

**LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN NIGERIA: EVALUATING THE PERFORMANCE AND CHALLENGES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY\***

**Abstract**

*This paper critically examines the functions and contemporary performance of the Nigerian legislature with particular attention to its oversight responsibilities within the framework of democratic governance. While the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended) empowers the legislature to act as a check on executive excesses through lawmaking, budgetary control, and investigative powers, empirical evidence suggests persistent dysfunction, institutional weaknesses, and ethical contradictions in the exercise of these roles. Drawing on legislative records, secondary data, and scholarly analyses, the study investigates how corruption, political interference, and prebendal practices have compromised the effectiveness of legislative oversight. It argues that rather than serving as an instrument of accountability, the legislature has often become complicit in the systemic corruption it is meant to combat thereby manifesting in practices such as budget padding, constituency project fraud, and rent-seeking within committee systems. The paper concludes that meaningful reform requires strengthening institutional independence, enhancing legislative ethics, promoting transparency, and fostering collaboration with civil society and adoption of comparative models such as Singapore's committee system to restore credibility and democratic accountability to Nigeria's National Assembly. By integrating political and philosophical analysis, the study reveals that Nigeria's legislature embodies both the promise and peril of democratic governance, where institutional authority coexists with moral failure.*

**Keywords:** Legislature, Oversight function, Nigeria, National Assembly, Corruption, Accountability

**1. Introduction**

The legislature remains one of the three coordinate arms of government and serves as the institutional embodiment of the people's sovereignty. It is constitutionally responsible for ensuring that citizens have a voice in governance, thereby playing a crucial role in national development and nation-building. As the representative body of the people, the legislature bears the responsibility to enact laws, make policy decisions, represent the populace, and oversee the actions of the executive. Each of these roles contributes to the socioeconomic transformation of the state and the sustenance of democratic governance.<sup>1</sup> Beyond its lawmaking role, the legislature is the primary defender of democracy and the voice of citizens in the political process. In fact, without a functional legislature, democratic principles such as equality before the law, liberty, the rule of law, and checks and balances would be difficult to sustain.<sup>2</sup> Across democratic systems, legislatures are entrusted with key functions and collectively, these responsibilities ensure that governance remains participatory, accountable, and responsive to public needs.<sup>3</sup> The legislature, therefore, acts as the moderator that strengthens democratic principles through lawmaking, representation, and oversight of the executive and its agencies. In performing these functions, it safeguards the sanctity of democratic values and ensures that government power is exercised within the limits of constitutional and moral responsibility. As the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth once noted, 'the major functions of parliament are legislation, national budgeting, government oversight, and promoting the interests, needs, and desires of constituents.'<sup>4</sup>

In democratic regimes, legislative oversight serves as a critical mechanism for maintaining checks and balances. It is the process by which the legislature monitors and evaluates the activities of the executive branch and its agencies to ensure accountability, efficiency, and adherence to the law.<sup>5</sup> Legislative oversight is thus designed to prevent the abuse of power, minimize corruption, and promote good governance. It functions as the institutional 'watchdog' of democracy and an indispensable instrument for transparency and policy accountability. In instances where the legislature fails in this duty, governance becomes vulnerable to impunity and inefficiency. The ability of the legislature to discharge this oversight role effectively depends largely on its vision, institutional independence, and commitment to the public good.<sup>6</sup> This submission inspired Olaogun, Sunkanmi, and colleagues to observe that the legislature is strategically established by the constitution to act as a watchdog and to moderate the activities of other arms of government.<sup>7</sup> Oversight, in this sense, is not merely procedural but ethical—it ensures that governance remains people-oriented and responsive to national priorities. Through budget scrutiny, investigative hearings, and public inquiries, the legislature ensures that government spending aligns with developmental objectives and that public resources are used efficiently.<sup>8</sup>

The oversight function also extends to the investigation of corruption, maladministration, and human rights violations. In this regard, the legislature becomes an arbiter of accountability in ensuring that government institutions act within the bounds of legality and justice. As Ayobolu and Igwe rightly argue that the legislature's performance of oversight responsibilities is

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<sup>1</sup> CFRN 1999, s 4(1).

<sup>2</sup> A Q Akinade, *Impacts of Ruling Party on Legislative Constraints in Nigeria: A Case Study of APC and National Assembly* (Department of Political Science, Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, Nigeria, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> MS Olaogun *et al*, 'Legislative Oversight in Nigeria's Democracy: Roles, Challenges and Way Forward,' [2024] (8) (14) *IJRISS*, Special Issue on Management, DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

indispensable to institutional accountability and national development.<sup>9</sup> Legislatures or assemblies thus serve as mirrors of a country's political culture, party system, and state character whether it is a democratic or authoritarian regime.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, legislative oversight remains one of the most important tools for strengthening democratic governance, promoting transparency, and ensuring that public power is used for the collective good. But, in Nigeria, this legislative oversight has been constrained by many challenges such as structural, political, and institutional challenges. Equally, party loyalty often undermines this institutional independence, while executive interference and limited research capacity weaken legislative assertiveness.<sup>11</sup> The above challenges led this work to attempts in evaluating the contemporary performance of the legislatures in the face of these present constraints and challenges. To help us achieve this feat, in the first section of this work, we are going to be x-raying the modern trends and practice of oversight functions of Nigerian Legislatures where the 'beaming of light' of the legislature shines on executive action, their programme implementation and public resources. In section two, we are going to look at some major Oversight functions in Nigeria witnessed so far by Nigerian Legislatures. Section three is an evaluation of the performance and challenges of the National Assembly from the beginning of the fourth republic until now. The final section is the conclusion and the recommendations.

## **2. Oversight Functions of the Nigerian Legislatures: Modern Trends and Practice**

As a key mechanism in democratic governance Legislative oversight allows a legislature to monitor, supervise, and hold the executive branch and its agencies accountable. It is on this premise that the doctrines of separation of powers and checks and balances hinges, so without effective oversight, the executive may exercise arbitrary power, leading to democratic decay or authoritarian drift.<sup>12</sup> This is why Fatile and Adejuwon note that oversight is 'the central instrument through which the legislature holds the executive branch of government to account.'<sup>13</sup> Legislative Oversight thus serves multiple normative functions like enabling elected representatives to oversee executive action on behalf of citizens and promoting accountability and transparency by subjecting government action to parliamentary scrutiny. It equally enhances public trust in institutions by ensuring that laws and budgets passed by the legislature are properly implemented.<sup>14</sup> In the Nigerian context, the oversight role is significant given the presidential system adopted in the 1999 Constitution, where the executive wields considerable policy and financial discretion. The legislature's surveillance role is therefore crucial to prevent executive over-reach.<sup>15</sup>

### **Constitutional and Institutional Basis for oversight in Nigeria**

The constitutional basis for oversight by the National Assembly is contained in Sections 88 and 89 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended). These provisions grant each House of the National Assembly the power to summon persons, issue binding orders, and investigate matters within its legislative competence.<sup>16</sup> Also, the internal rules of the Senate and House of Representatives, as well as practice-oriented guides such as the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC)'s *Guide to Legislative Oversight in the National Assembly*, provide the practical framework for committee work, inquiries, monitoring visits, and reporting.<sup>17</sup> Thus, officially the legislature is institutionally equipped to execute oversight, though practice may differ.

### **Modern Trends in Oversight Practice: 'Beaming Light' on Public Agencies**

In modern parlance, the oversight function of the National Assembly has been described as the process of 'beaming light' on the activities of ministries, departments, parastatals and agencies (MDAs).<sup>18</sup> Through standing and ad hoc committees, the Assembly investigates public bodies, summons their heads, examines relevant documentation and budget implementation, and publishes findings to the plenary for further action. For instance, the assembly recently resolved to set up a committee to investigate the activities of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), which was itself established by an Act of the National Assembly.<sup>19</sup> Studies have shown a growing number of oversight hearings, monitoring visits and public sessions, indicating a trend towards greater legislative activism in scrutiny of the executive.<sup>20</sup> For instance, research on the 8th Assembly's Committees on Power, Works and Housing (2015-2019) found increased oversight efforts albeit with mixed impact.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> OO Ayobolu and SC Igwe, 'Legislative Imperative, Institutional Accountability and Propensity for National Development in Nigeria,' [2024] (15) (11) *International Journal of Political Science and International Relations*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> A Q Akinade, *Impacts of Ruling Party on Legislative Constraints in Nigeria: A Case Study of APC and National Assembly* (Department of Political Science, Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, Nigeria, n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> JO Fatile and KD Adejuwon, 'Legislative Oversight as Accountability Mechanism: The Nigerian Perspective,' in *The Legislature in Nigeria's Presidential Democracy of the Fourth Republic* (ed), (Springer, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> 'Guide to Legislative Oversight in the National Assembly' (Abuja: Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre [PLAC], 2016) p3.

<sup>16</sup> DO Osy, 'Legislative Oversight in Nigeria: An Assessment of the Role of the National Assembly,' [2009] (3) (1-2) *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*.

<sup>17</sup> CFRN 1999, s 88-89.

<sup>18</sup> 'Guide to Legislative Oversight in the National Assembly' (Abuja: Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre [PLAC], 2016) iv-v.

<sup>19</sup> Anne Amuche Obiora, 'Comparative Analysis of Legislative Oversight in South Africa and Nigeria,' [2019] (2) (1) *COOU JPPL*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> 'Oversight Functions of the National Assembly in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges,' [2024] (13) (3) *International Journal of Psychology & Humanities*, 86.

<sup>21</sup> EC Chukwunyerere, *Legislative Oversight and Accountability: A Study of the 8th Senate Committees on Power, Works and Housing (2015-2019)*, (M.A. thesis, National Institute for Legislative & Democratic Studies, 2020).

### **Legislative Oversight Functions and Their Practice in Nigeria**

Studies connect effective legislative oversight with democratic consolidation and improved governance outcomes. Yusuf and Ojoduwa revealed that the legislature's oversight function contributed to democratic stabilization in Nigeria from 1999-2019, notably by exposing inefficiencies and corruption, and fostering executive responsiveness.<sup>22</sup> Abah and Obiajulu argue that oversight is critical to the fight against corruption, as it empowers the legislature to act as a watchdog over public resources.<sup>23</sup> In practical terms, when the legislatures uses its oversight powers actively, executive agencies are more likely to comply with laws, budgets are more rigorously implemented, and public trust in institutions may improve. Oversight, therefore, is not an optional add-on but a central pillar of governance.<sup>24</sup> Several thematic dimensions of legislative oversight can be identified and observed in Nigeria:

- a). The approval and Confirmation responsibility empowers the legislatures to exercises power to approve or reject executive appointments (such as ministerial nominees or heads of key agencies), thereby ensuring that executive composition aligns with public interest.<sup>25</sup>
- b). With the Investigative Powers, the Standing committees regularly summon MDAs to account for expenditure, implementation of laws and programmes. Some notable investigations include those into subsidy disbursement, the SURE-P fund, and other public financial misconduct.<sup>26</sup>
- c). The Budgetary and Financial Oversight helps the legislature to review budget proposals, approves appropriation bills, ensures expenditures align with legislative intent and investigates deviations. Section 81 and Section 80 of the Constitution articulate the process of laying budget estimates and withdrawing funds.<sup>27</sup>
- d). The oversight function of Monitoring & Supervision of Projects of the legislature extends to supervising the implementation of government projects, tracking timelines, evaluating outcomes and ensuring value for money. This is especially critical in infrastructure and public service delivery.<sup>28</sup>
- e). Effective representation and becoming a constituent Voice is the oversight function of the legislatures. While it is often institutional, legislatures are expected to represent citizen interests by raising queries on local MDAs, publicizing findings and ensuring executive responsiveness to public needs.<sup>29</sup>

The oversight functions of the National Assembly are central to the governance architecture of Nigeria's democratic system. When exercised effectively, oversight deepens representation, enhances accountability, and strengthens the rule of law. The 'beaming of light' metaphor aptly captures the legislature's role in shining scrutiny on executive action, programme implementation and public resources. However, realizing the full potential of this function depends not just on formal powers but on institutional capacity, political will and public engagement. For Nigeria to progress in its democratic maturity, investment in legislative oversight must match the legislature's law-making role.

### **Notable Oversight Functions by Legislatures in Nigeria**

In modern legislative discourse in Nigeria, the oversight role of the National Assembly is often described as a process of 'beaming of light' on the activities of government departments, parastatals, commissions, agencies, and ministries.<sup>30</sup> Through this metaphor, the legislature signals vigilance, transparency and the capacity to shine scrutiny into the black-boxes of public administration. These constitutional provisions anchor the legislature's role as a supervisory arm of government, with the mandate to monitor implementation of laws, expenditure of public funds, and conduct of the executive. We are going to look at some major Oversight functions in Nigeria.

***Petroleum Subsidy and Revenue Leakages:*** One of the most high-profile oversight functions executed by the Legislatures involved investigations into alleged subsidy frauds and revenue leakages in the oil and gas sector. For instance, a Senate Ad-Hoc Committee in the 8th Assembly probed the USD 16 billion Egina offshore oil project and the associated cost variations. The report of the committee's report claimed recoveries of over N140 billion, though the final report was never tabled before the dissolution of that Assembly.<sup>31</sup> These oversight efforts demonstrated the legislature's willingness to exercise its power, even though also highlighted gaps in follow-through.

***Examination of Budget Implementation and MDAs:*** The oversight function by the Legislature has shaped budgetary governance. The legislature has used its committees to summon ministers, heads of MDAs, and parastatal executives to account

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<sup>22</sup> YA Yusuf and FJ Ojoduwa, 'Legislative Oversight and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: 1999-2019,' [2022] (3) (2) *African Social Science & Humanities Journal*, 129.

<sup>23</sup> NC Abah and AO Obiajulu, 'Relevance of Legislative Oversight in the Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria,' [2017] (2) (1) *Socialscientia Journal of the Social Sciences & Humanities*, 34-45

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> AO Olufunsho and SC Igwe, 'Legislative Imperative, Institutional Accountability and Propensity for National Development in Nigeria,' [2024] (15) (11) *International Journal of Political Science & International Relations*, 14

<sup>26</sup> NC Abah and AO Obiajulu, 'Relevance of Legislative Oversight in the Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria,' [2017] (2) (1) *Socialscientia Journal of the Social Sciences & Humanities*, 34-45

<sup>27</sup> CFRN 1999, s 80-81.

<sup>28</sup> Benue State University Law Journal, 'Monitoring, Raising Queries and Censorship of Executive Activities,' [2023] (12) (2) *BSU Law J.*, 185.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>30</sup> 'Guide to Legislative Oversight in the National Assembly' (Abuja: Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre [PLAC], 2016).

<sup>31</sup> A Ochojila, 'National Assembly and why celebrated probes are of little consequence,' [2022] *The Guardian* (Nigeria).

for appropriation usage and project implementation.<sup>32</sup> Research shows that the 8th Senate's Committees on Power, Works and Housing (2015-2019) conducted multiple oversight visits, public hearings and interactive sessions, although their effectiveness was constrained.<sup>33</sup> Such oversight visits and hearings reflect the legislature's role in bridging the gap between statutory appropriation and administrative execution.

**External Borrowings, Projects and Infrastructure Monitoring:** The legislature also monitors the executive's borrowing powers, contract awards and infrastructure projects. For example, oversight functions include the monitoring of state borrowing and the scrutiny of loans/foreign aids by the House Committee on Aids, Loans and Debt Management.<sup>34</sup> Through such oversight committees, the National Assembly seeks to ensure that public debt and project financing follow the legislative intent and fiscal responsibility norms.

**Health Sector, Education and Public Service Delivery:** Another domain of oversight is the public service and welfare sectors. Committees of the National Assembly have undertaken investigations into issues such as university funding, education budgets, and health-sector expenditures.<sup>35</sup> These oversight activities reflect the legislature's developmental role: ensuring that appropriated public funds translate into service delivery, benefiting citizens, and not simply remaining on paper.

Emerging trends indicate that the National Assembly is increasingly reliant on standing committees, joint committee sessions, public hearings and field visits as oversight tools. Practitioners and scholars recommend reforms to strengthen oversight including granting the Assembly budgetary autonomy, establishing a National Assembly Budget Office for real-time monitoring, improving research support, and enhancing citizen and civil society participation in oversight processes.

### **3. Evaluating the Performance and Challenges of the National Assembly**

The legislative investigative powers in the constitutional framework as we have continuously asserted in this work are essential tools for ensuring transparency, accountability, and the prevention of abuse of executive and administrative power. Constitutionally, the legislature occupies a strategic position in Nigeria's anti-corruption architecture. Its other responsibilities include enacting anti-corruption legislation, providing budgetary oversight, approving appointments to key anti-graft agencies, and scrutinizing executive conduct.<sup>36</sup> The legislature is also empowered to summon persons, compel the production of documents, and scrutinize the conduct of government officials.<sup>37</sup> As part of ensuring transparency, accountability, and the prevention of abuse of executive there is a constitutional provisions in Section 66(1) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, which disqualifies individuals indicted for corruption, fraud, or other serious crimes from being elected into the National Assembly. However, this provision is rarely enforced, leading to the paradoxical situation where individuals with pending criminal charges or questionable integrity are entrusted with lawmaking responsibilities. This failure to uphold constitutional safeguards has entrenched a culture of impunity.<sup>38</sup> Atakpa et al while undertaking an evaluative analysis of the performance of Nigeria's 8th National Assembly (2015-2019) in combating corruption,<sup>39</sup> situated their study within the broader discourse on democratic governance, accountability, and institutional integrity observed that the 8th Assembly's role was undermined by several factors such as internal corruption scandals, executive-legislative tensions, weak enforcement of oversight powers, and the personal interests of legislators.<sup>40</sup> They highlighted that notable controversies involving the 8th Assembly were allegations of 'budget padding,' misuse of constituency project funds, and partisan conflicts that often diluted anti-corruption debates.<sup>41</sup> These episodes illustrate how legislative corruption not only erodes public confidence in parliament but also weakens Nigeria's overall anti-corruption drive. They however conclude that while the Assembly passed some relevant legislation and held investigative hearings but sadly, its effectiveness was limited by its own ethical compromises and political conflicts with the executive. Bakare and Bello voiced in Unisom to the above assertion to note that the National Assembly, as the apex legislative body in Nigeria, is central to the proper functioning of democracy but it has become undermined by pervasive corruption, weak institutional frameworks, and the politicization of its processes.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> DO Osy, 'Legislative Oversight in Nigeria: An Assessment of the Role of the National Assembly,' [2009] (3) (1-2) University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy.

<sup>33</sup> EC Chukwunyere, *Legislative Oversight and Accountability: A Study of the 8th Senate Committees on Power, Works and Housing (2015-2019)*, (M.A. thesis, National Institute for Legislative & Democratic Studies, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> 'NASS' Oversight of MDAs Ineffective – CSOs, Others,' *Leadership News*, May 2025.

<sup>35</sup> MK Aliyu et al, 'Analysis of the Challenges of Legislative Oversight on Good Governance in Nigeria,' [2016] (6) (7) *Developing Country Studies*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> OE Atakpa et al, 'The Nigerian Legislature and the Fight against Corruption: Focus on the 8th National Assembly,' [2020] (2) (6) *International Journal of Management Studies and Social Science Research*, 60-75.

<sup>37</sup> RA Uzoechi, 'The Scope and Limitations of the Investigative Powers of the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: an Appraisal' (unpublished paper). *Senate of the National Assembly v. Tony Momoh* (1983) 4 NCLR 269.

<sup>38</sup> UD Umaru, 'Corruption and Legislative Functions in Nigeria.' [2017] (8) (1) *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance (IOSR-JEF)*, 1-8.

<sup>39</sup> OE Atakpa et al, 'The Nigerian Legislature and the Fight against Corruption: Focus on the 8th National Assembly,' [2020] (2) (6) *International Journal of Management Studies and Social Science Research*, 60-75.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 70-72

<sup>42</sup> AR Bakare and ML Bello, 'Reforming the Nigerian National Assembly for Legislative Effectiveness: Issues, Constraints and Way-Forward.' [2020] (12) (1) *Acta Universitatis Danubius*, 68-89.

To underscore a recurring tension between the separation of powers and the oversight function of the legislature, Uzoechi highlighted several judicial pronouncements that have clarified the scope of these powers, especially the Supreme Court decision in *Senate of the National Assembly v. Tony Momoh*, which affirmed that legislative investigations must be tied to lawmaking functions and cannot amount to usurpation of judicial or executive powers.<sup>43</sup> In their contemporary functions, he established that there have been some identified limitations and constraints. These constraints range from the misuse of investigative powers for political witch-hunting, selective targeting of individuals, disregard for due process, and corruption within the legislature itself. The Legislature, Uzoechi argues, has often deployed its investigative machinery not in pursuit of the public good but as a bargaining tool for rent-seeking and prebendal interests.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, this prebendal culture within the legislature has led to the popular labeling of Nigerian lawmakers as 'legislolooters' or 'representa-thieves,' reflecting deep public cynicism about their role.<sup>45</sup> This is probably because rather than embodying democratic representation, legislators are perceived as rent-seekers who exploit their positions for financial gain. Agunyai and Ojatorotu followed up on this submission to observe that investigations into corruption are most often compromised by legislative complicity, reducing oversight to a performance rather than a genuine accountability measure. To be particular, they aver that even though committees are designed to decentralize legislative work and ensure accountability but in reality, the committee system is compromised by corruption in constituency projects. Here, the lawmakers allegedly collude with contractors to inflate and abandon constituency projects, leading to massive wastage of public funds.<sup>46</sup> They submit that reports from the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) reveal that trillions of naira earmarked for constituency projects since 2000 have produced little tangible development.<sup>47</sup> They also revealed that the committees are also compromised by the struggle for 'juicy Committees'. They finally noted that rather than being guided by merit or expertise, appointments into these committees are often determined by lobbying, political patronage, and corruption. Legislators prefer committees with lucrative oversight functions, particularly those tied to revenue-generating ministries and agencies.<sup>48</sup> Bakare and Bello on their own highlighted how that corruption is both a cause and a consequence of legislative weakness in Nigeria. They insist that the legislature has become an active participant in corruption rather than an institution of accountability. They make a compelling case by drawing attention to practices such as budget padding, contract racketeering, and misuse of oversight functions, this insight is critical because it shifts the discourse away from executive corruption alone to the complicity of lawmakers, thereby broadening the analysis of governance failure.<sup>49</sup> Oloto et al. demonstrated this legislative complicity in the fight against systemic corruption in Nigeria contrary to their constitutional duty of ensuring checks and balances. They narrowed this complicity specifically to budget padding. They conceive it as fraudulent inflation of budgetary provisions by legislators and sometimes in collaboration with members of the executive arm of government. This practice, according to them, undermines fiscal discipline, erodes transparency, and redirects public resources away from development-oriented projects toward private enrichment.<sup>50</sup> They equally drew from several instances, particularly from the 4th to the 8th National Assemblies, where allegations of budget padding surfaced. These include the manipulation of constituency projects, the inflation of capital project costs, and the clandestine addition of non-existent items to budgetary documents. Highlighting critical consequences of budget padding, they observed: misallocation of scarce resources, delay in budget passage, and public distrust in legislative institutions as such consequences. Most importantly, it connects budget padding to the erosion of public accountability, which directly undermines development planning and execution in Nigeria.<sup>51</sup>

The legislature is supposed to embody representative democracy, yet the practice of budget padding reduces it to an arena of personal enrichment and patronage distribution. Anthony Staddon also foregrounds the paradox that the legislators though constitutionally empowered to exercise oversight over the executive and ensure accountability, often becomes complicit in corruption itself. This duality according to him undermines both democratic consolidation and citizens' trust in governance. He emphasized the theoretical role of oversight in democratic governance by noting that the parliamentary oversight which is meant to guarantee transparency, curb executive excesses, and promote accountability in the use of public resources.<sup>52</sup> However, he lamented that this mechanism is frequently distorted by patronage, prebendal politics, and rent-seeking behavior among lawmakers. In the same vein, Umaru's while providing a penetrating analysis of how pervasive corruption has undermined the constitutional mandate of the Nigerian legislature avers that the Nigerian legislature, constitutionally empowered to make laws, conduct oversight, and represent the people, has paradoxically become a fertile ground for corruption, thereby eroding its legitimacy and credibility. He further observes that leadership figures in the National Assembly have been implicated in large-scale scandals involving contract inflation, embezzlement, and fraud while ordinary members of the legislatures are most often

<sup>43</sup> RA Uzoechi, 'The Scope and Limitations of the Investigative Powers of the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: an Appraisal' (unpublished paper). Senate of the National Assembly v. Tony Momoh (1983) 4 NCLR 269.

<sup>44</sup> R Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>45</sup> OB Ijewereme, 'Anatomy of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector: Theoretical Perspectives and Some Empirical Explanations,' [2015] (5) (2) *SAGE Open*, 1–16.

<sup>46</sup> SC Agunyai and V Ojatorotu, 'The Nigerian Legislative Committee System, Corruption, and Constituency Woes: Lessons Nigerians Can Learn from the Singaporean Legislative Committee System,' [2021] (17) (2) *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 97–123.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 119–121

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> AR Bakare and ML Bello, 'Reforming the Nigerian National Assembly for Legislative Effectiveness: Issues, Constraints and Way-Forward.' [2020] (12) (1) *Acta Universitatis Danubius*, 68–89.

<sup>50</sup> SE Oloto et al, 'Budget Padding and National Development in Nigeria.' [2019] (3) (2) *Journal of Economics and Allied Research*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> A Staddon, *Parliamentary Oversight and Corruption in Nigeria: Policy Brief, Presenting Key Issues & Lessons Learned* (London: University of Westminster, Centre for the Study of Corruption, 2017), p1–18.

accused of bribery, intimidation, and rent-seeking during oversight duties. He emphasizes that this culture of corruption is institutionalized, with legislators competing for positions on 'juicy committees' that provide lucrative opportunities for financial enrichment.<sup>53</sup> Such practices, he argues, transform oversight functions into avenues for extortion rather than mechanisms of accountability. He finally highlights how corruption in the legislature manifests in budget padding, the deliberate inflation of project costs for personal benefit and in constituency projects, which frequently remain unexecuted or abandoned despite massive allocations. Umaru documents cases where ministers, directors, and agency heads openly alleged extortion during legislative probes. The legislature, he alleges, is supposed not to be seen as a watchdog of the executive, but as a complicit actor in the looting of public resources.<sup>54</sup> As part of this complicity, Ijewereme also emphasized that the critical area where the legislature is implicated is in the area of budgetary corruption. He explained that budget padding is where lawmakers inflate project costs or insert fictitious projects into the national budget. This according to his lamentation is 'becoming embarrassing and endemic'.<sup>55</sup> He reveals how legislators often collude with contractors or executive officials to siphon funds through inflated allocations. He equally unravels how constituency projects which is meant to deliver grassroots development, are highlighted as a fertile ground for abuse, with legislators awarding contracts to cronies, pocketing kickbacks, or abandoning projects altogether.<sup>56</sup> This has led to a situation where billions of naira budgeted for constituency development produced negligible results, leaving communities without basic infrastructure or services. Ijewereme concretize his claims with real-world cases by citing scandals involving prominent legislators such as Herman Hembe (Capital Market Committee), Ndudi Elumelu (Power Committee), and Farouk Lawan (subsidy regime probe), who were implicated in bribery or fraud during oversight investigations.<sup>57</sup> Such high-profile scandals reveal not only individual lapses but systemic rot, showing how committee assignments which is meant to be functional are instead pursued as lucrative avenues for personal enrichment. One of the central consequences of this complicity of legislatures in their oversight functions is that the public confidence in parliament is becoming dimly low. According to Anthony Staddon's brief, his surveys shows that Nigerians rank the National Assembly as one of the most corrupt state institutions, second only to the police.<sup>58</sup> The document cites episodes of 'budget padding,' constituency project fraud, and bribery scandals as illustrative of how oversight responsibilities have been weaponized for personal gain rather than public good. These committees have long time eroded Public Trust as a result of gross malpractices found in them and these have fueled public disillusionment with the legislature. Constituents often perceive legislators as self-serving actors who prioritize private enrichment over public service.<sup>59</sup> This action is however said to be reinforced by Nigeria's political culture, where party loyalty, ethnic considerations, and the need to recover campaign investments often took precedence over the public interest. This scenario undermines the legislature's anti-corruption capacity; reducing its oversight role to mere bargaining with the executive branch.<sup>60</sup> Another key insight is the deep institutional conflict between the legislature and executive during budget processes. Instead of constructive scrutiny, oversight is often reduced to bargaining, collusion, or outright extortion. This not only weakens accountability but also delays governance processes, creating further inefficiencies and developmental setbacks.<sup>61</sup>

This work has so far laid the foundation for interdisciplinary engagement: political scientists, philosophers, and legal scholars can draw from it to interrogate the moral and institutional contradictions of a legislature that should embody democratic accountability but instead exacerbates corruption. It has also attempted to contribute to the discourse on corruption in Nigeria by spotlighting the performance of legislature in their oversight functions and pointed the constraints and limitations and its seeming designation as a corrupt institution. This is significant because much of the literature emphasizes executive corruption, thereby leaving the legislature relatively understudied. The argument that legislative corruption undermines accountability and sustains instability remains highly relevant, particularly in light of subsequent legislative scandals in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Nigeria is a filled with lots of paradoxes and contradictions especially in her attempt to reduce corruption but one of her Achilles hills is the obvious dysfunction and institutional weaknesses. It has been agreed in different fora, symposium and platforms that Nigeria has robust frameworks for checkmating corruption but it has weak enforcement mechanism. This is because the laws designed to protect the system are undermined by the very institutions tasked with enforcing them. It is saddening to note that corruption in Nigeria is enabled by its self-reinforcing cycle. Obviously, corrupt institutions generate corrupt outcomes. This recursive process mirrors the ecological model of vice: once the environment is saturated with corrupt norms, individuals and institutions are socialized into expecting and reproducing them. Philosophically, this reflects a breakdown of Aristotle's notion of virtue as habituation toward the good.<sup>62</sup> Instead of habituation toward virtue; Nigeria's institutional ecology habituates citizens toward vice, creating what can be described as an anti-ethics of governance. A critical take home from this work reveals that while the Nigerian Constitution articulates a system of checks and balances modeled on liberal democratic traditions, in

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<sup>53</sup> UD Umaru, 'Corruption and Legislative Functions in Nigeria.' [2017] (8) (1) *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance (IOSR-JEF)*, 1–8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> OB Ijewereme, 'Anatomy of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector: Theoretical Perspectives and Some Empirical Explanations,' [2015] (5) (2) *SAGE Open*, 1–16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 9

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 13-14.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 10-12.

<sup>59</sup> Eme and Onyishi, 'The Legislature and Anti-corruption Crusade under Nigeria's Fourth Republic, 1999–2013.' [2014] (5) (15) *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 28–36.

<sup>60</sup> UD Umaru, 'Corruption and Legislative Functions in Nigeria.' [2017] (8) (1) *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance (IOSR-JEF)*, 1–8.

<sup>61</sup> R Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>62</sup> Aristotle 1999, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1.

practice these mechanisms are weakened by Institutional weaknesses. The legislature, rather than performing its oversight role, frequently colludes with the executive in rent-seeking behavior. This reflects a failure of Locke's insistence on the separation of powers as the guardian of liberty and justice.<sup>63</sup> This work also demonstrates the fact that when institutional structures designed to restrain human self-interest are themselves captured by self-interest, corruption ceases to be deviant and becomes systemic. This explains why the foremost African philosopher, Innocent Asouzu provides a unique lens for understanding corruption. His reflection explains human failings through the phenomenon of concealment (*ihe mkpuchi anya*), where individuals are blinded to the interconnectedness of being.<sup>64</sup> Corruption in this sense arises when individuals or groups pursue selfish gain without regard for the larger social whole. Unlike Hobbes, who grounds corruption in natural desire, Asouzu locates it in epistemic blindness which is the failure to perceive the complementarity of interests that sustains communal life. In Nigeria, this blindness manifests when political leaders appropriate resources for personal or ethnic gain, ignoring the broader consequences for national development and social cohesion.

The fragility of Nigeria's democratic institutions suggests that without a genuine enforcement of constitutional provisions and a cultural shift toward accountability, corruption will continue to undermine legislative legitimacy. This is why this work will not end by simply diagnosing the wrong in the legislature, it will also offer some policy recommendations. These include the strengthening of internal mechanisms within parliament (such as ethics committees), capacity-building for lawmakers, collaboration with civil society organizations, and greater transparency in the management of constituency projects. It stresses that oversight must be reoriented from self-serving practices toward genuine service to the electorate. The need for reorientation and collaboration should not be limited to civil society organizations but nations with excellent legislative track records like Singapore. The legislative model of Singapore demonstrates how strong institutional frameworks can insulate committees from abuse and ensure that constituency projects directly benefit citizens. The Singaporean legislative committee system, they argue that is characterized by meritocracy, strict accountability, and transparent operations.<sup>65</sup> This collaboration will be valuable because it will distill practical lessons from Nigeria's oversight experience and connects them to wider governance challenges.

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<sup>63</sup> Locke 1689/1980, II.143

<sup>64</sup> II Asouzu, Ibuanyidanda: *New Complementary Ontology: Beyond World-immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Impositions* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> SC Agunyai and V Ojakorotu, 'The Nigerian Legislative Committee System, Corruption, and Constituency Woes: Lessons Nigerians Can Learn from the Singaporean Legislative Committee System,' [2021] (17) (2) *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 97–123.