Legislative Institutions, Governance Reform and Development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract
This study examined the role of Nigeria's National Assembly in shaping governance and development outcomes in the Fourth Republic (1999–2025). Democratic transitions in Africa have generated expectations that representative institutions can foster accountability and socioeconomic transformation. The developmental impact of legislatures in emerging democracies remains contested. The study was based on democratic institutionalism, developmental state theory and legislative institutionalism, which emphasise the connection between accountable governance, institutional capacity and developmental effectiveness. Methodologically, the study was grounded in a qualitative historical-institutional approach that combines documentary analysis, process tracing, thematic content analysis, and semi-structured elite interviews. Primary sources included constitutional provisions, Acts of the National Assembly, Hansard proceedings, committee reports, records of appropriation, investigative hearings and official policy documents. The results suggested that the National Assembly emerged as an important factor in fiscal governance, anti-corruption reform, sectoral liberalisation and public accountability. Legislative measures strengthened procurement regulation, debt oversight, telecommunications reform, petroleum sector governance and social policy frameworks. But development outcomes remained uneven, as implementation capacity remained weak, and executive dominance, bureaucratic fragmentation, insecurity and patronage politics persisted. The study concluded that the core determinants of legislative effectiveness include implementation capacity, stronger oversight institutions, increased legislative professionalism and institutionalised follow-up mechanisms to ensure accountability and policy implementation.

Keywords: National Assembly, legislative power, democratic governance, development policy, legislative oversight, Nigeria, democratic institutionalism, developmental state theory.

Introduction

Parliaments are key to democratic governance, mediating the relationship between political authority, public accountability and state development. Through lawmaking, fiscal authorisation, representation, and oversight, legislatures shape the institutional rules that govern economic management, public expenditure, and policy implementation. In presidential systems with separately elected executives and legislatures, parliaments can play an important role in shaping development paths by controlling executive overreach, monitoring public finances, and institutionalising long-term governance frameworks (Fish, 2006; Wehner, 2022).

A key question in comparative political and development studies is how well legislatures in emerging democracies can perform these functions.

Much academic discussion has centred on the link between democratic institutions and development. Earlier theories of modernisation linked democratic consolidation with socioeconomic development and institutional stability (Lipset, 1959; Dahl, 1971). Although the regime category of democracy has been the subject of more recent scholarship, the focus has shifted to the quality and effectiveness of democratic institutions per se (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Fukuyama, 2013). This institutional turn points out that development outcomes are not simply a function of elections or constitutional frameworks, but of whether institutions have the capacity, autonomy and legitimacy to sustain accountability, policy continuity and effective governance.

In this broader debate, legislatures have become particularly important institutions because they are at the nexus of representation, policymaking and accountability. There is growing evidence from comparative studies that strong legislatures are associated with better fiscal discipline, transparency, enforcement of anti-corruption rules, and policy responsiveness, especially where there are institutionalised committee systems, oversight mechanisms and legislative research capacities (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2014; OECD, 2021). Scholarship also recognises that legislatures in many developing democracies remain hamstrung by executive dominance, weak institutional capacity, patronage politics, and lack of enforcement powers, which constrain their developmental effectiveness (Cheeseman, 2015; Prempeh, 2010).

Nigeria offers an important context in which to explore these tensions. The return to civilian democratic rule in 1999 restored a constitutional legislature after decades of authoritarian centralisation. The 1999 Constitution gave the National Assembly broad powers over appropriations, borrowing, investigations, public appointments, constitutional amendments, and federal revenue allocation. Sections 80–84 grant the legislature broad powers over public finance, while Sections 88–89 confer wide investigative and oversight powers that can compel institutional disclosure and executive accountability (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1999). Formally, then, the National Assembly is one of the most constitutionally empowered legislatures on the continent.

But constitutional authority alone does not ensure institutional effectiveness. Nigeria’s Fourth Republic has been characterised by oil dependence, patronage networks, insecurity, corruption, bureaucratic weakness, and uneven capacity for federal implementation. The developmental role of the National Assembly has thus evolved unevenly across successive administrations and legislative cycles. Although the legislature has become more engaged in public financial reform, sectoral liberalisation, anti-corruption legislation, and oversight investigations, concerns remain about legislative professionalism, distributive politics, executive dominance, and the erratic implementation of parliamentary recommendations.

Existing literature on Nigeria’s National Assembly has largely focused on issues of executive-legislative conflict, democratic consolidation, corruption, and constitutional politics. While these studies provide important institutional insights, relatively little attention has been paid to the wider developmental implications of legislative activity across the Fourth Republic. There has been little scholarly attention to the National Assembly's role in the formulation of development policy through lawmaking, fiscal control and oversight, and to the role of executive-legislative relations in shaping the effectiveness of these interventions over time.

This study seeks to fill this lacuna by interrogating the role of Nigeria’s National Assembly in the formulation of development policy and governance outcomes from 1999 to 2025. It examines the extent to which the legislature has leveraged its constitutional powers to legislate, appropriate, investigate, and bargain within the institutional setting, and assesses how these have contributed to engendering accountability, policy change, and developmental governance. The study also situates Nigeria’s experience within the larger discourses on democratic institutionalism, legislative power and development in emerging democracies. The article argues that the National Assembly has become a more consequential governance institution since 1999, but its developmental impact has been conditioned by institutional capacity, executive-legislative dynamics and wider structural constraints within Nigeria’s political economy. The Nigerian case thus exemplifies both the possibilities and the limitations of legislative power in presidential democracies undergoing democratic consolidation and developmental transition.

The remainder of the paper is organised in five sections. The next section reviews the relevant literature and theoretical debates on development, democracy and legislative institutions. The study’s methodological approach is then discussed. The following sections examine the constitutional basis of legislative power in Nigeria, analyse the lawmaking and oversight roles of the Assembly in shaping development policy, and assess the broader implications of executive–legislative relations on governance outcomes during the Fourth Republic. The paper ends by reflecting on the implications of Nigeria’s experience for comparative debates on democratic institutionalism and developmental governance in emerging democracies.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

One of the most persistent and controversial issues in comparative political economy has been the relationship between democracy, legislative institutions and socioeconomic development. Earlier modernisation theorists proposed that economic development creates the social and institutional foundations necessary for the stability of democracy (Lipset, 1959; Dahl, 1971). Later scholarship expanded this argument that democratic governance per se could encourage long-term development through accountability, participation, and institutional inclusion (Przeworski & Limongi, 1993; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). But the empirical link between democracy and development has been anything but settled. Some democracies have managed to consolidate prosperity and institutional robustness, whereas others, especially in parts of Africa and Latin America, have failed to convert electoral competition into widespread socioeconomic change (Cilliers, 2015; Cheeseman, 2015).

More recent scholarship has moved away from regime-type determinism to a more nuanced focus on institutional quality and governance capacity. Rather than arguing about whether democracy leads to development, more recent studies increasingly emphasise the effects of specific democratic institutions on policy outcomes, fiscal accountability and state effectiveness (Fukuyama, 2013; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; North et al., 2009). This broader institutional turn makes legislatures especially important as they mediate executive power, authorise public expenditure, set policy frameworks, and offer channels of representation and oversight. Contemporary democratic institutionalism thus contends that effective legislatures are central not only to procedural democracy but also to developmental governance (Fish, 2006; Wehner, 2022).

This transformation is especially important in nascent democracies where legislatures have been weak, subordinated or marginalised under authoritarian rule. Earlier literature often portrayed parliaments in developing countries as 'rubber stamp' institutions lacking the autonomy, expertise or organisational capacity to make meaningful policy interventions (Mezey, 1979; Norton & Olson, 1996. Structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s often exacerbated this marginalisation by concentrating economic policymaking in the hands of technocratic executives and international financial institutions, thereby bypassing parliamentary scrutiny altogether (Olson & Mezey, 1991). Patronage politics, weak committee systems and limited technical competence had rendered legislatures obstacles to reform rather than engines of development.

The democratic transitions in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America and parts of Asia, however, transformed scholarly perceptions of legislative institutions. Comparative research now shows that legislatures can play a substantial role in development outcomes where they have constitutional powers, institutional capacity and sufficient autonomy from executive dominance (Barkan et al., 2004; Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2014). In presidential systems in particular, legislatures are important arenas for bargaining over budgetary priorities, sectoral reforms, and public accountability, given executives' inability to legislate on their own (Linz, 1990; Fish, 2006). Empirical evidence from Indonesia, South Africa, Brazil, and post-communist Eastern Europe illustrates how once-symbolic parliaments gradually became active policy institutions capable of shaping economic governance, anti-corruption frameworks, and social policy reforms (Ziegenhain, 2008; Agh & Ilonszki, 1996; Power, 2010).

The emerging literature on legislative institutionalism further argues that the developmental impact of parliaments is a function not only of constitutional powers but also of internal organisational strength. Independent budget offices, research services, technical expertise and professional committee systems can be influential in the legislative influence on public finance and oversight of policy (Krafchik & Wehner, 1998; Wehner, 2022). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the World Bank and the OECD (IPU, 2022; OECD, 2021; Stapenhurst et al., 2008), legislatures with higher analytical and oversight capacity are associated with better fiscal discipline, transparency and policy continuity. Procurement, borrowing, taxation and expenditure are associated with lower corruption risks and improved allocative efficiency through legislative scrutiny, particularly where parliamentary oversight mechanisms are institutionalised and publicly available (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2014).

At the same time, scholarship cautions that legislatures do not automatically produce developmental outcomes merely by being formally included in democratic constitutions. Executive dominance, partisan capture, elite patronage networks, weak enforcement institutions and limited bureaucratic capacity may considerably undermine legislative effectiveness (Cheeseman, 2015; Prempeh, 2010). Many African democracies have constitutional legislatures but also informal political institutions that emphasise discretion, patronage, and elite bargaining over programmatic policymaking. Thus, legislatures may have wide-ranging formal powers but not the political weight or technical capability to apply accountability consistently.

Nigeria is a case in point of many of these tensions. The National Assembly has functioned under one of Africa's most constitutionally strong presidential systems since civilian rule was restored in 1999. The 1999 Constitution confers substantial powers on the legislature in the areas of appropriations, borrowing, oversight investigation, constitutional amendments, public appointments and allocation of federal revenues (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1999). Sections 80-84 firmly place public finance under legislative authorisation, while Sections 88–89 provide broad investigative powers, including the power to compel testimony and institutional disclosure. Theoretically, these provisions position the National Assembly as a potentially decisive actor in Nigeria's development trajectory.

But scholarly assessments of the Assembly's actual performance remain sharply divided. Earlier works have emphasised institutional fragility, leadership instability and executive dominance in the early Fourth Republic (Suberu, 2007; LeVan, 2014). In the aftermath of decades of military rule, the legislature was initially devoid of institutional memory, committee professionalism and coherent internal organisation. Frequent leadership crises during the Obasanjo years weakened the legislature's bargaining power and reinforced public perceptions of instability and corruption. But gradually, the Assembly grew in policy relevance through more assertive oversight, budgetary scrutiny, and legislative entrepreneurship.

Recent studies increasingly view the National Assembly as a consequential governance institution rather than an empty symbolic democratic organ (Suberu, 2019; Suberu & Omotola, 2020). Legislative interventions in public procurement reforms, fiscal responsibility, debt management, anti-corruption frameworks and sectoral liberalisation have materially shaped Nigeria's governance architecture. Some of the legislative actions that have redefined economic governance, market regulation and institutional accountability include the Public Procurement Act 2007, Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007, Petroleum Industry Act 2021, Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020 and Electricity Act 2023. In addition, oversight probes into fuel subsidy fraud, pension mismanagement, extractive-sector leakages, and public debt accumulation have, at different times, revealed systemic governance failures and created demand for administrative reform.

Recent scholarship also emphasises the increasing complexity of the relationship between legislative cooperation and oversight effectiveness in Nigeria's presidential system. Developmental governance, as per comparative institutional theory, should strike a balance between constructive executive–legislature cooperation and credible parliamentary scrutiny (Fish, 2006; Fukuyama, 2013). Too much confrontation can delay budgets and reforms; too much alignment risks weakening accountability. Both dynamics are observed in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria. The 8th National Assembly (2015–2019) was more independent than the previous one but had long-standing budget tussles with the executive. The 9th Assembly (2019–2023) was praised for passing sweeping structural reforms and re-establishing predictability in budget cycles, but also criticised for lapses in debt and procurement oversight (BudgIT, 2022; IMF, 2023).

The 10th National Assembly, from 2023, has witnessed an evolving role that underscores the continuous evolution of legislative governance in Nigeria. Recent legislative activity has focused on fiscal consolidation, tax reform, digital governance, infrastructure financing, electricity decentralisation and student financing. At the same time, the Assembly has expanded the oversight of subsidy transition expenditure, public borrowing and the Central Bank's financing activities. The growing list of issues, including the legislative debate on constitutional amendments for gender representation, electoral reform, and the restructuring of the security sector, also signals an increasing policy focus on linking parliamentary activity to governance reform and democratic inclusion (House of Representatives, 2023; NILDS, 2024).

Outside Nigeria, the broader literature on African governance has increasingly recognised the potential significance of legislatures for institutional resilience and democratic consolidation. Afrobarometer's surveys in several African countries reveal a consistent trend: public trust in democratic institutions is largely contingent on perceptions of accountability, transparency, and responsiveness rather than on electoral rituals alone (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). The issue of legislative effectiveness has therefore become central in debates over democratic legitimacy and developmental governance in emerging democracies.

Despite this expanding scholarship, notable gaps persist. Much of the literature on Nigeria's National Assembly has been narrowly focused on executive-legislative conflict, corruption or democratic transition without a systematic examination of the role of legislative institutions in shaping long-term development policy and governance outcomes. To date, studies also tend to isolate Assemblies, sectors or constitutional controversies rather than analyse the cumulative developmental role of the legislature during the entire Fourth Republic. In addition, there is relatively little scholarship that situates Nigeria's legislative experience within broader theoretical debates on democratic institutionalism, developmental governance, and legislative capacity in emerging democracies.

This study fills these gaps by investigating the role of Nigeria's National Assembly in development policymaking from 1999 to 2025 through the processes of lawmaking, oversight, fiscal control, and institutional bargaining. This article, which contextualises the Nigerian case within broader comparative debates on democratic institutionalism and developmental governance, argues that legislatures in emerging democracies can make a major contribution to governance reform and institutional accountability but that their developmental effect is heavily contingent on implementation capacity, the balance of power between the executive and legislature, and the wider political economy within which they function.

Theoretical Framework

This study is set within the broader traditions of democratic institutionalism, developmental state theory and legislative institutionalism. These frameworks, taken together, offer an analytical foundation for understanding the role of legislatures in determining the quality of governance, policy reform and developmental outcomes in emerging democracies. Democratic institutionalism accounts for the link between accountable political institutions and long-term development, whereas developmental state theory highlights the importance of institutional coherence, bureaucratic capacity, and strategic governance for structural transformation. Legislative institutionalism adds a specific focus on the organisational strength, autonomy, and internal capacity of parliamentary institutions to these approaches. In sum, these perspectives offer a multidimensional framework for analysing the Nigerian National Assembly's role in shaping governance and development in the Fourth Republic.

The theoretical connection between democracy and development has long been a central concern of comparative political economy and development studies. Classical modernisation theorists argued that economic development creates the social conditions favourable to democratic consolidation and institutional stability (Lipset, 1959; Huntington, 1968; Dahl, 1971). Over time, however, the scholarly focus shifted from classifying regimes to the quality and effectiveness of institutions themselves. Contemporary democratic institutionalism suggests that development is less dependent on the formal existence of democratic systems, and more on whether political institutions are inclusive, accountable and capable of constraining arbitrary power and facilitating broad participation in governance (North, 1990; Leftwich, 2005; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). From this perspective, institutions organise incentives, shape public policy, govern political competition, and determine the allocation and monitoring of state resources.

Democratic institutionalists contend that legislatures play a particularly strategic role in democratic governance because they mediate the relationship between executive authority, public accountability, and policy legitimacy. Fish (2006) argues that, systematically, the stronger the legislature, the stronger the democracy, because parliamentary institutions impose institutional constraints on the concentration of power in the executive. Likewise, Fukuyama (2013) emphasises that effective democratic governance depends on the interaction among state capacity, the rule of law, and mechanisms of accountability, all of which are supported by legislatures through lawmaking, appropriations, investigations, and public oversight. More recent comparative scholarship further suggests that legislative effectiveness is strongly associated with higher levels of fiscal transparency, stronger anti-corruption institutions and more responsive public expenditure systems (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2014; Wehner, 2022; OECD, 2021). In this respect, legislatures are not only procedural institutions but also substantive actors in the governance and development process.

At the same time, democratic institutionalism recognises that constitutional authority, in and of itself, does not guarantee institutional effectiveness. Formal democratic institutions may be accompanied by informal systems of patronage, executive dominance, weak enforcement capacity, and elite capture that undermine accountability and distort governance outcomes (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Cheeseman, 2015). As a result, the developmental effects of legislatures are not only a matter of constitutional design but also institutional autonomy, political incentives, organisational capacity and state effectiveness more generally. This insight is particularly relevant for emerging democracies, where democratic institutions often operate within historically fragile bureaucratic and political environments.

These dynamics are well illustrated by the context of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The 1999 Constitution returned to a presidential democracy after many years of military rule and gave sweeping powers to the National Assembly. Sections 80-84 provide wide powers over public finance and appropriations, and Sections 88-89 provide broad oversight and investigatory powers, including the power to compel testimony and institutional disclosure (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1999). The legislature also has authority over revenue distribution, approval of borrowings, constitutional amendments and appointments. From the democratic institutionalist perspective, these constitutional provisions make the National Assembly a potentially important institution for promoting accountability, transparency and developmental governance. However, the extent to which these constitutional powers have translated into effective governance outcomes remains conditioned by broader institutional and political realities, including executive dominance, bureaucratic weakness, corruption and patronage-based politics.

Democratic institutionalism highlights the importance of accountability and institutional inclusion, whereas developmental state theory provides a complementary, but more state-centric, perspective on development. Based largely on studies of East Asian industrialisation, developmental state theory posits that long-term socioeconomic transformation requires coherent institutions capable of strategic coordination, planning, and effective implementation of public policy (Johnson, 1982; Evans, 1995; Woo-Cumings, 1999). The developmental state literature stresses bureaucratic competence, institutional insulation and policy continuity as necessary conditions for economic transformation. In this framework, development is driven not only by democratic participation but also by the state's capacity to formulate and implement coherent development strategies.

The developmental state perspective partly arose as a response to liberal assumptions that development would be the product of market forces and democratic competition. Many successful developmental experiences have involved strong institutional coordination between political leadership, bureaucratic agencies, and economic actors (Amsden 1989; Wade 1990; Evans 1995). More recent scholarship has expanded this argument beyond East Asia, arguing that capable institutions are necessary for effective development regardless of regime type (Mkandawire, 2001; Edigheji, 2010). State capacity, implementation effectiveness and institutional coherence are thus still central explanatory variables in developmental outcomes.

This framework creates considerable analytical tension for the Nigerian case. While the former emphasises accountability, representation, and inclusive governance, the latter emphasises policy coherence, administrative effectiveness, and strategic coordination. Democratic contestation and legislative bargaining can, in practice, slow reforms, fragment policymaking, or reduce implementation efficiency. On the other hand, too much concentration of executive power may speed up decision-making but reduce accountability and transparency. Nigeria's experience since 1999 is a telling case in point. The National Assembly has played an increasingly democratic oversight role through investigations, hearings, appropriations scrutiny and legislative reforms. But developmental outcomes have been mixed due to institutional fragmentation, weak implementation capacity, insecurity, and macroeconomic instability.

The Nigerian experience, therefore, demonstrates that developmental transformation cannot be guaranteed by democratic accountability and institutional capacity alone. Instead, development is a function of the interplay of accountability structures and implementation effectiveness. This study, therefore, follows the position that legislatures can play an important role in developmental governance, in which oversight, lawmaking, and institutional coordination take place within larger systems of capable and coherent state administration.

To further elaborate on this institutional analysis, the study also draws on legislative institutionalism, which, more specifically, concerns the role of internal organisation, professionalisation, and the operational capacity of legislatures in shaping policy outputs and oversight effectiveness. The literature on legislatures in developing countries has traditionally depicted them as weak or reactive institutions subordinate to executive power and constrained by patronage politics (Mezey, 1979; Norton & Olson, 1996). More recent research, however, shows considerable variation in legislative influence depending on the strength of committees, research capacity, procedural rules, technical expertise, leadership stability, and access to information (Krafchik & Wehner, 1998; Power, 2010; Wehner, 2022).

Legislative institutionalists argue that parliaments can do their work better when they have specialised committee systems, professional staff structures, independent analytical support, and institutional continuity, enabling oversight and policy engagement to transcend partisan cycles. Stapenhurst et al. (2008) find that across democratic systems, higher quality of fiscal governance and transparency are associated with stronger committee systems and legislative budget oversight mechanisms. Pelizzo & Stapenhurst (2014). The work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2022), World Bank, and others points to the role of parliamentary research offices, budget units and mechanisms for public participation in improving legislative effectiveness.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the analysis of the evolution of Nigeria's National Assembly in the Fourth Republic. The legislature, following decades of military authoritarianism, was at first afflicted by a weak institutional memory, unstable leadership structures, insufficient technical expertise and a lack of research support. But over the years, the Assembly experienced gradual institutional strengthening through reforms such as the establishment of the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), the expansion of committee systems, greater engagement with civil society organisations, and increased use of public hearings and expert consultations. These developments have contributed to the gradual expansion of legislative professionalism and policy influence, although important capacity gaps remain.

Legislative institutionalism also helps explain variation in legislative effectiveness across successive Assemblies and administrations, notwithstanding the relative continuity of constitutional powers. More substantive oversight and policy engagement tended to occur in periods of more intensive committee activity, more stable leadership, and greater research capacity. In contrast, periods of leadership instability, partisan fragmentation or excessive executive cohesion often undermined parliamentary scrutiny and institutional independence. This framework, therefore, provides an important analytical basis for understanding the practical exercise of legislative power in Nigeria, as shaped by organisational and institutional factors.

Taken together, democratic institutionalism, developmental state theory, and legislative institutionalism provide this study with a comprehensive analytical framework. Democratic institutionalism explains the importance of legislatures for accountability, representation, and the legitimacy of governance. The developmental state theory stresses the importance of implementation capacity, institutional coherence and strategic governance in determining developmental outcomes. Legislative institutionalism explains how parliamentary organisation, professionalism, and internal capacity influence legislative effectiveness in practice.

Development is conceptualised within this integrated framework as not only economic growth but also a broader process encompassing governance quality, institutional accountability, fiscal discipline, transparency, policy reform, and human development outcomes. The National Assembly's performance is thus judged not only by the volume of laws it passes, but also by its wider effects on the structures of governance, public accountability, fiscal management and institutional reform. Accordingly, the study considers legislative lawmaking, oversight and fiscal control as primary independent variables affecting developmental governance outcomes, while acknowledging that their effectiveness is mediated by intervening factors such as executive dominance, institutional capacity, corruption, partisan dynamics, and broader political-economic conditions. Nigeria's Fourth Republic, therefore, provides a valuable case for examining both the potential and the limitations of legislative power in emerging presidential democracies undergoing democratic consolidation and developmental transition.

Methodology

This study's research design is qualitative and interpretive, and it is embedded in the broader tradition of comparative legislative and institutional analysis. This study assesses the influence of the National Assembly of Nigeria on development policy and governance outcomes in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic (1999-2025). The study is premised on the nature of constitutional authority, institutional behaviour, policy processes, and executive–legislative relations, and a qualitative institutional approach is considered most fitting as it provides the opportunity to study in detail how formal powers are used in practice, governance structures and broader developmental dynamics over time (George & Bennett, 2005; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

The study is mainly based on historical-institutional analysis. Historical institutionalism stresses the role of institutional change, political sequencing, and path dependency in shaping governance outcomes (Pierson, 2004; Thelen, 1999). This is particularly the case for Nigeria's Fourth Republic, where the National Assembly emerged from a long period of military authoritarianism characterised by executive centralisation, institutional erosion, and weak legislative traditions. The transition back to democracy in 1999, therefore, involved not only a change in the constitution but also a broader process of institutional rebuilding and the renegotiation of politics. By studying the Assembly over several legislative cycles, the research seeks to follow the development of institutional capacity, oversight behaviour and legislative influence over time as political and economic conditions evolve.

The research also employs process-tracing elements to link the legislative interventions to broader governance outcomes. Process tracing enables researchers to systematically investigate the role of legislative actions, institutional reforms, and executive–legislative interactions in specific policy developments or governance changes (Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005). The method is particularly useful for analysing the passage and implementation of major legislative reforms concerning fiscal governance, procurement regulation, anti-corruption frameworks, debt management, sectoral liberalisation, and social policy development in the Fourth Republic. Instead of assuming a linear causality between legislation and development outcomes, the study emphasises the mediating effects of institutional dynamics, implementation capacity and political incentives.

The study employs different sources of qualitative data to enhance analytical depth and triangulation. Primary documentary sources include the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), National Assembly Acts enacted between 1999 and 2025, Hansard proceedings, committee reports, appropriation bills, records of public hearings, investigative reports, constitutional amendment records and official parliamentary resolutions. These documents contain direct evidence of legislative intent, parliamentary debates, institutional priorities and oversight practices across successive Assemblies. It focuses particularly on legislation and oversight activities involved in fiscal responsibility, procurement reform, anti-corruption governance, public finance management, petroleum sector reform, taxation, electricity regulation, social welfare policy, and federal development interventions.

The documentary analysis is supported by official publications from the government and institutional reports from the Central Bank of Nigeria, the Debt Management Office, the Budget Office of the Federation, the National Bureau of Statistics, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and other relevant ministries and regulatory institutions. This provides important contextual and empirical information on fiscal performance, debt accumulation, public expenditure, revenue management and other governance outcomes more generally. The study also draws extensively on reports produced by international organisations and governance institutions, including the World Bank, the International

Monetary Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Afrobarometer. These sources help place Nigeria's legislative experience within broader comparative discussions on democratic governance, institutional accountability, and development.

This study is based on secondary data drawn largely from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy papers, assessments of governance and comparative studies of legislatures on the themes of democratic institutionalism, developmental governance, legislative oversight, executive–legislative relations and African political institutions. Great importance is placed on combining classical institutional literature with contemporary scholarship (published between 2020 and 2026) to ensure both theoretical depth and analytical currency. The mix of historical and contemporary sources offers an opportunity to address both foundational democratic theory and recent debates on legislative effectiveness, governance reform, fiscal accountability, and institutional resilience in emerging democracies.

To further enrich the institutional analysis, the study draws on semi-structured elite interviews with a select group of current and former legislators, senior legislative aides, parliamentary administrators, governance practitioners and policy experts with direct knowledge of Nigeria's legislative process and oversight practices. Interviews were purposefully selected to elicit informed views on the influence of legislation, institutional constraints, executive–legislative relations and practical challenges to parliamentary oversight and policy implementation. Elite interviewing is particularly useful in institutional research because it provides insight into the informal political processes, bargaining, and operational realities that are often not reflected in official records alone (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002).

The interview process was semi-structured in the interests of comparability, but with analytical flexibility. Major themes included legislative independence, committee capacity, budget oversight, public accountability, executive dominance, constituency demands and institutional change. To promote frank reflection on sensitive political and institutional issues, respondents were assured confidentiality. Interview responses were then thematically coded and combined with documentary evidence to identify recurring institutional patterns and areas of convergence or divergence between formal constitutional powers and practical legislative behaviour.

The analysis approach combines thematic content analysis and institutional interpretation. Thematic analysis was performed on documentary and interview data to identify patterns of legislative activism, oversight effectiveness, executive-legislative bargaining, governance reform and institutional constraints (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The legislative interventions were then classified according to the major governance functions, including fiscal governance, anti-corruption oversight, sectoral reform, social policy, constitutional governance and public accountability. This allows the study to move beyond a descriptive catalogue of legislation to a more analytical focus on how legislative institutions influence governance processes and developmental outcomes.

This study does not set out to establish direct econometric causality between legislative activity and macroeconomic performance. The development results are affected by the interaction of oil price volatility, global economic trends, executive policy choices, security concerns and other institutional capacities. Rather, the study utilises an interpretative institutional lens to identify how the legislative interventions affected governance structures, accountability mechanisms, policy reforms, and institutional restructuring. In this sense, the focus is on institutional influence rather than deterministic causal attribution.

The study also identifies some methodological limitations. First, qualitative institutional analysis necessarily involves interpretive judgment about the significance and impact of legislative interventions. Second, elite interviews might be affected by the respondents' institutional biases, selective memory or political positioning. Thirdly, the complexities of Nigeria's political economy make it difficult to fully isolate legislative influence from broader executive, bureaucratic, and structural factors shaping development outcomes.

However, the credibility and reliability of the findings are enhanced through multiple data sources, documentary triangulation, process tracing, and comparative institutional analysis. The methodological approach adopted in this study is overall designed to offer a historically grounded, institutionally nuanced and analytically rigorous examination of the role of the Nigerian National Assembly in shaping development policy and governance during the Fourth Republic. The study aims to make a meaningful contribution to broader scholarly debates on legislative power, democratic governance and development in emerging democracies by combining documentary analysis, elite interviews, process tracing and comparative institutional interpretation.

Discussion

Legislative Authority: Constitutional Foundation

The constitutional architecture of Nigeria's fourth republic created a potential role for the National Assembly in governance and development after decades of military authoritarianism. The 1999 Constitution, unlike the highly centralised command structures of military rule, institutionalised a presidential system based on the separation of powers, checks and balances, fiscal oversight and representative governance. Sections 4(1) and 4(2) vested legislative authority in the National Assembly and empowered it to enact laws for the "peace, order and good governance of the Federation" (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1999). The Exclusive and Concurrent Legislative Lists extended the scope of parliamentary jurisdiction even further to important sectors, including public finance, taxation, trade, energy, education, infrastructure, telecommunications, banking and public administration.

The Constitution also granted broad fiscal and accountability powers to the legislature, which could affect the developmental direction of the Nigerian state. Sections 80–84 imposed legislative authorisation of public expenditure, requiring parliamentary approval for appropriations, withdrawals from the Consolidated Revenue Fund, and public borrowing. Sections 88-89 empowered the National Assembly to investigate the administration of laws, public expenditure and institutional performance. It could summon witnesses and require the production of documents. Further powers over constitutional amendments, appointments, emergency declarations and revenue-sharing embedded the legislature into the overall framework of governance and state control.

From the perspective of democratic institutionalism, these constitutional provisions reflected larger assumptions that effective legislatures promote accountability, transparency and rules-based governance by restricting executive discretion and increasing participation in policy-making processes (Fish, 2006; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). However, constitutional authority alone was not sufficient to ensure institutional effectiveness. The Fourth Republic of Nigeria was set within a broader political economy characterised by oil dependence, weak bureaucracies, patronage politics, insecurity, and uneven administrative capacity. The practical impact of the National Assembly was thus less a question of constitutional text alone than of the interaction of formal authority, institutional capacity, political incentives, and executive-legislative relations.

The Assembly has evolved slowly since 1999 through legislative consolidation and institutional adjustment. In the early Fourth Republic, legislatures faced problems of leadership instability, weak committee systems, lack of technical expertise, and the legacy of executive dominance from the authoritarian regime (Suberu, 2007; LeVan, 2014). But gradually, the National Assembly evolved institutional devices that could increasingly enhance parliamentary influence on governance and development policy. Strengthening of committee structures, expansion of public hearings, creation of research institutions such as the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) and increasing interaction with civil society organisations and policy experts gradually improved legislative professionalism and policy engagement.

Legislation and Policy Making

The National Assembly's influence on development policy was increasingly evident through the enactment of legislation on fiscal governance, anti-corruption regulation, sectoral liberalisation, social welfare, and institutional reform. Between 1999 and 2025, the legislature passed numerous laws that cumulatively altered the governance architecture of the Nigerian state. The reforms have reflected an increasing legislative role in economic management, regulatory restructuring and developmental governance.

Reforms to fiscal governance were among the most important areas of legislative intervention. The Debt Management Office Act 2003 fused debt coordination and improved fiscal reporting mechanisms. The Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007 made provision for medium-term expenditure planning, borrowing limits, and obligations aimed at enhancing fiscal transparency. The Public Procurement Act 2007 established competitive procurement procedures and created the Bureau of Public Procurement to regulate federal procurement practices. These reforms were in an effort to curtail discretionary expenditure, improve fiscal discipline and enhance transparency in public finance management systems.

There is empirical evidence that these legislative interventions have led to actual institutional improvements. Debt reporting was more structured and transparent than in previous authoritarian periods, and procurement regulation was more formalised. Improving fiscal governance and stronger institutional accountability were part of Nigeria's successful negotiation of about US$18 billion in Paris Club debt relief in 2005. The fiscal savings accumulated in the Excess Crude Account during high oil prices between 2005 and 2013 were part of broader efforts at macroeconomic discipline and budgetary coordination.

However, the developmental results of these reforms have been uneven. For much of the 2000s, Nigeria experienced average annual GDP growth rates of over 6 per cent, but that growth was concentrated in the hydrocarbon sector and did not lead to meaningful industrial diversification or job-rich transformation. Despite periods of macroeconomic expansion, poverty rates remained stubbornly high and unemployment and underemployment rose sharply, particularly among youth populations. Nigeria's Human Development Index increased steadily from about 0.465 in the early 2000s to 0.548 in 2023, indicating gradual improvements in life expectancy, education, and income indicators, yet still below several regional comparators (UNDP, 2023). Trends such as these imply that legislative reform could strengthen governance frameworks without necessarily leading to immediate developmental transformation, where the capacity for implementation and productive diversification remains weak.

The Assembly's developmental impact is also evident in sectoral reforms. Telecommunications liberalisation under the Nigerian Communications Commission framework has made Nigeria one of Africa's largest digital economies. There were fewer than one million active mobile subscriptions in 1999 and over 220 million in 2025. This has greatly enhanced access to communication, financial inclusion and digital commerce. One of the most consequential economic transformations of the Fourth Republic was thus directly attributable to legislative support for market liberalisation and regulatory restructuring.

The same applies to reforms in the financial sector that enhanced banking regulation and crisis management capacity following several episodes of instability. Consolidation of banking, prudential regulation, and laws, and the establishment of the Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria, enhanced systemic resilience following the 2009 banking crisis. The eventual enactment of the Petroleum Industry Act 2021 in the petroleum sector was a major effort of institutional restructuring after almost two decades of legislative negotiation, executive disagreement and stakeholder contestation. The Act commercialised the Nigerian National Petroleum Company, restructured regulatory institutions and enacted host-community development mechanisms, meant to foster transparency and reduce conflicts in oil-producing regions.

Legislative activity also increased in the social policy sector. Federal intervention in welfare governance and human development was broadened by the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004, the National Health Act of 2014, Disability Act of 2018, and reforms in student financing. These legislative interventions responded to increasing democratic pressures for social inclusion and distributive responsiveness. But social outcomes remained mixed, reflecting implementation gaps, regional disparities, insecurity, and weak coordination between federal and subnational institutions within the administration.

Governance, Oversight and Accountability

In addition to law-making, the National Assembly was playing an increasing role in oversight investigations, examining the budget, holding public hearings and institutional accountability mechanisms. One of the most visible manifestations of legislative power during the Fourth Republic was parliamentary scrutiny, particularly in the areas of corruption, public spending, procurement and sectoral governance.

Periodically, legislative investigations into fuel subsidy fraud, pension management, defence procurement, oil revenue leakages and public debt management exposed significant governance failures and increased public scrutiny of executive conduct. In 2012, the fuel subsidy probe revealed systematic manipulation of subsidy payments amounting to billions of naira and exposed deep structural weaknesses in the governance of the petroleum sector. Similarly, parliamentary investigations into pension administration exposed widespread embezzlement of public pension funds and led to subsequent administrative reforms.

These enquiries led to increased transparency and increased the status of the Assembly as a public accountability body. Parliamentary hearings became increasingly significant governance events that could attract media attention, political pressure, and institutional responses. Public Accounts Committees also stepped up their scrutiny of audit reports, patterns of expenditure, and fiscal irregularities. Budget defence hearings with ministries, departments and agencies became gradually important mechanisms for public scrutiny of expenditure priorities and implementation performance.

But the enhanced effectiveness of legislative oversight was stymied by enforcement limitations and political meddling. Many enquiries generated considerable publicity and short-term administrative responses, but most did not result in long-term institutional change or consistent prosecution outcomes. This tension between increased transparency and limited effectiveness of enforcement was evident in Nigeria's persistent poor performance on global corruption indicators throughout much of the Fourth Republic. Parliamentary scrutiny was more successful in revealing governance failures than in guaranteeing long-term accountability.

This problem is symptomatic of a broader institutional reality in emerging democracies: legislatures can improve transparency and public oversight, but the implementation of transparency initiatives relies ultimately on executive agencies, judicial institutions, law enforcement systems, and broader bureaucratic capacity. In places where these complementary institutions are weak or politically compromised, legislative oversight alone cannot bring about systemic change. As such, the oversight activities of the National Assembly were more effective at enhancing the visibility of governance than at enforcing it.

Relations Between Executives and Legislatures and Developmental Results

Executive–legislative relations were one of the most important intervening variables that conditioned legislative effectiveness throughout the Fourth Republic. Nigeria's presidential system is one of continuous institutional negotiation between independently elected branches of government. Comparative institutional scholarship suggests that developmental governance in presidential systems depends on the balance between legislative independence and policy coordination and administrative coherence (Linz, 1990; Mainwaring & Shugart, 1997).

Strong confrontations between parties tended to reinforce the autonomy of parliament but to weaken policy continuity and budgetary efficiency. In parts of the Obasanjo and Buhari administrations, executive-legislative tensions have produced delays in budget passage, confirmation disputes, and institutional paralysis. The 8th National Assembly was more independent in its legislative role, especially in oversight of borrowing, committee investigations, and confirmation disputes. But constant feuding with the executive also caused policy delays and institutional uncertainty.

Periods of high legislative-executive congruence have been linked to policy continuity and fast-tracked reforms. The 9th National Assembly reinstated the January-December budget cycle and passed landmark legislation, including the Petroleum Industry Act and subsequent Finance Acts. However, critics argued that the alignment between the legislature and the executive resulted in less scrutiny of debt accumulation, procurement practices, and emergency spending. Nigeria's public debt increased substantially during this period, with debt-servicing obligations taking up a larger share of federal revenue. Approval processes in the legislature have often favoured fiscal continuity over more rigorous oversight, raising broader questions about the balance between accountability and policy coordination.

The 10th National Assembly appears to be a more conscious attempt to reset this balance. Legislative scrutiny of subsidy-transition spending, "Ways and Means" financing, tax reforms, and debt sustainability indicates growing parliamentary concern with macroeconomic governance and fiscal accountability. At the same time, the Assembly has maintained substantial policy cooperation with the executive in areas such as tax reform, digital governance, electricity decentralisation, and infrastructure financing.

More broadly, the developmental lesson is that neither over-confrontation nor over-alignment is a guaranteed recipe for superior governance outcomes. Phases of policy coordination and credible oversight seemed to produce better institutional performance than phases marked by either constant deadlock or legislative acquiescence. The Nigerian experience, therefore, strengthens the comparative argument that effective presidential governance depends on negotiated institutional balance rather than permanent confrontation or unconditional cooperation.

Structural Constraints and Institutional Limits

However, this expansion of legislative influence in the Fourth Republic did not result in a significant increase in the developmental effectiveness of the National Assembly, as it was constrained by the broader structural and institutional constraints. A key impediment was the limited capacity for implementation in the Nigerian state. Typical challenges to legislative reforms were administrative bottlenecks, bureaucratic fragmentation, weak enforcement mechanisms and patchy coordination between federal and subnational institutions. The gap between the law and its practical application in different sectors was therefore still wide.

Legislative effectiveness was also limited by distributive pressures and patronage politics. Nigerian legislative politics was often embedded in wider systems of elite bargaining, in which constituency pressures, regional balancing, political patronage, and distributive incentives shaped legislative priorities. The expansion of constituency projects and the demand for the institutional distribution of federal resources reflected broader pressures to use legislative authority for distributive representation rather than purely for developmental planning. While some of these practices increased the distribution of infrastructure and the implementation of local intervention projects, they also fragmented national planning priorities and made long-term developmental coordination more difficult.

Institutional change was also hindered by the oil-based nature of Nigeria’s political economy. Historically, petroleum revenues have concentrated fiscal power in the federal executive while simultaneously weakening taxation-based accountability relationships between citizens and the state. This rentier structure reduced the push for administrative efficiency and further institutionalised patronage networks, which often undermined institutional accountability. Thus, legislative oversight was played out within a broader political economy in which access to state resources remained central to political competition and elite bargaining.

The institutional capacity constraints within the legislature itself, however, remained significant despite gradual improvements in parliamentary professionalism. However, as the committee systems, research structures and public hearings grew over time, many committees continued to face technical limitations, insufficient research support, inconsistent data access and political interference. Legislative turnover rates also eroded institutional continuity and the accumulation of long-term policy expertise. In several instances, parliamentary oversight activities were reactive and ad hoc rather than systematically institutionalised.

Developmental governance was also constrained by security challenges. For much of the Fourth Republic, the growth of insurgency, banditry, communal violence and organised criminality placed major fiscal and administrative burdens on the Nigerian state. These conditions diverted public resources to emergency security spending at the expense of the state’s capacity in education, health, infrastructure and economic governance. Legislative development initiatives were thus undertaken in an environment of continuing security instability and institutional stress.

The structural conditions taken together suggest that legislative institutions alone cannot deliver developmental transformation in emerging democracies. While the National Assembly was instrumental in reforming governance, expanding accountability, and restructuring institutions, its effectiveness was largely contingent on broader systems of state capacity, bureaucratic coherence, enforcement effectiveness, and political stability.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The study examined the contribution of Nigeria's National Assembly to shaping development policy and governance outcomes in the Fourth Republic (1999-2025). The study contextualised the analysis within the wider traditions of democratic institutionalism, developmental state theory and legislative institutionalism, and demonstrated that the legislature evolved from a relatively fragile post-authoritarian institution to a more consequential actor in fiscal governance, public accountability, sectoral reform and democratic oversight. The National Assembly's role in law-making, appropriations, investigations, and institutional bargaining was a major factor in establishing rule-based governance frameworks in public finance, anti-corruption administration, petroleum governance, telecommunications liberalisation, social policy, and regulatory reform.

The evidence presented throughout the study suggests that legislative institutions matter greatly for the quality of governance in emerging democracies. The National Assembly was pivotal in institutionalising procurement regulation, debt management frameworks, fiscal responsibility mechanisms, banking reforms, social welfare legislation, and public oversight structures, collectively strengthening transparency and accountability within Nigeria's governance system. Parliamentary probes into the fuel subsidy scam, pension administration, debt accumulation, procurement abuses, and the management of the extractive sector increased public scrutiny of executive actions and strengthened democratic accountability mechanisms that had largely been absent during military rule. Similarly, legislative support for telecommunications liberalisation, financial-sector restructuring and public-sector reform helped feed a wider process of institutional modernisation and regulatory expansion across several sectors of the economy.

But the research also shows that the developmental effects of legislative activism were uneven and often constrained by broader structural and institutional realities. Despite extensive legislative reforms, Nigeria continued to face persistent poverty, weak industrial diversification, unemployment, infrastructure deficits, insecurity and uneven human development outcomes. Such a contradiction exposes the limits of formal institutional reform in contexts characterised by weak implementation capacity, bureaucratic fragmentation, rent dependence, corruption and distributive patronage politics. Legislative enactments have improved governance frameworks and accountability structures, but the reforms have not always led to broad-based developmental transformation due to uneven enforcement of institutions and policy implementation across successive administrations and sectors.

Thus, the findings reinforce a more conditional reading of democratic institutionalism. Strong legislatures matter for accountability, transparency and governance reform, but constitutional authority alone does not guarantee developmental results. Legislative effectiveness depends largely on institutional capacity, committee professionalism, research support, executive-legislative balance and the overall administrative capacity of the state. Nigeria's experience shows that democratic institutions can gradually improve the quality of governance, even amid unresolved structural developmental challenges. But it also implies that legislatures in fragmented and capacity-constrained political systems face important constraints in converting formal oversight and lawmaking powers into sustained socioeconomic transformation.

The study also found executive–legislative relations to be one of the most potent intervening variables in determining governance outcomes in the Fourth Republic. Periods of over-confrontation tended to enhance parliament's independence at the expense of policy coordination and budgetary efficiency. By contrast, high congruence between the legislature and the executive during periods of policy consistency favoured policy continuity and expedited legislative approval but often compromised the credibility of oversight and fiscal scrutiny. The evidence suggests that developmental governance in presidential systems is less a matter of institutional confrontation or executive dominance than of maintaining constructive bargaining under conditions of credible accountability and institutional respect.

Nigeria's Fourth Republic thus makes a significant contribution to comparative debates on legislatures and development in emerging democracies. The National Assembly's evolution shows that parliamentary institutions in post-authoritarian settings can gradually evolve into more influential policy actors through institutional learning, committee development, procedural strengthening, and greater public engagement. But the Nigerian case also shows that legislative institutions remain deeply embedded in broader political economies shaped by elite bargaining, patronage incentives, administrative weakness, and structural dependence on extractive revenues. Legislative power is, therefore, not trivial or independently transformative. Rather, its developmental significance is in its potential to institutionalise accountability, constrain arbitrariness, shape governance incentives and provide a framework within which broader developmental reforms may gradually emerge.

These findings support several policy recommendations. First, the institutional capacity of the National Assembly needs to be built up to improve the effectiveness of legislation and development monitoring. Committee systems need to be more professionalised, with greater technical expertise and sector-specific analytical support, to engage more effectively with increasingly complex fiscal, technological, environmental and regulatory issues. The expansion of the institutional role of institutions such as the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies and the strengthening of parliamentary research services would go a long way in improving evidence-based lawmaking and oversight.

Second, more rigorously institutionalising legislative oversight mechanisms through mandatory implementation of reporting frameworks. There should be a legal obligation on ministries, departments and agencies to provide periodic reports on compliance with parliamentary recommendations, audit findings and committee directives within defined timelines. This would build follow-through capacity and reduce the repeated gap between investigative exposure and real institutional enforcement.

Third, fiscal governance and public borrowing processes need greater parliamentary scrutiny and transparency safeguards. The approvals for borrowing should include more transparent sustainability assessments, project-specific implementation benchmarks and periodic public reporting. The rising debt-service burden on federal revenues underscores the need for increased legislative engagement with long-term fiscal sustainability rather than short-term budgetary accommodation.

Fourth, the appropriation process needs more transparency, digitalisation and public participation. Open parliamentary platforms and digital oversight systems should be used to significantly expand public access to budget amendments, constituency project allocations, data on implementation of procurements, and mid-year expenditure performance reports. Transparency would increase public confidence and reduce opportunities for shadowy financial manipulation.

Fifth, mechanisms for legislative ethics and institutional integrity should be enhanced to promote public confidence in parliamentary governance. Stronger, clearer rules on conflicts of interest, better compliance systems for asset disclosure, and more rigorous procedures for ethical enforcement would further enhance institutional credibility and reduce the public perception of legislative complicity in the politics of patronage.

Sixth, better implementation of oversight outcomes is needed through stronger coordination among the legislature, anti-corruption agencies, audit institutions, and the judiciary. Parliamentary enquiries typically expose failures of governance but rarely have enduring institutional effects. Enforcement is divided among a range of institutions. More structured inter-institutional coordination mechanisms would enhance accountability and reduce institutional duplication.

Finally, the democratic consolidation in Nigeria requires a political culture that sees legislative scrutiny not as an obstacle to governance but as an integral part of accountable development. The sustainability of developmental governance in presidential democracies is premised on the balance between executive decisiveness and credible parliamentary oversight. In this sense, the long-term sustainability of Nigeria's democratic institutions will depend not only on constitutional provisions, but also on the extent to which political actors continue to build the norms, capacities, and institutional practices required for accountable and development-oriented governance.

The Nigerian experience suggests that legislatures in new democracies may have more agency as actors in governance reform and institutional accountability than structural constraints may suggest. The evolution of the National Assembly since 1999 illustrates the promise and the limits of legislative power in post-authoritarian presidential systems. While the legislature cannot on its own resolve the deeper structural problems facing the Nigerian state, its continuing institutional strengthening is relevant to the larger project of democratic consolidation, accountable governance and long-term developmental transformation.

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