

## **The Casualties of Greed: Governance Crises, Development Stagnation, and the Quest for Institutional Reforms in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

**T**he Nigerian State, Africa's most populous nation, has long struggled with governance crises rooted in corruption, political instability, and systemic inefficiencies. These challenges, largely driven by greed at various levels of government, have resulted in significant developmental stagnation, impeding economic growth, social progress, and the realization of the nation's full potential. This paper examines the intricate relationship between governance failures and their implications for sustainable development in Nigeria, emphasizing the critical role that institutional weaknesses play in perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment. The study highlights that the true victims of Nigeria's governance crises are the everyday citizens, who bear the brunt of mismanagement, poor policy decisions, and systemic corruption. Employing a Qualitative Critical Phenomenology (QCP) approach, this research analyzes secondary data, to explore the relationship between elite greed and developmental stagnation. Drawing upon the Conceptual Framework for Nigeria's Governance Crises and Developmental Stagnation, the study investigates how elite greed, ethnic and regional tensions, and institutional weaknesses have contributed to Nigeria's slow pace of development. This paper emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive systemic reforms that empower citizens to actively engage in governance and demand accountability from their leaders. The paper recommends civic education programs designed to raise awareness of existing accountability frameworks, such as the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and Whistle-blower Protection laws, enabling citizens especially in rural areas to challenge poor governance.

**Keywords:** Governance Crises, Corruption, Development Stagnation, Institutional Reforms, Political Instability

### **Introduction**

The Nigerian state, endowed with vast natural resources and a young, dynamic population, faces persistent challenges to its development despite significant international attention and aid. Over the decades, the country has experienced governance crises rooted in systemic corruption, political instability, and institutional inefficiencies. These crises have not only stunted economic growth but have also undermined the prospects for social development, with many Nigerians living in extreme poverty, lacking access to basic services such as healthcare and education (Ogunbiyi, 2016; Ezeani, 2017). At the heart of Nigeria's developmental stagnation lies the

problem of greed a pervasive factor influencing governance at multiple levels, from local administrations to national government.

Corruption remains endemic within Nigeria's public sector, with politicians and officials often prioritizing personal gain over national interest. Between 1999 and 2007, it was estimated that Nigeria lost between \$4 to \$8 billion annually due to corruption, a trend that continues to this day (Ijewereme, 2015; Abada, & Ngwu, 2019). Despite the establishment of anti-corruption bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), corruption persists at all levels of government.

In 2024, the EFCC reported recovering nearly \$500 million in proceeds of crime, and secured more than 4,000 criminal convictions, marking its most successful year since its inception over two decades ago (Reuters, 2025). While the EFCC have so far in 2025 initiated 286 corruption cases pending in various courts across the country (Transparency IT, 2025). However, Nigeria still ranks 140th out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating the deep-rooted nature of corruption (Transparency IT, 2025; Momoh, Okoye, Eze, & Sankey; 2025)

Despite being Africa's largest economy, Nigeria faces significant developmental challenges. As of 2024, over 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, with many lacking access to basic services such as healthcare and education. The healthcare system is underfunded and overstretched, leading to inadequate service delivery. In rural areas, less than 5% of the population is enrolled in the National Health Insurance Scheme, and many continue to rely on out-of-pocket payments for healthcare. In education, approximately 10.5 million children are out of school, despite primary education being officially free and compulsory (UNICEF, 2024; Eze & Chukwuma, 2024)

Governance failures in Nigeria can be traced to the systematic erosion of public institutions, where politicians often prioritize personal gain over national interest (Ibrahim, 2019). The political class, especially at the federal level, is accused of perpetuating policies that benefit their pockets and those of their allies while neglecting the welfare of the general populace (Olaopa, 2020). Nigeria's historical reliance on oil as its primary economic driver has fostered a culture of resource mismanagement, where revenue from the oil sector has been siphoned off, leaving the country dependent on imports and unable to diversify its economy (Ugoani, 2017). While there have been notable efforts to curb corruption, the absence of comprehensive institutional reforms has hindered any substantial long-term improvements (Agbibo, 2020).

At the heart of Nigeria's governance crises lies the issue of greed. This pervasive factor influences decision-making processes at multiple levels of government, leading to the misallocation of resources and the perpetuation of policies that benefit a few at the expense of the majority. The concentration of power and wealth among small elite undermines democratic institutions and erodes public trust in governance. This culture of greed not only hampers economic growth but also exacerbates social inequalities, making it a significant barrier to sustainable development (Abada, & Ngwu, 2019).

Nigeria's complex ethnic makeup, with over 250 ethnic groups and three dominant ones (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo), has historically created a fragile political system where ethnic and regional identities often shape political decision-making. Akinyemi (2015) suggests that the ethnic-based political divisions in Nigeria have played a central role in creating an environment where governance is influenced more by ethnic allegiance than by national interest. This, in turn, hampers effective governance and policy-making, as political leaders tend to prioritize ethnic or regional benefits over national development goals.

The resource control debate, particularly regarding oil in the Niger Delta, highlights how regional tensions have fueled demands for political autonomy, leading to frequent disruptions in the oil-producing regions. As a result, political and social stability is often undermined, which in turn stifles development. Moreover, the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast and the frequent herder-farmer conflicts in the middle-belt of Nigeria underscore how regional disputes can escalate into violent conflicts, further exacerbating economic stagnation and disrupting governance (Saliu & Mohammed, 2019). These tensions not only divert attention from crucial governance reforms but also lead to misallocation of resources toward addressing regional crises rather than investing in national infrastructure and economic growth. Thus, scholars like Akinyemi (2015) argue that ethnic and regional dynamics are root causes of Nigeria's poor governance and underdevelopment, and therefore must be acknowledged a factor in the country's stagnation.

On the other hand, several studies maintain that weak institutions rather than the actions of individuals in power are the primary drivers of Nigeria's governance and development crises. Scholars like Suberu (2017) argue that, while individual corruption plays a significant role, the structural problem lies within Nigeria's institutions, which are often weak, poorly structured, and lack accountability.

For instance, the judiciary, the electoral system, and the public service are often criticized for being inefficient and inequitable, which creates an environment ripe for mismanagement and corruption. Suberu (2017) posits that Nigeria's electoral system, marred by vote-buying, rigging, and inconsistent legal frameworks, fails to produce a leadership that is accountable to its citizens. Similarly, the judiciary, which is supposed to provide checks on executive power, has been plagued by corruption and a lack of independence, undermining public confidence in the rule of law (Agbibo, 2020).

Proponents of institutional reform argue that addressing Nigeria's governance crises requires a systemic overhaul of its institutions, especially those that directly affect public service delivery and national governance. Reforms in public service, the judiciary, and electoral processes are considered essential steps toward creating an environment that is less conducive to corruption and more responsive to public needs (Adogamhe, 2008; Okonjo-Iweala, 2014 Obi, 2018).

For example, strengthening the judiciary by ensuring its independence and accountability can reduce political interference in legal processes and enhance the rule of law, thereby providing a solid foundation for long-term development. Similarly, electoral reforms such as automatic voter registration, electronic voting, and the enhancement of the INEC's independence could promote

electoral integrity and ensure that politicians are genuinely representative of the people's will, not driven by corrupt influences (Ugoani, 2018; Babalola, & Onapajo, 2019).

While institutional reforms are vital for Nigeria's development, scholars also note the role of international actors in pushing for accountability. International organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations often play a significant role in promoting governance reforms through financial aid tied to institutional improvements, especially in sectors like education, health, and infrastructure (Ayittey, 2017; Sulu-Gambari, Stafford, & Stapleton, 2018; Kirfi, Kirfi, Yakubu, & Edah, 2024). However, the effectiveness of such aid is often contingent on the political will of Nigerian leaders to undertake genuine reforms. The failure to reform these core institutions has led to the continuation of a system that allows corrupt practices to thrive. When public sector officials are not held accountable, and judicial and electoral reforms remain inadequate, the overall political system fosters poor governance and developmental stagnation.

### **Elite Greed and Developmental Stagnation in Nigeria**

Nigeria's politics has been consistently characterized by elite greed, which has significantly contributed to the nation's developmental stagnation. Elite greed manifested in self-interested behavior of Nigeria's political elites, who prioritize personal enrichment and short-term political gains over long-term national development. This greed-driven approach has manifested in widespread corruption, resource mismanagement, and the inefficiency of public institutions, all of which have undermined Nigeria's economic and social progress. The deliberate diversion of public resources for personal gain has prevented the country from leveraging its natural resources and human capital for sustainable development.

At the heart of elite greed in Nigeria is the rent-seeking behavior of political leaders. Rent-seeking refers to the process where political elites exploit state power and resources to enrich themselves, rather than investing in productive economic activities that could drive national development. Nigeria's oil wealth, which has long been a cornerstone of the nation's economy, is perhaps the most vivid example of this phenomenon. Brownsberger (1983) and Dike (2015) argue that the country's oil boom in the 1970s, instead of fostering economic diversification, led to a system where oil revenues were channeled into the hands of a small group of elites, who used these resources to solidify their political power and enrich themselves. This led to the creation of a rentier state, where political elites become highly dependent on oil revenues rather than developing long-term economic strategies (Manu et al., 2023).

The political elite, particularly in the Fourth Republic, have utilized their control over state resources to cement their political dominance and accumulate wealth at the expense of national prosperity. Abada and Ngwu (2019) contend that political elites have used the control of public offices as a means of personal enrichment, resulting in a misallocation of resources that stifles economic growth. These elites perpetuate a system of nepotism and patronage, appointing individuals to public office based on ethnic loyalty and personal relationships rather than competence. This undermines the capacity of state institutions to perform their public duties effectively, further hindering the country's economic and social development.

The primary consequence of elite greed in Nigeria has been resource mismanagement. Nigeria's vast oil wealth, which should have served as a springboard for development, has instead contributed to the country's economic stagnation. Nkwocha et al. (2024) and Manu et al. (2023) argue that oil wealth has been misused by Nigeria's political elites, who have diverted oil revenues into private pockets rather than investing in infrastructure, education, or healthcare. Resource mismanagement has been a hallmark of Nigerian politics, with public funds routinely siphoned off for personal enrichment, leaving public institutions underfunded and ineffective.

This misallocation of resources is a key factor in Nigeria's developmental stagnation. Adogamhe (2008) notes that while the country has some of the world's largest oil reserves, it lacks a diversified economy and continues to be heavily reliant on oil exports. This over-dependence on a single commodity leaves Nigeria vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations, which have periodically decimated the country's economic performance. Moreover, because the political elite prioritize short-term wealth accumulation, they fail to invest in human capital or develop alternative economic sectors, thus stunting long-term growth prospects. The resultant economic instability has made it difficult for Nigeria to attract foreign investment, further exacerbating the stagnation of its economy (Kabiru, 2019).

Another consequence of elite greed is the neglect of social services, which directly affects the poor and marginalized populations. Besong (2017) argues that political elites, focused on personal enrichment, have consistently underfunded essential public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. This underfunding has deprived millions of Nigerians of access to basic services, hindering social development and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Ezenwa et al. (2025) highlight how political elites' greed has undermined Nigeria's healthcare system, resulting in poor healthcare infrastructure, high mortality rates, and limited access to medical care for large segments of the population. As public funds are diverted for personal enrichment, the government is unable to address the healthcare needs of its citizens, particularly in rural areas where access to medical facilities is limited.

Similarly, education has been severely impacted by elite greed. Lewis (2004) argues that the neglect of education is a direct consequence of political elites' inability to prioritize long-term national development. Kabiru (2019) and Bafeto et al. (2024) note that education in Nigeria remains underfunded, resulting in poor quality education, inadequate school infrastructure, and a lack of skilled labor. Political elites have consistently failed to prioritize investments in education, which has led to low literacy rates and a youth population ill-equipped for participation in the global economy.

Furthermore, infrastructure development has stagnated due to the same patterns of elite greed. Popescu (2024) and Kabiru (2019) explain that infrastructure projects are often used as avenues for personal enrichment, where politically connected individuals inflate costs and misappropriate funds, leaving Nigeria with substandard infrastructure that hinders economic development. The lack of adequate infrastructure—including roads, electricity, and water supply—has perpetuated the rural-urban divide, leaving marginalized communities even more vulnerable to the consequences of political greed.

The casualties of elite greed in Nigeria are most acutely felt by the poor and marginalized. Ezenwa et al. (2025) argue that the greed of political elites has led to the disempowerment of ordinary citizens, particularly those in rural areas, who suffer from poverty, lack of access to services, and economic exclusion. Chioke (2024) explains that the disempowerment of citizens results from the elite's control over state resources, which they use to secure their own wealth, leaving the masses without access to basic services and opportunities for upward mobility.

Bafeto et al. (2024) also explore the impact of elite greed on youth development, arguing that the lack of investment in youth education and job creation has led to widespread youth disillusionment. In many cases, youth unemployment and lack of educational opportunities have resulted in the alienation of young people, making them vulnerable to exploitation by extremist groups and criminal organizations. This perpetuates the cycle of social unrest and political instability in the country.

The greed-driven nature of Nigerian politics has also contributed to political apathy and disillusionment. As citizens become increasingly aware of the corrupt practices of the political elite, they become less inclined to engage in democratic processes, leading to low voter turnout and a lack of trust in government. Popescu (2024) argues that this disenfranchisement results in social unrest, as people, frustrated by the government's failure to address their needs, resort to protests and other forms of civil disobedience.

Additionally, global factors such as the oil market's volatility, foreign debt, and global economic pressures have contributed significantly to Nigeria's economic challenges. Manu et al. (2023) argue that while corruption and elite greed exacerbate Nigeria's problems, the rentier economy created by the oil boom has left Nigeria highly vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. This external dependency has stunted the diversification of the economy and left the country reliant on a single resource for most of its revenue. Furthermore, global financial systems and the influence of international actors, including the IMF and World Bank, have sometimes encouraged policies that do not prioritize local development needs, exacerbating the country's economic stagnation.

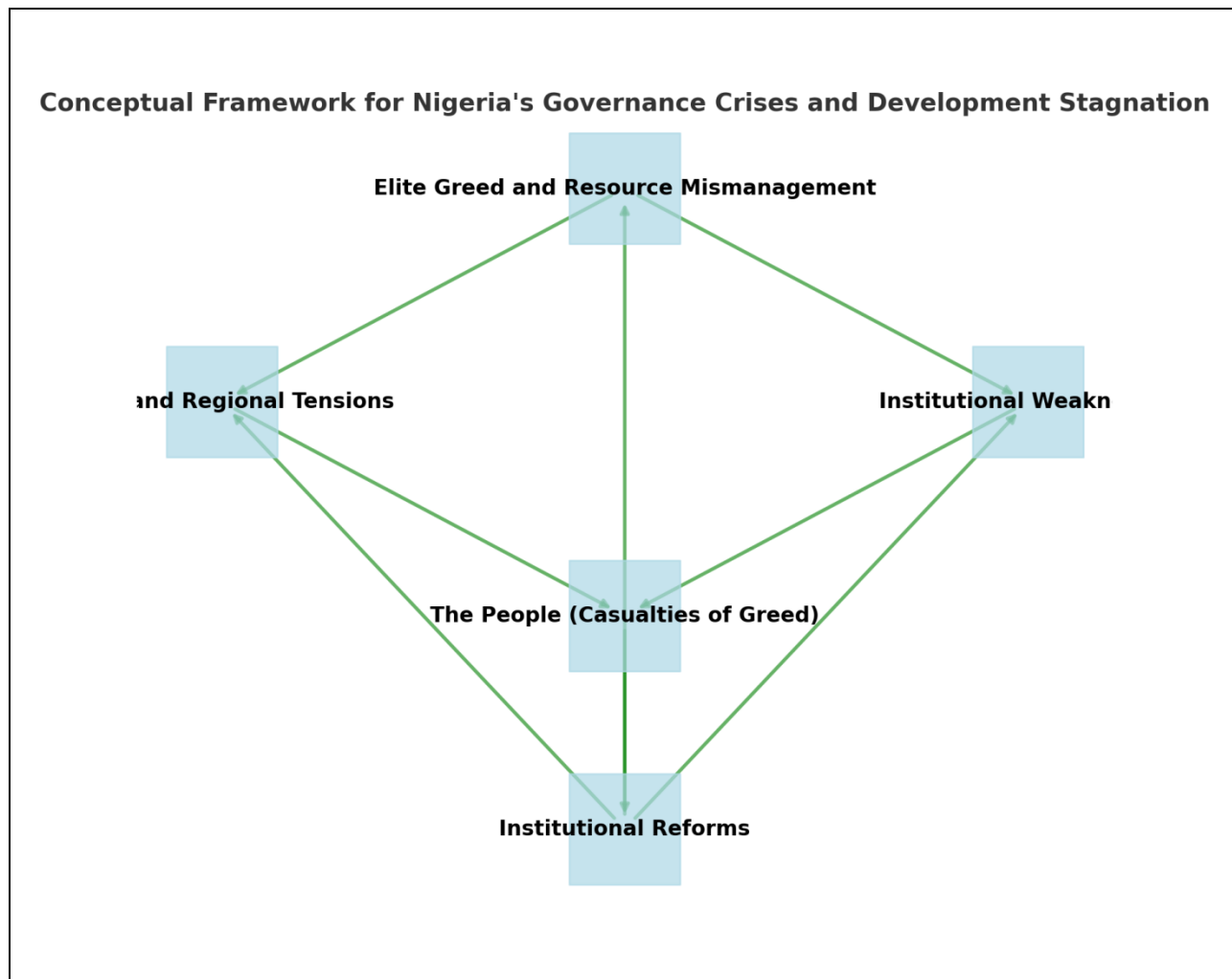
However, the emphasis on elite greed alone might obscure the deeper issue of citizen accountability. Despite the existence of various accountability mechanisms designed to hold political leaders responsible, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), SERVICOM, Whistle-blower Protection and Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, there is a lack of political will among citizens to actively engage in holding their leaders accountable. Alozie (2023) argues that Nigerians have largely resigned themselves to fate, due to a sense of disillusionment and cynicism toward political processes. The failure to engage in meaningful political participation whether through voting, public advocacy, or demanding accountability from elected officials has allowed political elites to continue their corrupt practices with little fear of repercussions.

This unwillingness to demand accountability stems from a complex mix of factors. Sulu-Gambari, Stafford, and Stapleton (2018) note that electoral fraud, vote-buying, and violence have created an environment where citizens feel powerless, and are thus less likely to exercise their right to vote or demand action from their leaders. Furthermore, a culture of silence, where

citizens accept poor governance as a norm, has been entrenched by historical legacies of authoritarian rule and political manipulation. Kabiru (2019) emphasizes that the weakness of civil society, combined with ineffective legal frameworks, has made it difficult for the population to demand changes or challenge political elites. Rather than utilizing available legal avenues or participating in political reforms, many citizens, particularly in rural areas, feel that they have no power to change the system.

Thus, while elite greed is certainly a critical factor in Nigeria's developmental stagnation, the failure of Nigerians to hold political leaders accountable has equally contributed to the persistence of poverty and inequality. This lack of political engagement among the populace, combined with institutional weakness, underscores the need for not just reforms targeting political elites, but also for cultural shifts that encourage citizen participation, political awareness, and a commitment to holding government officials accountable. Only by empowering citizens to actively engage in the political process can Nigeria hope to break free from its cycle of corruption, poor governance, and economic underdevelopment.

### Conceptual Framework



Author's Design, 2025

This conceptual framework connects elite greed to institutional failures, which, in turn, contribute to the marginalization of citizens and the underdevelopment of the country.

## Methodology

This study adopts a Qualitative Critical Phenomenology (QCP) approach to analyze secondary data sources, such as government reports, media articles, scholarly research, and policy documents, to explore the relationship between elite greed and developmental stagnation in Nigeria. Through phenomenological analysis, the study examined how these secondary sources reflect lived experiences and narratives of marginalized populations affected by poor governance. It also explores key themes such as corruption, ethnic tensions, inequality, and the disempowerment of Nigerian citizens, probing into the social consequences of governance failures.

The data will be analyzed thematically, focusing on key areas such as:

1. Elite Greed and its impact on resource mismanagement.
2. Institutional Weaknesses and the failure to implement reforms.
3. The casualties of elite greed, focusing on the marginalized groups affected by poor governance.

## Nigeria's Economic Indicators & Budget Performance (2013–2023)

Year	GDP Growth (%)	Inflation Rate (%)	Total Revenue (₦ Trillion)	Total Expenditure (₦ Trillion)	Fiscal Deficit (₦ Trillion)	Debt-to-GDP Ratio (%)	Debt Service-to-Revenue Ratio (%)
2013	5.4	8.5	7.0	4.56	-0.43	12	20
2014	6.3	8.0	6.8	4.99	-0.50	13	22
2015	2.7	9.0	3.5	5.07	-1.57	14	25
2016	-1.6	15.7	3.2	6.06	-2.86	18	35
2017	0.8	16.5	4.0	7.44	-3.44	20	40
2018	1.9	12.1	4.5	9.12	-4.62	22	45
2019	2.2	11.4	5.0	10.0	-5.0	25	50
2020	-1.8	13.2	3.9	10.8	-6.9	30	60
2021	3.6	16.9	4.4	12.6	-8.2	35	70
2022	3.3	18.8	5.0	17.3	-12.3	38	90
2023	2.9	24.5	5.99	19.5	-13.5	40	111

Sources: African Development Bank (2024); BudgIT (2023) Budget Office of the Federation (2023).



### Nigeria's Federal Budget: Projections vs. Actual Performance (2023 & 2024)

Budget Item	2023 Projected (₦ Trillion)	2023 Actual (₦ Trillion)	2023 Performance Notes	2024 Projected (₦ Trillion)	2024 Actual (₦ Trillion)	2024 Performance Notes
Total Revenue	10.49	5.99	Achieved only 57% of projected revenue, indicating significant shortfall.	18.32	18.5	Revenue-generating agencies surpassed targets; actual revenue exceeded projections.
Total Expenditure	21.83	19.50	Actual spending was about 89% of the budgeted amount.	27.50	28.77	Expenditure exceeded projections, leading to a higher fiscal deficit.
Fiscal Deficit	11.34	13.50	Deficit exceeded projections by 19%, highlighting increased borrowing needs.	9.18	10.27	Deficit surpassed projections due to increased spending.
Debt Service to Revenue Ratio	Not specified	111%	Indicates that debt servicing costs surpassed total revenue, stressing fiscal health.	Not specified	Not specified	Specific ratio not provided; however, high debt servicing costs remain a concern.

Sources: Budget Office of the Federation (2024); BudgIT. (2024)

**Table 1: Unemployment data, 2020**

	Unemployment rate (%)	Underemployment rate (%)
<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>22.8</b>
<i>Urban</i>	31.3	16.2
<i>Rural</i>	34.5	26.9

MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX IN NIGERIA (2022)

### Nigeria National MPI - Key Results



Sixty-three percent of people—133 million— are multidimensionally poor.



The National MPI is 0.257, showing that poor people in Nigeria experience just over one quarter of all possible deprivations.



Over half of the population are multidimensionally poor and deprived in cooking fuel. High deprivations are also apparent in sanitation, time to healthcare, food insecurity and housing.



Multidimensional poverty is higher in rural areas, where 72% of people are poor, compared to 42% of people in urban areas. Approximately 70% of Nigeria's population live in rural areas, yet rural areas are home to 80% of poor people, and their intensity of poverty is also higher: 42% in rural areas compared to 37% in urban areas.



Sixty-five percent of poor people—86 million—live in the North, while 35%—nearly 47 million - live in the South.



Poverty levels across States vary significantly, with the incidence of multidimensional poverty ranging from a low of 27% in Ondo to a high of 91% in Sokoto.



Seventy-one percent of people living in households with at least one person living with a disability (PLWD) are poor, compared to 62% of people who live in households where no one is living with a disability.



In total, 29% of all school-aged children are not attending school, and 94% of all out of-school children are poor. Thus, 27% of all school-aged children are both poor and out of school (with no significant gender disparities)



According to the 2018/19 national monetary poverty line, 40.1% of Nigerians are poor, while 63% are multidimensionally poor according to the National MPI 2022.

**SOURCE: NBC, (2022).**

**Table 5:** Multidimensional poverty by zone

Area	MPI	Incidence (H, %)	Intensity (A, %)	Population share (%)	Number of poor people (million)
National	0.257	62.9	40.9	100.0	132.92
North Central	0.272	66.3	41.0	14.4	20.19
North East	0.324	76.5	42.4	12.7	20.47
North West	0.324	75.8	42.7	28.4	45.49
South East	0.183	49.0	37.3	10.5	10.85
South South	0.250	62.6	39.8	14.8	19.66
South West	0.151	40.0	37.7	19.2	16.27

**SOURCE: NBC, 2022**

## Discussion of findings

### Elite Greed and Resource Mismanagement

Nigeria's governance challenges are deeply rooted in the systemic issue of elite greed, which manifests through persistent corruption, budgetary mismanagement, and poor implementation of national projects. According to the 2023–2024 budget analysis, Nigeria recorded a fiscal deficit of ₦13.5 trillion in 2023, with a debt service-to-revenue ratio of 111%, indicating that most of the country's revenue was spent servicing debt rather than investing in development (Nigeria Budget Analysis, 2024). Despite increasing revenue in 2024, the structural imbalance in spending priorities persisted. As observed in the budget analysis (2023–2024), Nigeria's fiscal deficit is largely driven by mismanagement of resources and debt servicing, leaving little room for development-focused expenditure. The corruption case data confirms that elite greed has contributed to misuse of public funds and lack of accountability in key sectors such as oil, public service, and financial management.

The corruption cases, including high-profile prosecutions such as those involving Farouq Lawan, Orji Uzor Kalu, and Godwin Emefiele, illustrate the institutional complicity and elite impunity that characterize Nigeria's anti-corruption landscape (EFCC, 2023). The fact that cases can last over a decade without resolution (e.g., Kalu's trial ongoing since 2007) exposes the judicial system's vulnerability to elite influence, undermining the credibility of governance institutions (Transparency International, 2024).

The mismanagement of national resources is further exemplified by over 60,000 abandoned public projects with an estimated value exceeding ₦17 trillion. Projects like the Ajaokuta Steel Mill and Bakolori Dam represent lost opportunities for industrialization and infrastructure development (Adamu & Rasheed, 2016). These failures, driven by political interference, lack of transparency, and misappropriation of funds, are symptomatic of elite greed entrenched in Nigeria's governance system (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019).

## **Multidimensional Poverty and Social Consequences**

The 2022 National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) reveals that 63% of Nigerians approximately 133 million people are multidimensionally poor (NBS, 2022). Deprivations in health, education, housing, and access to clean energy point directly to governance failures and the elite's neglect of public welfare. The MPI shows that 72% of rural Nigerians are poor, and 67.5% of children suffer multidimensional poverty, with the highest deprivations in child engagement, housing, and sanitation (UNDP & OPHI, 2022).

Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks Nigeria 140 out of 180 countries, with a score of 26/100, indicating rampant public sector corruption (Transparency International, 2024). Furthermore, 44% of public service users reportedly paid bribes, and 43% of citizens believe corruption worsened over the last year, underscoring widespread distrust in governance. The convergence of these indices affirms that elite greed has a direct correlation with poverty, inequality, and development stagnation.

## **Ethnic and Regional Tensions**

Ethnic and regional tensions serve both as causes and consequences of elite-driven governance failures. Political elites often manipulate regional affiliations for political gain, exacerbating resource disparities. The MPI findings reveal that 65% of the multidimensionally poor live in Northern Nigeria, where poverty rates in Sokoto reach 91%, compared to 27% in Ondo (NBS, 2022). Despite the Niger Delta's oil wealth, underdevelopment persists due to elite capture and marginalization, perpetuating regional inequality and discontent (Babalola & Onapajo, 2019).

The court data and media reports suggest that political elites exploit regional divisions to secure electoral advantage, often through clientelism, patronage, and nepotism (Afolabi & Agunyai, 2017). These practices result in uneven development and further entrench identity-based politics, which compromise national cohesion and sustainable development (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019).

## **Judicial and Institutional Weaknesses**

Institutional fragility remains a core enabler of elite impunity. The judiciary, while constitutionally independent, is often influenced by political interference and lacks the autonomy to enforce equitable justice. Cases involving high-level corruption continue unresolved for years, undermining both deterrence and public trust (Fagbadebo, 2025). The EFCC and ICPC, though active, face challenges of underfunding, selective prosecution, and political meddling (Ijewereme, 2015). The compliance data from the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) shows that only 65.8% of cases comply with procedural requirements, while 8.4% are violated—another indicator of systemic dysfunction. Without credible reforms in legal frameworks and judicial processes, anti-corruption efforts will continue to falter (Corruption cases Database, 2025)

## **Conclusion**

The persistent cycle of elite greed and developmental stagnation in Nigeria cannot be effectively addressed without a focused effort on citizen empowerment and engagement. While reforms targeting political elites are essential, equally crucial is the empowerment of Nigerian citizens to actively participate in the political process and hold their leaders accountable. This can be achieved through an innovative combination of civic education, utilization of existing accountability frameworks, and cultural shifts toward greater political participation.

By shifting the focus from elite greed to citizen empowerment, Nigeria can begin to break free from its cycle of corruption and economic stagnation. Encouraging citizen engagement and political participation, combined with institutional reforms and a cultural shift toward accountability, will create an environment where elite accountability becomes the norm. Ultimately, a well-informed electorate and an empowered citizenry will have the tools and motivation to hold political leaders accountable, paving the way for sustainable national development.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations aim to leverage these frameworks to promote citizen activism, government transparency, and sustainable development.

- i. **Strengthening Civic Education and Awareness Programs:** The lack of political will among Nigerians to hold leaders accountable often stems from political apathy, disillusionment, and a lack of understanding of how to effectively use existing accountability frameworks. Civic education must be prioritized across formal and informal sectors to teach Nigerians, especially those in rural areas, the importance of political participation and how to navigate legal avenues such as the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, Whistle-blower Protection, and how to engage with bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Therefore, nationwide campaigns must be intensified promoting political literacy, emphasizing citizens' rights to demand transparency and how to utilize available laws for accountability. These initiatives should be integrated into schools, universities, and community outreach programs. Community leaders, NGOs, and civic organizations should play a key role in driving these efforts.
- ii. **Promoting Active Use of Accountability Mechanisms:** Despite the existence of frameworks like the EFCC, SERVICOM, Whistle-blower Protection Act, and the FOI Act, many citizens remain unaware or distrustful of these institutions due to perceived inefficiency or political manipulation. It is crucial to demystify these mechanisms and ensure their accessibility, particularly for those who may feel disempowered. More efforts should be made to create platforms enabling citizens to easily access accountability mechanisms. For instance, establishing online portals where citizens can report corruption or demand transparency in real time would empower citizens to take action. Additionally, publicizing success stories of corruption prosecutions and policy changes resulting from citizen engagement will inspire broader participation.
- iii. **Enhancing Collaboration between Civil Society and Legal Institutions:** As noted by Kabiru (2019), the weakness of civil society and ineffective legal frameworks contribute

- to political disengagement. However, fostering strong collaboration between civil society organizations (CSOs) and legal bodies such as the EFCC, Judiciary, and National Assembly can create a more robust and responsive accountability system.
- iv. **Fostering a Culture of Political Participation and Social Accountability:** The culture of silence, where citizens accept poor governance as a norm, has been reinforced by historical legacies of authoritarianism and political manipulation. Encouraging civic participation through grassroots movements, protests, and policy advocacy will help shift the focus toward demanding accountability from political leaders. Thus political activism and social accountability must be encouraged by supporting youth-led initiatives and community-based political organizations. These movements can serve as platforms for political education and engagement, particularly in rural areas where citizens may feel disconnected from the political process. Combating voter apathy and building trust in democratic institutions is essential for empowering the population to hold leaders accountable.
  - v. **Political Will and Government Commitment:** For these recommendations to be effective, there must be genuine political will from the Nigerian government to improve governance and actively support the use of accountability frameworks. Political elites must be held to the highest standards of transparency, and policies must be enforced equally across ethnic and regional lines.

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