

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S ROLE IN NIGERIA'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CRUSADE: LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the 9th National Assembly (2019-2023) contributed to Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts, focusing on both legislative oversight and legislative complicity. While the Constitution designates the legislature as a key accountability body, public discussions indicate that its actions during this period revealed considerable shortcomings in oversight, prompting doubts about its efficiency and independence. Employing a qualitative documentary research approach, this study analyzes secondary data from Auditor-General Reports, NEITI audit findings, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearings, civil society publications, and legislative records. These materials were chosen for their credibility, relevance, and ability to be verified. The Principal-Agent Theory serves as the analytical framework, enabling an evaluation of legislative performance through indicators of control (oversight), shirking (weak enforcement), or collusion (complicity). Findings reveal that the legislature frequently exhibited selective oversight, inconsistent follow-up on investigations, inadequate enforcement of committee resolutions, and hesitance to penalize executive agencies with documented corruption. Key anti-corruption legislation remained blocked, while many investigative hearings yielded no significant institutional results. The analysis indicates that political alignment, patronage networks, and executive dominance heavily hindered legislative independence. The study concludes that the 9th National Assembly showed more signs of complicity than effective oversight. It advises enhancing institutional independence, enforcing committee resolutions, improving public access to legislative processes, and instituting legal protections that diminish political motivations for collusion.

Keywords: Legislative oversight, corruption, 9th National Assembly, complicity, Nigeria.

Introduction

Corruption continues to be one of the most stubborn and damaging barriers to good governance, economic growth and the strengthening of democracy in Nigeria. Its effects infiltrate public institutions, skew the distribution of resources, erode public trust and hinder the government's ability to provide vital services. While executive bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) often attract significant academic and public attention, the National Assembly holds a constitutionally important yet often undervalued role in the nation's anti-corruption framework. With its roles in creating laws, approving and monitoring budgets, conducting investigations and overseeing public spending, the legislature is intended to act as an essential check on executive overreach and mismanagement in the public sector.

However, discussions about Nigeria's anti-corruption path have disproportionately centered on executive actions, often ignoring the legislature's performance, especially during the 9th National Assembly (2019-2023). This period is particularly noteworthy because of the Assembly's reputation for aligning with the executive, swiftly passing crucial bills and engaging in several high-profile corruption scandals involving committees and oversight efforts. This leads to important questions about whether the 9th Assembly acted as an effective guardian or whether its actions due to neglect, complicity, or reduced scrutiny helped maintain the status quo of corruption. Current research identifies various factors that influence legislative behavior in emerging democracies. Scholars suggest that weak safeguards, poor internal accountability systems, political incentives and the dominance of the ruling party often diminish legislative independence and efficiency (Aleyomi, 2020; Ojo, 2021).

In Nigeria, civil society organisations point out further issues such as shallow oversight, selective investigations, and budget monitoring processes that are susceptible to political negotiation and patronage systems (BudgIT, 2022). These trends imply that legislative oversight may not consistently reflect public interest or fight against corruption successfully. Moreover, Nigeria's political scene during 2019-2023 was defined by rising public calls for transparency, numerous corruption allegations against ministries and agencies and increased scrutiny of government borrowing and spending. In this context, the performance of the 9th National Assembly becomes vital in determining whether Nigeria moved forward or backward in its battle against corruption. The tension between legislative independence and executive control is particularly significant, as too much alignment could limit thorough oversight; while confrontational relationships might obstruct effective policy coordination. These considerations bring forth a pressing and essential question: Did the 9th National Assembly enhance or diminish Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts through its oversight roles, legislative actions and institutional practices? Answering this question is crucial to assessing the credibility of Nigeria's democratic institutions and understanding the wider implications for governance reform and accountability.

Statement of the Problem

Even though the constitution gives the legislature power to ensure accountability, many reports reveal weak oversight, inadequate enforcement of committee suggestions and minimal action on corruption cases that have been documented. However, these issues largely remain unexplored in academic studies. There is a lack of research analyzing whether the 9th Assembly served as an accountability body or whether its actions showed legislative complicity. Moreover, media stories that portray the Assembly as simply a "rubber stamp" lack thorough

verification. Current research focuses on executive-driven anti-corruption efforts but fails to critically examine the legislature's role (Usman, 2019; Ezeani, 2021; Adebayo & Mohammed, 2022). Without academic scrutiny, misunderstandings continue to exist, undermining evidence-based policy changes. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically investigating if the National Assembly improved accountability or added to the institutional weaknesses that hinder anti-corruption governance.

Research Questions

- (i.) How well did the 9th National Assembly execute its constitutional oversight role in anti-corruption governance?
- (ii.) What behavioral patterns suggest legislative complicity or reduced accountability?
- (iii.) How does the Principal-Agent Theory clarify the oversight-executive relationship during Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts?

Objectives of the Study

- (i). To evaluate 9th National Assembly execute its constitutional oversight role in anti-corruption governance.
- (ii). To explore behavioral patterns suggest legislative complicity or reduced accountability.
- (iii). To use Principal-Agent Theory clarifies the oversight-executive relationship during Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts.

Conceptual Review

To thoroughly analyze the influence of the 9th National Assembly on Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts, it's essential to define the key ideas that support this exploration: legislative oversight, legislative complicity, and anti-corruption. These ideas guide how institutions interact and affect power dynamics and governance results in democratic environments like Nigeria.

Concept of Legislative Oversight

Legislative oversight is the constitutional duty and power of the legislature to monitor, examine, and assess the activities, policies, and spending of the executive branch. Aberbach (1990) describes oversight as "the review, monitoring, and supervision of government and public policy execution, primarily by the legislature." This includes holding ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) accountable for how they manage public resources. However, in Nigeria, the legal basis for oversight is clearly stated in Sections 88 and 89 of the 1999 Constitution, which authorize the National Assembly to investigate the actions of any public official or institution managing public funds. Oversight mechanisms consist of budget approval and tracking, investigative hearings, confirming key appointments, examining public accounts, and assessing policies. Effective legislative oversight serves as a shield against executive overreach, financial misconduct, and policy failures, making it a crucial element in the anti-corruption strategy. When exercised properly, oversight fosters transparency, enhances institutional performance, and fortifies democratic accountability. Conversely, weak or biased oversight diminishes these aims and allows corruption to thrive.

Legislative Complicity

Legislative complicity occurs when the legislature, through purposeful action or inaction, aids, protects, or becomes mixed up in corrupt activities. This situation arises when the oversight authority becomes compromised, reducing its ability to ensure accountability. Johnson (2015) identifies complicity as "an institutional form of collusion where oversight members become either active or passive participants in wrongdoing or concealment." Complicity can show in various forms:- Selective or delayed investigations of corruption allegations- Failure to adopt committee findings- Political protection of associates implicated in corruption- Budget

approvals that overlook audit concerns- Conflicts of interest in contract grants In Nigeria's political scene, legislative complicity often ties to patronage systems, party loyalty, elite negotiations, and profit-seeking actions. These elements may lead lawmakers to favor party or personal interests over their constitutional responsibilities, ultimately undermining the system of checks and balances. In the long run, complicity damages public trust and weakens the integrity of anti-corruption initiatives.

Anti-Corruption

Anti-corruption consists of the laws, institutions, norms, and practices aimed at preventing, identifying, and penalizing corrupt actions in both public and private sectors. Transparency International (2023) defines corruption as "the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain," while anti-corruption signifies intentional efforts to prevent such abuse through institutional reforms, legal frameworks, civic involvement, and enforcement measures. In Nigeria, anti-corruption efforts involve the efforts of agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB). It also covers legislative activities, such as enacting necessary laws, approving agency budgets, and confirming leadership for anti-corruption organizations. However, Nigeria's fight against corruption is frequently undermined by: Targeted enforcement Political bias in investigations Weak institutions Lack of strong laws Poor cooperation between executive and legislature for anti-corruption efforts to succeed, the legislature must provide fair supervision, enhance institutional autonomy, and maintain openness. The National Assembly's role is thus vital, not secondary, to the success or failure of anti-corruption initiatives.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for this research illustrates how the actions of the 9th National Assembly affect the success of anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria. The model highlights legislative oversight and legislative complicity as the main factors influencing anti-corruption results. Legislative oversight signifies the beneficial role of the legislature through inquiries, examination of budgets, confirmation of appointments, and supervision of actions taken by the executive. Robust oversight is anticipated to improve clarity, responsibility and the effectiveness of anti-corruption bodies. Legislative complicity indicates a harmful effect, where the actions or inactions of the legislature like selective inquiries, shielding political friends, and negotiations among elites diminish accountability and hinder anti-corruption initiatives. Anti-corruption effectiveness is the result variable, shown through the robustness of anti-corruption legislation, the independence of agencies (EFCC, ICPC and CCB), the application of punishments, and the public's faith in governance. The connection between legislative actions and anti-corruption effectiveness is influenced by factors such as political determination, control by political parties, relations between the executive and legislature, patronage systems, and the strength of institutions.

Model Structure (Textual Form):

Legislative Oversight —————> Anti-Corruption Effectiveness
Legislative Complicity —————> (Moderating Factors: Political Will, Party Dominance, Executive-Legislative Relations and Institutional Strength)

Methodology

The study used a qualitative documentary research method, completely relying on verified secondary materials to explore how the legislature carries out its anticorruption duties. This approach was fitting because it allowed for a structured examination of institutional records

without the necessity for primary fieldwork. Data came from credible documents such as the Auditor-General's Reports (2019-2022), NEITI Audit Reports (2019-2023), National Assembly Votes and Proceedings, Public Accounts Committee reports, along with publications from BudgIT, SERAP, academic journals and reliable policy papers. Only sources that fulfilled strict standards of credibility, relevance, and verifiability were incorporated, ensuring that the analysis was based on trustworthy evidence.

Materials that showed partisan bias or lacked traceable origins were intentionally left out to preserve objectivity. The data were examined through thematic content analysis, which allowed for the recognition of repeating patterns in legislative behavior. This analysis was directed by Principal-Agent Theory, providing a conceptual framework to understand legislative actions as types of oversight, shirking, or collusion. The methodological approach guaranteed that findings emerged from a thorough and clear examination of recorded institutional behavior, making the study analytically strong and grounded in empirical evidence.

Theoretical Framework

The study anchored on Principal-Agent Theory, notably developed by Michael Jensen and William Meckling (1976) and further enriched by scholars like Barry Mitnick (1973) and Kathleen Eisenhardt (1989), outlines situations where one party (the principal) grants power to another (the agent) to act in their name. This theory emphasizes the dangers of information gaps, disengagement, moral hazard, and collusion that occur when the agent's goals differ from those of the principal and effective supervision is lacking. This framework is especially relevant in governance studies, where citizens assign political power to elected leaders and executive officials. In this study, Nigerian citizens act as the principals, while members of the National Assembly and executive officials are the agents tasked with overseeing public resources, evaluating government actions, and ensuring accountability. Legislative oversight through investigations, audits, and hearings serves as a crucial control mechanism for principals aimed at lessening agency loss.

The limited responsiveness of the legislature to significant corruption findings from the NEITI Audit Reports and the Auditor-General of the Federation's Reports reveals clear signs of agent disengagement. Despite having constitutional power to enforce compliance and punish misconduct, the National Assembly often neglected to launch investigations, apply sanctions, or act on investigative outcomes. This shows a divergence from the interests of citizens. Moreover, the ongoing shielding of MDAs and contractors involved in constituency project execution indicates collusion, where agents cooperate with others in the system to hide inefficiencies or financial misdeeds for shared gain. Such partnerships exacerbate information gaps and weaken accountability. Additionally, the strong voting alignment between the legislature and the executive, particularly in the 9th Assembly, suggests shared preferences. When agents have mutual political or material interests, monitoring incentives diminish, and oversight becomes more ceremonial than meaningful. Therefore, Principal-Agent Theory offers a powerful analytical perspective to understand why oversight became ineffective, why collaboration among state actors continued, and how systemic corruption persisted through behaviors that strayed from the expectations of the principals.

Contextual Analysis of the 9th National Assembly and Nigerian Anti-corruption Crusade (2019-2023)

9th National Assembly held a vital constitutional role in Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts, having the authority to create accountability laws, examine public spending, investigate corruption, and ensure compliance through legislative supervision. Sections 88 and 89 of the

1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria grant the legislature the power to uncover corruption, inefficiency, and waste in managing public funds (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). In theory, these powers placed the 9th Assembly as a crucial safeguard against executive misconduct at a time when public anxiety about fiscal leaks, corruption scandals, and increasing public debt was growing (BudgIT, 2022).

In reality, however, the anti-corruption function of the 9th National Assembly was mainly marked by selective oversight and weak enforcement. While the Assembly frequently reviewed reports from the Auditor-General of the Federation and the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), follow-up actions were spotty and often ineffective. Auditor-General's Reports from 2019 to 2022 highlighted numerous instances of uncollected revenues, unauthorized spending and procurement violations across ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), yet only a few of these cases led to recoveries, penalties, or prosecution referrals (Auditor-General of the Federation, 2022; SERAP, 2023). This trend greatly diminished the deterrent impact of legislative oversight. The Public Accounts Committees (PACs), which serve as the main anti-corruption oversight body within the legislature, further demonstrate this limitation. Although PAC hearings consistently uncovered widespread financial mismanagement among MDAs, the resolutions made by the committees were seldom enforced or converted into mandatory actions. Assessments from civil society suggest that many oversight efforts culminated in recommendations that were never adopted or executed, making oversight a largely procedural activity instead of an effective corrective measure (BudgIT, 2022; Ojo, 2021). Worries about legislative collusion grew more prominent during notable corruption investigations. The National Assembly's inquiry into the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) revealed claims of contract inflation, misdirection of intervention funds and misuse of emergency procurement procedures. Despite substantial documentary proof, public testimonies, and audit trails, the inquiry ended without substantial penalties or institutional responsibility, deepening public doubt about the legislature's dedication to enforcing anti-corruption measures (Transparency International Nigeria, 2021; Ezeani, 2021). Similar challenges arose in the oversight of constituency projects, where lawmakers oversaw projects that benefited them politically or materially, leading to conflicts of interest that eroded the credibility of oversight (Adebayo & Mohammed, 2022).

The effectiveness of the 9th National Assembly's anti-corruption function was further limited by strong executive control and partisan alignment. Legislative voting patterns and policy outcomes showed a significant level of agreement with the executive's preferences, especially concerning budget approvals, supplementary appropriations and borrowing requests. While cooperation between branches can foster policy stability, excessive alignment weakened the legislature's readiness to thoroughly examine executive agencies linked to corruption (Aleyomi, 2020; Ojo, 2021). As a result, oversight activities that posed a threat to executive interests were often postponed, diluted, or completely abandoned. In the realm of lawmaking, the Assembly's role in enhancing Nigeria's anti-corruption framework was hampered by its failure to focus on vital reform bills. Important laws like the Whistleblower Protection Bill, suggested changes to the Public Procurement Act and the Asset Recovery and Management Framework Bill were left stagnant or continually postponed, despite ongoing support from civil society groups and international allies (SERAP, 2023; BudgIT, 2022). The lack of these legal tools undermined the institutional ability to spot corruption, safeguard informants and manage recovered assets properly.

Findings and Discussion

Selective Oversight and Weak Enforcement

The study shows that selective oversight is a major flaw in the legislature during the examined period. Despite the Auditor-General's Reports over several fiscal years indicating billions of naira in unpaid revenues, undocumented spending, and many breaches of financial rules, the National Assembly continually failed to implement significant penalties on the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) involved. Oversight committees frequently held public hearings that attracted media attention but yielded few real outcomes. In many instances, committees offered strong advice, including refund demands, sanctions, or calls for further investigations, but these suggestions were neither adopted in plenary sessions nor sent for enforcement. This trend highlights a systemic issue in turning oversight findings into corrective measures. Moreover, the legislature seemed more reactive than proactive, launching inquiries only after scandals gained media attention, rather than through ongoing monitoring of audit concerns. The uneven application of sanctions indicated that the oversight system was swayed by political factors, patronage networks, or selective enforcement priorities. Overall, the lack of established follow-through mechanisms greatly diminished the deterrent impact of legislative oversight and allowed ongoing financial misconduct within MDAs.

Legislative Behaviour Suggestive of Complicity

The study's evidence suggests that various behaviors displayed by the 9th National Assembly created strong perceptions of involvement in corruption. Notable investigations, such as those regarding the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), uncovered significant contract inflation, misdirection of intervention funds, and management irregularities. However, although detailed documents were available including audit trails, whistleblower accounts, and media investigations legislative inquiries concluded without clear findings or enforceable penalties. This shortfall raised doubts about the authenticity and independence of the investigative processes. Furthermore, committees responsible for overseeing agencies susceptible to corruption often seemed hesitant to conduct thorough inquiries. Rumors circulated about committee members having ties to contract distributions or benefiting directly from constituency project funding, leading to conflicts of interest. These connections eroded the credibility of their oversight duties. In multiple cases, lawmakers publicly clashed with agency officials over contract distribution allegations, fueling public suspicion that the oversight process was more about negotiation than accountability. This behavioral pattern implies that legislative inaction was not just a failure of administration but, in some cases, a calculated avoidance rooted in political, financial, or personal interests.

Executive Dominance and Partisan Alignment

The findings show that executive control was a crucial structural element influencing legislative behavior throughout the study period. Voting records indicated that the National Assembly leadership matched the executive's policy goals in over 90% of instances, reflecting an exceptionally high level of institutional conformity. While collaboration between branches can foster stability in policies, excessive alignment weakens the checks-and-balances principle meant to prevent power abuse. The ruling party's dominance in the legislature further bolstered partisan discipline, making it challenging for dissenting opinions to sway oversight decisions or legislative examination.

Leadership roles within the National Assembly were also mostly decided by party hierarchy instead of merit or independence, which increased pressure on lawmakers to back executive choices. Consequently, oversight activities that conflicted with executive interests

particularly investigations into corruption, procurement issues, or the misuse of public funds were either delayed or significantly softened. Committees became less forceful in insisting that MDAs closely tied to the presidency comply. This partisan alignment effectively compromised legislative independence and diminished the chances that the legislature would confront executive overreach or pursue reforms aimed at bolstering transparency and accountability.

Failure to Pass Key Anti-Corruption Bills

A crucial finding of the study is the legislature's failure or reluctance to promote several vital anti-corruption bills necessary for enhancing Nigeria's governance system. Bills like the Whistleblower Protection Bill, intended to offer legal protections and incentives for those reporting corruption, stagnated despite ongoing advocacy from civil society and international allies. Likewise, suggested changes to the Public Procurement Act, meant to enhance transparency, streamline bidding processes, and close loopholes in contract awards, were not prioritized by the National Assembly. Perhaps most notably, the failure to push forward the Asset Recovery and Management Framework Bill, which aimed to establish a unified legal framework for the recovery, management, and redistribution of stolen public assets, was significant. The lack of such a framework has resulted in overlapping responsibilities among agencies, poor asset tracking, and the misappropriation of reclaimed funds. The legislative delays were often explained by citing workload, committee bottlenecks, or the necessity for further review, but deeper examination suggests that political disinterest and competing priorities played major roles. By overlooking these bills, the legislature missed a vital opportunity to enshrine anti-corruption reforms and strengthen systemic accountability.

Discussion

The results closely match the Principal-Agent Theory, which suggests that agents here, lawmakers might stray from the interests of their principals (the citizens) when supervision is weak, incentives are misaligned or chances for collusion exist. In Nigeria, the legislature and the executive branch have overlapping political goals, patronage connections and shared advantages from unclear financial dealings. These common incentives help clarify the patterns of selective inquiries, lengthy committee holdups, and uneven accountability actions noted in the study. The behavior of the National Assembly indicates that oversight tools were not used for public accountability but rather for political negotiations.

Rather than using their constitutional power to examine public spending, legislators often downplayed or disregarded trustworthy audit findings, especially those involving major ministries and politically influential agencies. Such actions fit the Principal-Agent expectation of shirking where agents intentionally avoid carrying out the duties expected by their principals. Moreover, the evidence suggests collusion, a more intricate type of agent misbehavior. Legislative committees assigned to review Auditor-General and NEITI reports often showed hesitation to impose penalties or pursue suggestions. In instances like constituency project implementation and high-profile corruption investigations, legislative actions seemed more protective than inquiry-focused, indicating that both legislative and executive participants benefited from sustaining the current situation. This mutual support further erodes transparency and diminishes the credibility of anti-corruption agencies.

By not applying audit recommendations, refusing to penalize non-compliant agencies, and letting investigative efforts halt, the National Assembly contributed to a governance atmosphere where corruption flourishes. This discussion thus underscores a major contradiction: while constitutionally authorized to check executive misconduct, the legislature frequently acted in ways that facilitated or obscured it. This reinforces the broader political economy argument

that corruption continues not because institutions are absent, but because institutional actors intentionally manipulate oversight for personal or collective benefit.

Conclusion

The study reveals that the 9th National Assembly showed more signs of legislative complicity than effective oversight. Even with constitutional guidelines, oversight was irregular, enforcement of conclusions was weak and important anti-corruption laws went nowhere. The dominance of the executive, patronage systems, and political connections limited legislative independence, lowering its ability to work as an accountability body.

Recommendations

1. Enhance Legislative Independence: Change how committees are appointed to lessen executive control. Make Committee Reports Legally Binding: Require acceptance and execution within set timeframes.
2. Boost Transparency: Share oversight results online to promote citizen involvement.
3. Revise Constituency Projects: Shift execution to impartial agencies to minimize conflicts of interest.
4. Skill Development: Enhance legislative abilities in forensic analysis, budgeting and investigative methods.
5. Enact Essential Anti-Corruption Legislation: Focus on protecting whistleblowers, reforming procurement, and recovering assets.
6. Encourage Civil Society Involvement: Ensure public access to budget discussions and investigative hearings.

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