannot be understood without reference to its history of military rule. Between independence in 1960 and 1999, Nigeria experienced long periods of military government. Military rule weakened democratic institutions, centralised power, normalised authoritarian practices and weakened civilian oversight.

Although military governments sometimes established anti-corruption tribunals, their approach was often selective and political. Accountability was frequently used as an instrument of power rather than as a neutral democratic principle. This legacy continues to affect Nigeria's political culture, where public office is sometimes viewed as an avenue for personal enrichment and patronage rather than public service.

4.2 The Fourth Republic Since 1999

The Fourth Republic began in 1999 with the adoption of the 1999 Constitution and the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Since then, Nigeria has conducted successive general elections and experienced alternation of power at the federal level. These developments represent important democratic gains.

However, the quality of democracy has remained uneven. "Elections have often been marked by allegations of rigging, vote buying, violence, logistical failures and disputes over results. Political parties remain weakly institutionalised, with internal democracy frequently undermined by godfatherism, imposition of candidates and lack of ideological clarity. Civilian rule has therefore not automatically produced accountable governance" (Ojo, 2018).

4.3 Federalism and Accountability

Nigeria operates a federal system with 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory and 774 local government areas. Federalism can strengthen accountability by bringing government closer to the people and allowing sub-national units to respond to local needs. However, it can also create multiple sites of corruption and weak oversight.

In practice, state governors exercise substantial control over state institutions, including state assemblies, local governments and sometimes the judiciary. Local governments, which are constitutionally recognised, often lack financial and administrative autonomy. This weakens grassroots accountability and reduces citizens' ability to influence local service delivery.

5. Challenges to Public Accountability and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

5.1 Executive Dominance

Executive dominance is a major obstacle to accountability in Nigeria. Presidents and governors often control significant financial, political and coercive resources. This can weaken legislative oversight, compromise law-enforcement agencies and limit judicial independence.

Executive dominance appears in several forms: delay or refusal to implement budgetary provisions, interference in the appointment of oversight officials, pressure on anti-corruption agencies, selective enforcement of laws and use of state institutions against political opponents. Where the executive controls the resources and appointments of oversight bodies, those bodies may become reluctant to investigate powerful officials (O'Donnell, 1998).

5.2 Weak Legislative Oversight

The National Assembly and state houses of assembly have constitutional responsibilities to make laws, approve budgets and oversee the executive. Legislative committees can summon officials, investigate public expenditure and recommend sanctions. In principle, this makes the legislature a central accountability institution.

In practice, legislative oversight is often weak. Some legislators lack technical capacity to analyse budgets and audit reports. Others prioritise constituency projects, party interests or personal benefit over rigorous scrutiny. The relationship between the legislature and the executive may also become cooperative rather than adversarial, especially when members of the same party control both branches.

Moreover, public hearings are sometimes used for political theatre rather than genuine investigation. "Committee reports may be delayed, ignored or not implemented. This weakens the legislature's ability to hold the executive accountable" (O'Donnell, 1998).

5.3 Judicial Delay and Limited Independence

The judiciary is essential for accountability because it interprets the constitution, resolves disputes and can check unlawful executive action. Nigerian courts have occasionally delivered important judgments on elections, fundamental rights, fiscal federalism and administrative justice.

Nevertheless, judicial effectiveness is constrained by case delays, congestion, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, procedural complexity and allegations of corruption. Corruption cases involving politically exposed persons may take many years, allowing accused persons to exploit procedural delays. Judicial independence may also be threatened by executive control over appointments, funding and disciplinary processes.

5.4 Corruption and Impunity

Corruption remains the most visible challenge to accountability in Nigeria. It includes bribery, embezzlement, misappropriation, procurement fraud, money laundering, abuse of office, nepotism and illicit financial flows. Corruption is not limited to one level of government or one political party; it is systemic and affects federal, state and local institutions.

A major problem is impunity. Public officials accused of corruption may be arrested, investigated or charged, but cases may be delayed, settled politically or abandoned. Plea bargains, technical legal arguments, jurisdictional disputes and lack of cooperation between agencies can prevent successful prosecution. When

citizens observe that powerful individuals escape punishment, they lose confidence in the fairness of the political system (Adeyeri, 2012)

5.5 Weak Anti-Corruption Institutions

Nigeria has several anti-corruption agencies, including the ICPC and EFCC. The ICPC was established by the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000, while the EFCC was established by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act 2004. These agencies have recorded some convictions and recovered assets, but their performance remains contested.

Studies of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies identify problems of political interference, inadequate funding, overlapping mandates, weak coordination, poor case management and selective enforcement. Research on the ICPC and EFCC notes that, "despite the existence of two specialised anti-corruption agencies, "corruption continues to soar in the country," raising questions about their institutional design and effectiveness" (Musa, 2020, p. 1). Another study similarly concludes that the agencies' operations have remained insufficiently influential in shaping government policy and practice, thereby weakening their capacity to perform their mandates (Adebayo, 2021, p. 7).

5.6 Weak Public Financial Management

Public financial management is central to accountability. Budgets should be realistic, transparent and aligned with development priorities. Procurement should be competitive and open. Expenditure should be properly recorded and audited. Audit findings should be published and acted upon.

In Nigeria, weaknesses in public financial management include delayed passage of budgets, poor budget implementation, extra-budgetary spending, weak internal controls, poor procurement practices and delayed consideration of audit reports. The Office of the Auditor-General for the Federation produces audit reports, but their recommendations are not always implemented promptly by the executive or enforced by the legislature.

5.7 Limited Access to Information

Access to information enables citizens, journalists and civil-society organisations to monitor government. Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act 2011 gives persons the right to request information from public institutions. It also requires public institutions to proactively publish certain categories of information.

However, implementation remains weak. Many public institutions fail to publish required information, respond late to requests or deny access without valid legal justification. Officials may classify information as security-sensitive or claim that disclosure would harm public interest. As a result, the law's potential to strengthen accountability is not fully realised.

5.8 Insecurity and Shrinking Civic Space

Insecurity affects accountability in several ways. Violent conflict, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and communal violence divert public resources toward emergency security spending. They also make it difficult for citizens to participate in public life, monitor projects or engage elected representatives.

"Insecurity can also be used to justify restrictions on civil liberties. Journalists, activists and critics of government may face harassment, arrest, surveillance or online intimidation. A shrinking civic space weakens vertical accountability because citizens become less able to speak freely, organise and demand answers" (Musa, 2020).

5.9 Weak Political Parties and Electoral Accountability

Political parties are supposed to aggregate interests, recruit leaders, formulate policies and provide voters with choices. In Nigeria, many parties are weakly organised and dominated by powerful individuals or factions. Internal democracy is often limited, and candidates may be selected through imposition rather than transparent primaries.

This weakens electoral accountability. When voters cannot choose among credible candidates or influence party decisions, elections become less meaningful as instruments of accountability. Vote buying further weakens the electoral link between citizens and representatives, because politicians may treat public office as an investment to be recovered after election.

5.10 Low Citizen Awareness and Participation

"Citizen participation is essential for social accountability. However, many Nigerians have limited awareness of their rights, public budgets, procurement processes or accountability institutions. Poverty, low civic education, distrust of government and insecurity can reduce participation (Ojo, 2018).

Civil-society organisations and the media play important roles, but they face funding constraints, legal restrictions, security risks and limited access to official information. Without active citizen engagement, institutional accountability mechanisms may operate in isolation from the people they are meant to serve.

6. Institutional Mechanisms for Public Accountability in Nigeria

6.1 The 1999 Constitution

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 is the primary legal foundation for democratic governance and accountability. It establishes the structure of government, divides powers among the executive, legislature and judiciary, protects fundamental rights and creates institutions intended to prevent abuse of office.

The Constitution also contains provisions on public revenue, expenditure, audit and public conduct. For example, it establishes the Code of Conduct Bureau and Code of Conduct Tribunal, which are intended to promote ethical conduct among public officers. It also requires public officials to declare their assets and liabilities.

However, constitutional provisions require political will and institutional capacity to be effective. Where enforcement is selective or delayed, constitutional accountability mechanisms may become symbolic rather than practical.

6.2 The Legislature

The National Assembly consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Its accountability functions include lawmaking, budget approval, confirmation of appointments, investigation of public institutions and oversight of ministries, departments and agencies.

State assemblies perform similar functions at the state level. Legislative oversight can expose waste, question officials, review audit reports and recommend reforms. Public hearings can also provide citizens with information about government performance.

"Despite this potential, legislative accountability is limited by partisanship, inadequate capacity, weak follow-up and executive influence. Strengthening legislative oversight requires technical support for committees, timely submission of audit reports, transparent committee proceedings and enforcement of recommendations" (Musa, 2020).

6.3 The Judiciary

The judiciary promotes accountability through judicial review, protection of fundamental rights, resolution of election disputes and prosecution of corruption cases. "Courts can declare executive actions unconstitutional, nullify unlawful decisions and order public institutions to comply with the law" (Adebayo, 2021).

The judiciary also plays a role in electoral accountability by adjudicating election petitions. However, prolonged litigation can delay justice and create uncertainty. Judicial reform should therefore focus on timely case management, transparency, integrity, adequate funding and protection from political interference.

6.4 Audit Institutions

"The Office of the Auditor-General for the Federation audits federal public accounts, while state auditors-general audit state accounts. Audit institutions are essential for financial accountability because they examine whether public funds were authorised, spent properly and recorded accurately" (Adebayo, 2021).

Audit reports can reveal irregular payments, unsupported expenditure, procurement violations and poor record-keeping. However, audit findings must be considered by the Public Accounts Committee of the legislature and acted upon by the executive. Where audit reports are delayed, ignored or not published, their accountability value is reduced.

6.5 Anti-Corruption Agencies

The ICPC and EFCC are Nigeria's principal specialised anti-corruption agencies. The ICPC focuses on corruption prevention, investigation and prosecution, as well as public education. The EFCC focuses on economic and financial crimes, including money laundering, advance-fee fraud and corruption-related financial crimes.

These agencies have contributed to investigations, prosecutions, asset recovery and public awareness. However, "their effectiveness depends on independence, funding, professional capacity, inter-agency cooperation and political support. Critics argue that anti-corruption efforts are sometimes selective, especially when powerful political figures are involved" (Adebayo, 2021).

Strengthening these institutions requires transparent appointment processes, security of tenure for leadership, statutory funding, specialised courts, digital case-management systems and clear coordination mechanisms among the EFCC, ICPC, police, Code of Conduct Bureau, Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit and judiciary.

6.6 Public Procurement and Fiscal Responsibility Institutions

The Public Procurement Act 2007 established the Bureau of Public Procurement to regulate public procurement and promote transparency, competition and value for money. The Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007 established the Fiscal Responsibility Commission to promote prudent management of public finances.

These laws are important because procurement and budgeting are major sites of corruption. Competitive bidding, open contract awards, publication of procurement information, citizen monitoring and sanctions for violations can reduce waste and fraud.

However, implementation is inconsistent. "Some procurement processes are manipulated through emergency procurement, contract splitting, inflated pricing or collusion between officials and contractors. Fiscal responsibility rules may be ignored, especially during periods of revenue pressure or political urgency" (Adebayo, 2021).

6.7 Freedom of Information and Open Government

The Freedom of Information Act 2011 is a major legal instrument for transparency. It allows citizens and organisations to request records from public institutions and requires proactive disclosure of certain information.

Nigeria also joined the Open Government Partnership in 2016. Through national action plans, government has committed to reforms in areas such as open contracting, beneficial ownership transparency, fiscal transparency, anti-corruption and citizen engagement. These commitments are promising, but their impact depends on implementation, political leadership and public awareness (Musa, 2020).

6.8 Media and Civil Society

The media performs a watchdog function by investigating corruption, reporting on public expenditure, amplifying citizens' voices and informing the public. Investigative journalism has exposed procurement fraud, misuse of public funds, human-rights abuses and failures of public institutions.

Civil-society organisations contribute through research, advocacy, litigation, budget monitoring, election observation and civic education. They help translate technical governance issues into public concerns and pressure institutions to act.

However, journalists and civil-society actors face risks, including harassment, arrest, defamation suits, online abuse and restricted access to information. "Protecting press freedom and civic space is therefore essential for democratic accountability" (Schedler, 1999).

6.9 Digital Governance and Technology

Digital technology offers new opportunities for accountability. E-procurement platforms can publish contract details; open-budget portals can show allocations and spending; digital payment systems can reduce cash-based corruption; and citizen-reporting platforms can allow communities to report poor service delivery.

Technology alone cannot solve accountability problems. It can be undermined by poor data quality, limited internet access, cyber insecurity and lack of institutional commitment. Nevertheless, digital transparency can make it easier for citizens, auditors, journalists and civil society to monitor government

7. Prospects for Reform

7.1 Strengthening Institutional Independence

The first priority is to strengthen the independence of accountability institutions. Anti-corruption agencies, audit institutions, procurement regulators, electoral bodies and human-rights institutions should be protected from arbitrary removal, political interference and financial dependence on the executive.

Reform should include transparent and merit-based appointments, fixed tenure for leadership, clear removal procedures, statutory funding and public reporting requirements. Where institutions depend on the executive for budget approval or appointment, their independence is compromised.

7.2 Reforming Public Financial Management

Nigeria should strengthen budget transparency, procurement openness and audit follow-up. Budget documents should be published in accessible formats and in good time. Contract awards, beneficiaries, values and implementation status should be publicly available. Audit reports should be submitted promptly, debated publicly and followed by enforceable corrective action.

Open contracting is particularly important. Publishing the full procurement cycle—from planning and tendering to award and implementation—allows citizens and journalists to identify suspicious patterns. It also improves competition and value for money.

7.3 Judicial and Electoral Reform

Judicial reform should prioritise timely resolution of corruption and election cases. Specialised anti-corruption courts, digital case management, witness protection and stronger prosecutorial capacity can reduce delay. Judicial appointments and discipline should be transparent and insulated from political manipulation.

Electoral reform should strengthen the independence and capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission, improve voter registration and result transparency, regulate campaign finance, reduce vote buying

and address electoral violence. Political parties should also be required to conduct transparent primaries and maintain democratic internal structures.

7.4 Protecting Whistleblowers, Journalists and Civil Society

Whistleblowers often provide crucial information about corruption, but they face retaliation, job loss, harassment and physical danger. Nigeria needs a comprehensive whistleblower-protection law with clear procedures for reporting, confidentiality, protection from retaliation and remedies for victims.

Journalists and civil-society organisations also require protection. Laws that criminalise expression or restrict digital communication should be reviewed to ensure they do not suppress legitimate criticism. Public institutions should respond constructively to media enquiries and provide information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

7.5 Promoting Citizen Participation

Citizens should be involved not only during elections but throughout the governance cycle. Participatory budgeting, town-hall meetings, public comment periods, community monitoring of projects and citizen scorecards can strengthen social accountability.

Civic education is essential. Citizens need to understand their rights, the work of oversight institutions, how to request information and how to report corruption. Schools, media organisations, faith-based institutions, community associations and digital platforms can all support civic education.

7.6 Leveraging Technology

Government should expand digital transparency in budgeting, procurement, revenue collection, project monitoring and service delivery. Real-time publication of budget execution data, contract information and project locations can enable citizens to track whether promised services are delivered.

Technology should be inclusive. Rural communities, persons with disabilities and low-income citizens must be able to access digital platforms. This requires investment in connectivity, digital literacy, accessible design and offline alternatives where necessary.

7.7 Building Political Will and Ethical Leadership

Institutional reform will fail without political will. Political leaders must demonstrate commitment to accountability by complying with court orders, publishing financial information, supporting independent oversight bodies and accepting criticism.

Ethical leadership also matters. Leaders should model integrity, avoid conflicts of interest, disclose assets, refrain from interference in investigations and punish corruption within their own circles. Without credible leadership, citizens may view reforms as rhetorical exercises rather than genuine commitments.

8. Recommendations

- **Guarantee operational and financial autonomy** for the EFCC, ICPC, Auditor-General, Bureau of Public Procurement, Fiscal Responsibility Commission and other oversight bodies.
- **Strengthen legislative capacity** through research support, budget-analysis units, public hearings, timely consideration of audit reports and enforcement of committee recommendations.
- **Establish specialised anti-corruption courts** and improve case-management systems to reduce delays in corruption and election cases.
- **Publish procurement and contract data** throughout the procurement cycle, including tender notices, bid results, contract awards, beneficiaries, values, timelines and implementation status.
- **Improve budget transparency** by publishing budget proposals, enacted budgets, execution reports, debt information and audit findings in accessible formats.
- **Enforce the Freedom of Information Act** by requiring public institutions to designate information officers, publish proactive disclosures and report annually on FOI requests.
- **Enact and implement strong whistleblower protection** covering confidentiality, protection from dismissal, physical security, legal support and compensation for retaliation.
- **Protect press freedom and civic space** by reviewing laws that restrict expression, preventing arbitrary arrests of journalists and ensuring safe conditions for civil-society work.
- **Promote digital governance** through e-procurement, open-budget portals, digital payment systems, project-tracking platforms and citizen feedback mechanisms.
- **Deepen civic education and participation** through school curricula, community engagement, participatory budgeting and support for citizen monitoring of public projects.
- **Reform political parties** to promote internal democracy, transparent candidate selection, accountable campaign finance and issue-based competition.

- **Strengthen inter-agency coordination** among anti-corruption agencies, security agencies, financial-intelligence units, courts and asset-recovery institutions.

9. Conclusion

Public accountability is indispensable to democratic governance in Nigeria. It ensures that public officials use power and resources for the public good rather than private benefit. Nigeria has made important institutional progress since 1999 through constitutional provisions, anti-corruption agencies, procurement and fiscal-responsibility laws, freedom-of-information legislation, audit institutions, the media and civil society.

However, the country continues to face serious challenges. Executive dominance, weak legislative oversight, judicial delay, corruption, impunity, insecurity, weak public financial management, limited access to information and shrinking civic space undermine accountability. These problems are mutually reinforcing: corruption weakens institutions, weak institutions enable corruption, and impunity reduces citizens' trust in democracy.

The prospects for reform remain real but require sustained commitment. Nigeria does not need to begin from zero; it needs to strengthen, fund, protect and consistently apply the institutions it already has. Reform must combine legal change with political will, institutional capacity, technological innovation, citizen participation and protection for those who expose wrongdoing. If these measures are implemented, public accountability can become a practical foundation for democratic governance, improved service delivery and national development.

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