

Legislative Oversight and Government Accountability: Implications for Good Governance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the extent to which the Nigerian federal legislature has been able to perform its oversight role to promote accountability and its impact on good governance in Nigeria. The research design used in the study is qualitative research design to examine the legislative activities and their effectiveness in improving accountability by using secondary data in scholarly articles, government documents and other related case studies. The findings show that legislative control has been a major factor in enhancing transparency and balancing executive operations. However, the effectiveness of legislative oversight is compromised by problems such as political interference, lack of adequate resources, and internal corruption, which might not be in a position to facilitate accountability in governance to the maximum. Moreover, the separation of powers limits the extent of the legislature, as the executive is often obliged to implement the law. The paper has established that despite the fact that legislative oversight is a key accountability mechanism, which is a characteristic of good governance, its effectiveness still requires improvement. The article, therefore, indicates that internal ethical standards and anti-corruption mechanisms should be enhanced in the legislature to enhance the credibility of the population and the legitimacy of the control measures. This is to ensure that there is good governance and that the legislative oversight has a positive role to play in the democratic stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Accountability, governance, legislature, legislative oversight, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Legislative oversight is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance because it offers a system of checks and balances that allows the legislature to check the executive and ensure that government actions comply with the established legal and ethical standards (Stapenhurst et al., 2019). Oversight enables the legislature to check government actions, safeguard the interests of the people, and foster transparency and accountability in the administration of the government (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2013). In this role, oversight serves as an instrument to assess and check the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of government functions, which should be in line with the rule of law (Putri & Ausath, 2024).

In Nigeria, the legislative oversight role is bestowed on the National Assembly, which is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives at the federal level, and state assemblies at the regional level. The Nigerian constitution gives these legislative institutions the power to check the activities of the executive, scrutinize government spending, and hold government officials accountable (Omotoso & Oladeji, 2019). As an example, Section 88 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria empowers the National Assembly to investigate matters within its legislative competence, including budgetary allocation, policy implementation, and administrative efficiency (Udemezue & Chioke, 2024). This legislative role is essential in the Nigerian context, where the problems of corruption, mismanagement of state funds and executive excesses are always a threat to good governance. Nigeria is low on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which indicates that there are still problems with accountability in the country in terms of its public institutions (Transparency International, 2023). The oversight role of the National Assembly is, therefore, essential in limiting these issues by ensuring accountability of the public officials and reviewing budget implementations, policy results, and spending habits (Adeniyi & Bakare, 2023). As an example, the oversight role of the National Assembly is

applied in the annual budget review process, where the legislative committees scrutinise the budget proposal of the executive, evaluate its compatibility with national priorities, and make amendments to achieve a balanced and equitable distribution of resources (Fagbadebo, 2019).

Although the Nigerian Constitution and other legal systems provide the National Assembly with significant powers to exercise legislative oversight, there is low government accountability as demonstrated by high levels of corruption, poor institutional checks, and enforcement of accountability mechanisms. Corruption and misappropriation of government funds remain common (Agu, Nkwo & Eneiga, 024). According to Transparency International, Nigeria ranks low in the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index, which shows that the country has not overcome its governance issues, and people do not trust its institutions. The number of people who have been killed by the police in the country is high (Transparency International, 2022; Ojo, 2018; Enofe et al., 2021). It is on this premise that this paper will look at the current situation of legislative oversight in Nigeria, the particular challenges that impede its effectiveness and the wider implications of these issues on good governance in the country. This research is especially timely at this point, as effective oversight is an important aspect of ensuring transparency, integrity, and the rule of law in a democracy. In Nigeria where governance issues like corruption, mismanagement, and executive overreach continue to plague the country, there must be a strong system of legislative oversight to make sure that government actions are in the best interest of the people. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the complexities and effectiveness of legislative oversight in Nigeria, identifying areas where improvements are needed and providing insights that can contribute to strengthening the country's democratic processes and enhancing good governance.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a secondary data collection method, whereby the researcher relies on existing sources of information that are pertinent to the study. Secondary data were accessed through official government publications, legislative reports, audit reports of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in Nigeria, publications of non-governmental organisations concerned with governance and accountability, academic journals and research papers. Reliable online databases like JSTOR, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar were also used to collect data on literature that addresses the functions of legislative oversight, government accountability, and governance practices in Nigeria.

A systematic review of these secondary sources was undertaken to identify data that could be used in legislative oversight mechanisms, accountability metrics and good governance indicators. This was done by examining portions of the powers of the National Assembly, legislative oversight of executive actions, instances of investigative hearings, and published audits of government agencies and departments. This wide range of secondary data sources enables a thorough insight into the current legislative framework and its contribution to transparency, accountability, and good governance in Nigeria. To make the data reliable and relevant, the sources were chosen according to such criteria as their publication during the last decade, their applicability to the Nigerian governance system, and their attention to the legislative practices. The study keeps the current information on the efficiency of legislative oversight and its influence on government accountability by using recent publications. Older sources were only used selectively when it was necessary to establish the background or conceptual underpinnings of the study.

The research used qualitative content analysis to explain the secondary data. Content analysis enabled a detailed analysis of textual information, including government reports and legislative documents, to identify patterns and common themes regarding legislative oversight practices. This method also helped to identify formal and informal oversight mechanisms used by the Nigerian legislature and the problems faced in holding the executive accountable. Using a thematic coding framework, data from the secondary sources were systematically organised under themes such as "Oversight Mechanisms," "Challenges in Legislative Accountability," and "Impact on Good Governance." Sub-themes were allocated to each theme that captured certain dimensions of legislative oversight, including the role of investigative hearings, committee inquiries, budgetary review, and public audits in improving government accountability. This thematic framework enabled a subtle appreciation of the role of legislative practices in Nigeria in shaping the outcomes of governance.

The results were then synthesised to establish the effectiveness of legislative oversight in enhancing accountability and its implications for good governance. Comparative analysis was used to determine the extent to which the practices in Nigeria conform to or diverge from the standard oversight practices in other democracies. In addition, the information was put into the context of governance theories to explain the correlation between legislative oversight and the quality of governance in Nigeria. The analysis compares the findings with the existing governance benchmarks to identify the areas where the Nigerian legislative practices either contribute to or detract from the accountability objectives. The use of secondary data and qualitative content analysis is suitable in the study as the topic of study is based on the analysis of legislative and governance documentation, which gives an understanding of the institutional practices and results without the necessity of primary data collection. The approach allows a comprehensive and extensive examination, which identifies the main trends and issues in Nigerian governance that can be used to draw conclusions about the role of legislative oversight in fostering government accountability and good governance.

Legislative Oversight and Government Accountability: Exploring extant Literature

The body of literature on legislative oversight and government accountability is extensive and varied, with researchers in different disciplines contributing to the understanding of how these two notions are defined, used, and interconnected. This literature review explores some of the major definitions, the theoretical interconnection between legislative oversight and accountability, and criticisms of the global and Nigeria-specific scholarly views. The review aims at demystifying points of agreement and disagreement among researchers and identifying gaps that can be used to guide future studies.

Conceptualising Legislative Oversight

Usman (2016) defines oversight as a process that is embraced by the legislative arm of a government to supervise, oversee, scrutinise and monitor the activities, actions and performance of the executive and its agencies on a continuous basis to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Also, Fagbadebo (2019) described oversight as a series of activities undertaken by the legislature that has a legally established responsibility to monitor and control all activities undertaken by the administration and its agents to identify gaps in policy execution or deviations thereof. According to Griglio (2020), the term legislative oversight refers to mechanisms that are used by the legislature to perform its functions of checks and balances in a democratic form of government. In the same vein, Jooji (2019) stated that legislative oversight is interested in the different ways in which the executive can be made accountable and in ensuring that programmes are carried out in line with laws and budgets passed by the legislature. This is done to make sure that the executive's powers are not unrestrained. Accordingly, the National Conference of State Legislatures (2022) explained legislative oversight as a primary check and balance to review the actions of the executive and its agencies in the implementation of laws and policies. For Omotosho & Oladeji (2019), legislative oversight symbolises the power of the legislature over the executive's enforcement and administration of legislation. In contrast, Walker (2017) sees legislative oversight as a continuation of the process of lawmaking to ascertain the effectiveness of legislation passed in response to a specific problem as intended by the drafters. In broad terms, legislative oversight describes techniques and methods adopted by the legislature to ensure accountability of the government as well as efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of programmes formulated for the sustenance, development and improvement of the society (Hildreth, Miller, & Rabin, 2021). According to Jooji (2019), legislative oversight makes it possible and simple to monitor and regulate government actions. In a democratic system, the ability to check, balance and control the activities of the government is a vital component of democracy because the more the powers of the government are subjected to control, checks and balances, the greater the prospects for democracy (Stapenhurst, Jacob & Olaore, 2016). Also, Dogara (2016) explained that it is the responsibility of legislators to monitor the operations of government agencies, particularly those of the executive branch, on behalf of those whom they are tasked with representing. This procedure brings the actions of the executive branch to the attention of the general public, and it provides the voters with the opportunity to assess whether public officials are truly serving their common interests or not. The oversight of the legislative process is one of the legislature's primary constitutional responsibilities. In a system of separation of powers, the legislature is required to counterbalance the executive and keep its power in check. According to Frolick (2016), legislators have the legal authority, the legal basis, and the obligation to hold the government accountable for its acts, as well as the responsibility to do so. According to Onyango (2020), legislators are

responsible for holding government departments and agencies accountable to the public. The goal of legislative oversight is to allow the legislature to pass essential legislation on any subject within its legislative jurisdiction and to remedy any flaws in existing laws (Maricutt-Akbik, 2021). The legislature regularly monitors administrative agencies to ensure accountability in the use of public resources for stated goals and objectives while studying and evaluating the executive's operations to make sure they remain within acceptable bounds (Gberevbie, 2017). According to Busuioc & Lodge (2016), the legislature exerts control over the activities of public officials in order to hold them accountable for their actions in carrying out their duties and responsibilities on a daily basis through legislative oversight, question time, adjournment debate, and, where necessary, amendment of the law, all of which are done to ensure that the citizens' interests are well protected. Similarly, Stapenhurst, Jacob, and Olaore (2016) made a submission that hearings in committee, plenary assembly hearings, parliamentary questions, question time, and interpellation are all tools that could be used to monitor the executive's actions. The parliamentary standing committees, in particular, are responsible for a constant examination of the activities of MDAs in respective subject areas. Legislators have also established special and standing committees to assess the functioning and performance of government agencies (Tobi, Ayodeji & Odalonu, 2021). These tools come in handy, particularly in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of policies and programmes formulated to address specific challenges in the country. Legislative oversight could be undertaken both ex-ante and ex-post, depending on the nature of the program or policy (Dogara, 2016). The ex-ante, which is an oversight conducted before policy implementation, allows legislators to make suggestions on policy designs which is in line with the demands of their constituencies (Bundi, 2016). This involves carrying out two major activities, which involve giving consideration to the design of policies while taking into consideration their peculiarities and details. The second major activity involves the screening and determination of an appropriate policy that would best address pressing challenges of the people (Fagbadebo, 2018). The process of monitoring and making reports on the implementation of policies approved at the ex-ante stage falls under ex post oversight (Bundi, 2018). This form comes after the selection and passage of the preferred policy design. Following the passage of legislation, the legislature's principal role is to ensure that the legislation is effectively implemented and that it appropriately reflects the objective of the legislators who drafted it. Additionally, lawmakers and their staff, individually or collectively, can have an impact on bureaucratic conduct, whether or not they intend to. The legislature is responsible for ensuring that existing programs are implemented and managed effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with legislative intent (Wenibowei, 2021).

Importance of Legislative Oversight

a. Promotion of Transparency and Accountability: Accountability and transparency are specific demands of the governed in a democratic state. In a representative democracy, it is expected that those who represent the governed in government would act in the collective interest of the governed if they are required to answer for their actions and outcomes (Olsen, 2017). Thus, this becomes a mechanism for ensuring the promotion of the interests of the governed. Through legislative oversight, the actions and inactions of the government are made known, and therefore the government is forced to be made accountable to those that are being governed (Malapane, 2019). This enables the governed to determine whether or not the government is working in their best interest and what steps to take should it be revealed that the actions of the government are in contrast with their collective will. Legislative oversight is also quite important in ensuring fiscal accountability by the government (Kgatjepe, 2018). Through its oversight duties, the legislature ensures that all projects of the government are within the approved budgetary limits. The purpose of this is to prevent mismanagement of public funds and corrupt practices by the government and its agencies.

b. Determination of Programme and Policy Effectiveness: Information elicited from the conduct of legislative oversight allows the legislators to determine if a policy was effective in addressing a particular challenge for which it was formulated. In this sense, the goal here is to determine if actual performance is equal to standard performance. In such a situation, the legislature closely monitors the implementation of the programmes to determine if it's being done properly or not (Vedung, 2017). The result of this exercise would therefore serve as a justification for the performance of the programme. Legislative oversight also creates the opportunity for legislative intervention in situations where the results yielded by the policy are in a completely negative contrast with what was expected (Gaitonde, Oxman, Okebukola, & Rada, 2016). In determining the effectiveness of the programme through its oversight duties, the legislators would also be able to assess the

impact of a policy on society and the lives of the governed (PLAC, 2019)

c. Identification of Non-compliance with Constitutional Directives by the Executive: The practice of democracy does not allow for the concentration of absolute power at the disposal of any institution of the state. The legislature exists to serve as a check and balance of the powers of the executive, and this is attained through conducting oversight on the actions and activities of the executive. By nature of the executives' position in government, there is a tendency for their actions to sometimes stray away from what is obtainable within the constitution for reasons known to them. Such actions can only be noticed, identified and addressed through proper monitoring by the legislature (Chohan, 2017).

d. Promotion of Rationality in the Formulation and Administration of Public Policy: Policy designs do not just become public policies; they are often subjected to ex-ante oversight, which is usually carried out before the formulation of policies (Nwogwugwu & Ishola, 2019). This is done to determine which of the policy designs would best address the present policy demand and at what cost. The ex-ante also goes further to determine persons whom the policy is supposed to benefit and the expected result to be realised. The purpose of conducting an ex-ante oversight is to acquire information that is required to help in the development of a sensible and practical policy to accomplish the necessary goals. (Omotosho & Oladeji, 2019).

Tools for Legislative Oversight

The legislature has different oversight instruments at its disposal when overseeing the actions of the executive. Audit commissions, hearings in plenary sessions of parliament, inquiry, question time and interpellations, as well as the auditor's general are some of the most frequently used tools (Stapenhurst, Jacob & Olaore, 2016). This collection of oversight tools can be divided into two categories. The first of these dimensions is concerned with the timeliness of the oversight activities; "instruments of control ex ante." This refers to oversight measures that are employed before a certain policy is implemented or before the government engages in a specific activity (Stapenhurst, Jacob & Cedric Eboutou, 2019; Patty & Turner, 2021). The use of ex ante mechanisms, such as hearings in committees, is one of the options open to lawmakers. As long as the legislative oversight is undertaken after the government has passed legislation in order to ensure that the legislation is effectively executed, the legislative oversight tools are referred to as "instruments of control ex post" (after the policy has been implemented). Interrogations, interpellations, and the formation of committees of inquiry are some of the methods that are employed after the fact (Patty & Turner, 2021). Another aspect to consider is whether the oversight tools are developed within or outside of the Parliament, that is, if they are internal or external oversight instruments. Questions, question time, interpellations, hearings, and public accounts committees are all examples of internal tools, whereas the auditor's general is an example of external instruments (Fagbadebo, 2019).

Conceptualising Government Accountability

The concept of public accountability emphasises the belief that the public has a "right to know," meaning they have the right to access reliable information from the government (Omar et al., 2007; Pablos et al., 2002). It is widely understood that accountability arises when one party is responsible for reporting decisions and actions to another party (Omar et al., 2007). Therefore, accountability exists when the agent receives resources and responsibilities from the principal (Kluvers & Tippet, 2010; Pina et al., 2010). In the public sector, the relationship of accountability indirectly positions the public as a key user of the information and services provided by the government (Lily et al., 2012). As such, the public has the right to know how financial resources are utilised and managed by the government (Perez et al., 2005). Citizens are interested in obtaining information that allows them to assess the current performance and financial status of the government (Pablos et al., 2002). Consequently, the government should be more transparent in disclosing the information needed by the public (Steccolini, 2004). This obligation is essential for fulfilling its responsibility and represents a vital means of implementing accountability to the public.

Accountability is a broad concept that can be interpreted differently depending on the context. Traditionally, it describes the relationship between parties involved in a particular operation (Roberts & Scapens, 1985). From an organisational standpoint, Shahul (2000) argues that accountability goes beyond merely using resources effectively, efficiently, and economically (the 3Es). It also includes a responsibility to prevent any misuse of

these resources. This implies that individuals must provide explanations for their actions to those who have the right to know.

Accountability is closely linked to the concept of power; while power can be delegated, responsibility cannot be transferred. This means that a manager is accountable for the actions of their subordinate employees. Furthermore, accountability is tied to the value of individual responsibility. It is essential for everyone entrusted with a task to understand the importance of responsibility and to execute their duties meticulously and ethically, without any elements of fraud, corruption, injustice, or treachery. If negative actions affect the completion of a job, even stellar results cannot justify them. Ultimately, an individual will face consequences that reflect the severity of their misdeeds.

In the context of civil service, accountability refers to the obligation of officers to explain their actions and decisions to those entitled to receive such explanations. Traditionally, accountability has been understood as vertical accountability, where civil servants are answerable to their superiors and the government. The meaning of accountability has however changed. It also includes the role of officers to interact with a wider network than their immediate hierarchy as they carry out their duties today. Therefore, the concepts of responsibility and commitment to the work should be maintained on a regular basis with the help of high ethical principles, appropriate values, and laws and regulations. This view is supported by Jones and Pendlebury (2000), who emphasise that the management of public resources should be conducted effectively, efficiently, and economically, often referred to as the "3E" principles.

Accountability is a multifaceted term that denotes the duty of the officials in the government to answer to the people or other authorities about their actions and the reasons behind their decisions. There is a general consensus among scholars that accountability entails three elements, namely, transparency, responsibility, and responsiveness to the people. Nevertheless, critics of this idea point out its depth and breadth. Bovens (2010) describes accountability as a relationship where an actor feels obliged to explain and justify his or her actions to some other significant party, usually a supervisory body or the people. Although this definition is commonly used, Koppell (2015) claims that it is too procedure-oriented and does not pay enough attention to substantive results. According to Koppell, accountability must be evaluated on the basis of the concrete outcomes of oversight, including the minimisation of corruption and the enhancement of the delivery of public services, and not the mere presence of reporting and justification systems. In the case of Nigeria, Salisu (2020) suggests that definitions of accountability that focus on formal obligations might not be sufficient. Procedural requirements are often met by public officials who do not show any real transparency or responsiveness. Salisu asserts that accountability in practice should not only be the duty to justify actions but also a commitment to ethical governance, which entails the absence of corrupt or self-serving behaviours. This broader definition of accountability is similar to the arguments of Ojo and Omole (2022), who state that accountability must also include a proactive commitment to the public interest, particularly in fragile democracies where institutional checks are weak.

Nexus of Legislative Oversight and Government Accountability

The nexus between legislative oversight and government accountability is frequently discussed in terms of their interdependent roles in ensuring transparency, preventing corruption, and fostering public trust in government. Legislative oversight is viewed as an essential mechanism through which accountability can be operationalised, providing a means for legislators to scrutinise executive actions, evaluate policy outcomes, and prevent the misuse of public resources (Gerring & Thacker, 2022).

However, critiques arise regarding the extent to which oversight genuinely enhances accountability. According to Adeniyi and Bakare (2023), the effectiveness of legislative oversight in promoting accountability is contingent upon several factors, including the autonomy, resources, and expertise available to legislative bodies. They argue that in many developing democracies, oversight bodies lack the independence needed to act against the executive, thus undermining their role as mechanisms of accountability. This critique aligns with the perspectives of Salisu (2020), who notes that oversight is often symbolic in nature, fulfilling formal requirements without achieving substantive accountability.

Moreover, some scholars argue that the link between oversight and accountability is idealised and does not

account for the realities of power dynamics and political patronage. Ayee (2020) suggests that oversight often serves as a tool for partisan or personal gain rather than as an objective means of promoting accountability. This instrumentalisation of oversight is particularly evident in countries where legislative members may be aligned with the executive, leading to collusion rather than confrontation. This critique reflects a broader concern within the literature that oversight mechanisms may be undermined by political interests, especially in contexts like Nigeria.

Legislative Oversight and Government Accountability in Nigeria

Literature on legislative oversight and government accountability in Nigeria has tended to point out the difficulties experienced by the Nigerian legislature in its oversight role. Political interference and executive dominance have been cited as some of the biggest challenges to effective oversight in Nigeria. According to scholars like Ojo (2023), the executive in Nigeria has a lot of influence over the legislature, which is usually achieved through budgetary control, political appointments, and the capacity to co-opt members of the legislature through party affiliation. This superiority restricts the independence of the legislature and discourages it from questioning executive actions.

Critics, however, believe that these analyses tend to exaggerate the influence of the executive and underestimate the agency of the legislators. According to Agbaje and Osabuohien (2022), the legislative members can oppose the executive dominance by acting together and forming strategic partnerships with civil society organisations, yet these options are not used to their full potential. They suggest that the legislature's inability to assert its authority is partly due to internal fragmentation, lack of solidarity among lawmakers, and the absence of a strong legislative culture.

The other theme that is prevalent in the literature is the absence of institutional capacity in the Nigerian legislative institutions, which makes it difficult to conduct effective oversight. Research by Eme et al. (2021) indicates that Nigerian legislative committees often do not have the funds, qualified staff, and information access to conduct comprehensive investigations. In the absence of sufficient resources, legislative institutions can hardly perform their mandates, which results in the oversight functions being limited to mere symbolic actions with no real effect.

However, critics of this view have stated that such a narrow approach can be counterproductive in solving structural problems, including corruption and political will. Salisu (2020) states that resource constraints are a legitimate concern, but the bigger problem is that there is no commitment to accountability in the legislature. He argues that even in the case where resources are present, they are usually misused or used inefficiently because of the lack of accountability among the legislators themselves. This criticism poses critical questions regarding the contribution of legislative ethics and internal accountability systems to the improvement of oversight.

Another common topic of discussion that compromises the effectiveness of oversight is corruption in the legislature. According to Eme and Edeh (2021), conflicts of interest, bribery, and nepotism among legislators are likely to result in compromised oversight because lawmakers might be reluctant to investigate their colleagues or government officials with whom they are financially or politically connected. This culture of corruption undermines the confidence of the people in the legislature as an independent watchdog. Nevertheless, other researchers argue that corruption-focused analyses can inadvertently overshadow other forces that affect the effectiveness of oversight. Akinyemi (2023) states that corruption is a widespread problem, but the emphasis on it can result in a deterministic perspective that ignores the possibility of change. Akinyemi suggests a more subtle approach that would look at how institutional reforms, including transparent legislative procedures, performance-based incentives, and public accountability measures, would reduce the effects of corruption on oversight.

The literature often points to Public Accounts Committees (PACs) as an important mechanism of fostering financial accountability in Nigeria. According to Ojo (2023), PACs are important in examining government spending and making sure that money is spent as per the budgetary allocations. PACs give a platform to hold the executive accountable in financial management through their reviews of audit reports and the power to summon government officials. However, the criticisms of PAC effectiveness in Nigeria show that these

committees have serious problems. According to Ojo (2023), PACs usually do not have enforcement capabilities, and their recommendations are not binding and can be ignored by the executive without any repercussions. Also, the slow pace of acting on PAC recommendations and poor follow-up systems further compromise the effectiveness of these committees in holding governments accountable. According to scholars such as Fagbadebo and Ruffin (2022), the failure to follow through is indicative of larger institutional failures and political will, which PACs cannot solve alone.

Another area where scholars differ is in the issue of public trust in the process of legislative oversight. Research shows that citizens have a low opinion of the effectiveness of the legislature, and they tend to believe that the legislature is either part of the corruption or incapable of enforcing accountability (Adeniyi & Bakare, 2023). This image is partially supported by media coverage of cases of legislative scandals, conflicts of interest, and compromised investigations. Criticisms of this viewpoint state that although the issue of public distrust is a serious one, it is not always an insurmountable obstacle.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Agency Theory which studies the interaction between two parties, the principal and the agent, the former who delegates work to the latter who performs that work on behalf of the former. This relationship is established through delegation and trust, but it is also vulnerable to conflict of interest, particularly in cases where the two parties do not share the same objectives and do not have equal access to information. The ideas behind the theory had been debated in economics and political science earlier, but were most fully and powerfully developed in 1976 by Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling in their seminal paper, *Theory of the Firm: Managerial Behaviour, Agency Costs and Ownership Structure*. Their contributions added to previous ones like those of Stephen A. Ross in 1973, but it was the approach of Jensen and Meckling that gave the formal model that is used widely in business, economics, political science, and public administration today.

The core of the theory is the understanding that not all objectives of the principals and the agents coincide. As an example, shareholders (principals) would want managers (agents) to maximise shareholder value, but managers might be interested in their own benefits (salaries, job security, prestige projects) that do not always coincide with shareholder interests. This difference is further compounded by information asymmetry, whereby the agents tend to possess more specific information about their activities and the work environment than the principals, and thus, they are better placed to influence the results in accordance with their preferences. The theory is anchored on a number of important assumptions. First, the principals and the agents are regarded as rational actors driven by self-interest. Second, they tend to have different goals, i.e., what is good to one is not always good to the other. Third, it is characterised by information asymmetry where the agent possesses better or concealed information. Fourth, the principals and the agents might differ in their attitudes towards risk; agents might not risk venturing into risky projects that might risk their status, and the principals might prefer riskier projects, which might yield greater returns. Lastly, the theory presupposes that it is expensive to monitor the actions of the agent and that decision-making is bound by rationality, time constraints, information constraints, and human capacity constraints. The theory proposes a number of solutions to this problem of agency that emerges due to these dynamics. These are the alignment of incentives, where the rewards of the agent are linked to the goals of the principal, enhancing monitoring and reporting to minimise asymmetric information, and bonding, where the agents give guarantees against the possible losses that may be incurred by their actions.

Principal-Agent Theory has been subject to a lot of criticism despite its widespread use. One of the major criticisms is that it has a narrow view of human motivation since it presumes that individuals are primarily self-interested and opportunistic and ignores other factors like trust, ethics, or intrinsic commitment. The theory has also been criticised by those who feel that it oversimplifies human and organisational relationships to contractual relationships and ignores cultural, social and psychological factors. The assumptions of opportunism and goal divergence might not hold in certain situations, e.g. in non-profits or in public service organisations. In addition, the outcomes of most processes can hardly be measured precisely, and it is difficult to design optimal incentive contracts. The theory has also been faulted as being too fixed in that it does not entirely capture the dynamic and evolving nature of principal-agent relationships over time. Finally, excessive

attention to control through monitoring and incentive plans can be counterproductive, creating adversarial rather than cooperative relationships and generating costs that can outweigh the benefits.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Legislative oversight is crucial; its effectiveness is hindered by systemic and structural issues within Nigeria's political landscape. The findings align with past studies suggesting that strong oversight is necessary for accountable governance (Stapenhurst, 2019). Addressing these issues requires strengthening the institutional capacity of the legislature, promoting public engagement, and implementing policies that foster legislative independence.

The findings reveal that while legislative oversight has contributed positively to the quest for transparency and accountability, several weaknesses limit its effectiveness in ensuring good governance.

Positive Contributions

Promotion of Transparency and Accountability: Legislative oversight is an important factor in enhancing accountability in the governance systems of Nigeria. The ability of the legislature to check the executive and seek explanations on its actions has resulted in more scrutiny and uncovering of inefficiencies and corruption. As an example, legislators have used public committee hearings and inquiries to hold government agencies accountable in terms of budget allocations, public spending and policy outcomes. This has created a higher level of transparency where citizens can look at government activities with a more critical eye and promote ethical practices of governance (Dogara, 2016; Freedom of Information Act).

Constitutional Mandate for Oversight: The National Assembly has wide powers to conduct inquiries and investigations under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Section 88 enables it to call people, demand documents and even issue warrants to enforce compliance. This authority gives the legislature the ability to check the compliance of the executive with the laws and programs, and therefore, it is a crucial element in the balance and separation of powers in the government system (Ezeani, 2010). Legislative scrutiny has resulted in major policy improvements as it has brought to the attention of the people corruption, mismanagement and policy failures (Jinadu, 1979; Yusuf, 2000).

Contribution to Democratic Processes: Legislative oversight promotes democratic governance because it makes sure that the actions of the executive are in line with the will of the people. Lawmakers represent a variety of constituencies and must therefore examine executive actions and promote the interests of the people, which creates an atmosphere in which citizens can observe their interests being safeguarded. These acts promote the merits of democracy, including freedom of expression, rule of law, and equal representation in governance, which are critical to good governance (Kabong, 1986; Alemika, 2000).

Weaknesses and Limitations

Political Interference and Abuse of Oversight: Although legislative oversight is constitutionally supported, its effectiveness is often undermined by political interference. Legislators have sometimes used oversight tools as a means to exert political pressure on the executive rather than promote accountability. This has resulted in cases where oversight activities are perceived as tools for harassment or political retaliation rather than genuine governance checks. Former President Obasanjo's response to legislative inquiries illustrates how executive leaders may resist or criticise oversight, viewing it as encroachment or misuse of power by the legislature (Oluwadare Aguda; Tony Momoh vs. Senate, 1982).

Corruption and Collusion: Legislative oversight is also affected by internal issues, including corruption within the legislative body itself. Legislators may be involved in corrupt activities, leading to a situation where oversight becomes superficial or selective. This undermines the credibility of oversight actions and may prevent critical issues from being addressed. The problem of legislators allegedly extorting resources from ministries or government agencies, as noted during Obasanjo's administration, reflects these issues (National Network, 2016).

Limited Resources and Capacity Constraints: Effective oversight requires well-resourced and capable institutions; however, Nigerian legislators often face constraints in terms of technical expertise, resources, and adequate research support. Legislative committees may lack the necessary information or technical understanding to thoroughly evaluate complex policies or expenditures, limiting their ability to conduct comprehensive investigations. The lack of access to independent research facilities and budget constraints further hampers legislative oversight, reducing its effectiveness in promoting accountability (Dogara, 2016).

Judicial Limitations and Separation of Powers: Legislative powers of oversight are bound by the principle of separation of powers, which restricts them from carrying out investigative or prosecutorial roles reserved for the judiciary and executive. In cases such as Tony Momoh vs. Senate, the judiciary has reinforced these boundaries, clarifying that the legislature should not overstep its authority by conducting investigations that resemble executive or judicial actions. These legal constraints can limit the legislature's capacity to pursue accountability fully, as they must often rely on the executive to act upon findings of oversight committees (Corel Pagination, International Policy Brief).

Implications for Good Governance

The findings indicate that while legislative oversight has positively contributed to accountability and transparency, substantial challenges hinder its ability to guarantee good governance comprehensively. The dual issues of political manipulation and internal inefficiencies reduce the legislature's credibility, which in turn weakens the public's trust in its oversight functions. For legislative oversight to effectively promote good governance, there is a need for stronger ethical standards within the legislature, as well as reforms to enhance legislative capacities, minimise political interference, and ensure effective coordination with judicial and executive arms.

The paper highlights that although legislative oversight is critical to good governance, particularly in a developing democracy like Nigeria, it is important to overcome the constraints within this system to make it effective. The legislature can be further empowered to play its role as a key accountability mechanism in Nigeria through reforms in oversight processes, increased institutional support and citizen participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In sum, this paper has highlighted the importance of legislative oversight in enhancing government accountability and good governance in Nigeria. Legislative oversight acts as a major tool of checking the executive activities, ensuring that they are in line with the constitutional requirements, and also revealing cases of mismanagement and corruption. The legislature has also contributed to transparency in government operations through investigative hearings, budgetary reviews, and public committee hearings, which are key to a democratic society (Dogara, 2016; Ezeani, 2010).

Although legislative oversight plays a major role in transparency and accountability, there are a number of challenges that restrict its effectiveness. Political interference and misuse of oversight for partisan purposes can undermine genuine governance objectives, as legislators may prioritise political gain over public interest. Additionally, issues like corruption and limited resources within the legislature further compromise the efficacy of oversight processes, eroding public trust and weakening accountability efforts (Obasanjo; Tony Momoh vs. Senate). These internal challenges often lead to selective oversight, where certain issues remain unaddressed, or investigations are cut short due to political considerations (National Network, 2016). Moreover, judicial limitations and the separation of powers doctrine restrict the legislature's role in certain aspects of accountability, often requiring the executive to act on legislative findings. These boundaries highlight the need for stronger collaboration between Nigeria's arms of government, as well as reforms to improve the legislature's capacity and ethical standards (Corel Pagination, International Policy Brief).

For legislative oversight to realise its full potential, systemic reforms are needed. These should include capacity-building initiatives, enhanced research support, and improved ethical governance practices within the legislature. Strengthening legislative oversight mechanisms would not only bolster accountability but also reinforce democratic principles in Nigeria, ensuring that government actions are genuinely aligned with public interest. By overcoming these shortcomings, the legislative oversight in Nigeria can become a more efficient

and believable instrument of good governance, which will eventually lead to democratic consolidation and sustainable development.

This paper, therefore, recommends:

1. Strengthen Ethical Standards and Anti-Corruption Frameworks within the Legislature

To curb corruption within the legislative branch and to curb the abuse of oversight powers, a more stringent code of conduct and an improved internal accountability system should be established within the legislative branch. This may involve the introduction of compulsory anti-corruption education to the legislators and the creation of an independent ethics committee that has the power to investigate and punish corrupt activities. Increased scrutiny of lawmakers themselves would assist in regaining the trust of the people in their oversight roles, making oversight activities more believable and effective (Dogara, 2016).

2. Increase Legislative Capacity through Training and Resources

Legislators and legislative aides require specialised training to conduct effective oversight, particularly for evaluating complex policy issues and budgetary allocations. This can be achieved by providing ongoing professional development programs and access to research support services, such as independent think tanks and technical advisory teams. Improving these resources would empower the legislature to perform in-depth reviews and develop informed recommendations, addressing the current gaps in technical expertise and resource limitations (Ezeani, 2010; Corel Pagination, International Policy Brief).

3. Establish Cross-Agency Collaboration for Accountability

Legislative oversight would benefit from formalised collaboration with key government agencies, such as the judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, and audit bodies like the Public Accounts Committee. Such partnerships could improve the tracking of executive compliance with legislative recommendations and support interagency efforts to address corruption. Improved cross-agency collaboration would strengthen oversight effectiveness by ensuring that findings and recommendations from legislative inquiries are acted upon more efficiently (Obasanjo; Tony Momoh vs. Senate).

4. Encourage Public Participation and Transparency in Legislative Processes

Transparency is essential for fostering public trust and ensuring accountability. Legislators should make oversight processes more open by regularly publicising their findings and engaging with civil society and the media. Platforms for public input, such as open hearings and digital portals for public feedback, can enhance citizen engagement in governance. By promoting transparency and public involvement, the legislature can ensure that its oversight functions reflect the will of the people, thereby bolstering the democratic process and promoting better governance outcomes (Freedom of Information Act; Corel Pagination, International Policy Brief).

These recommendations aim to create a more robust legislative framework that effectively monitors executive actions, enhances accountability, and strengthens democratic governance in Nigeria.

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