



A Critical View and Analysis of Nigeria's Current Administration The Fragile State of Our National Peace: A Call for Upright Leadership and Systemic Reform

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Abstract

Nigeria's uninterrupted democratic practice since 1999 has failed to produce durable peace, equitable development, or sustained public trust in governance. This paper critically evaluates the performance of the current administration inaugurated in May 2023, using the analytical lenses of political legitimacy, institutional capacity, and distributive justice. Drawing on data from the 2023 general elections, economic indicators, security reports, and governance assessments, the study argues that Nigeria's fragility is structural rather than circumstantial. Elite capture, a high-cost electoral system, weak institutional independence, and centralized federalism constrain policy effectiveness and erode social cohesion. The paper concludes that without comprehensive reforms in political finance, fiscal federalism, and civil service professionalism, policy interventions will remain palliative and national peace will remain precarious. It recommends a three-pronged reform agenda: electoral integrity and campaign finance regulation, devolution of powers and fiscal autonomy, and merit-based institutional renewal.

Keywords: Nigeria, governance, legitimacy, electoral reform, federalism, institutional capacity, public trust, national peace

Introduction

Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999 marked a watershed in its political history. The country has since conducted seven successive general elections, the longest period of uninterrupted democratic governance since independence. Yet, democratic longevity has not translated into democratic dividends. Insecurity, inflation, youth unemployment, and declining confidence in public institutions persist, raising questions about the quality and direction of governance under successive administrations.

The current administration, which assumed office on May 29, 2023, inherited a complex web of economic distortions and security challenges. Its early policy decisions—removal of the fuel subsidy, unification of the foreign exchange market, and tax reform proposals—signal a willingness to confront long-standing structural imbalances. However, policy effectiveness depends not only on technical design but on political legitimacy, institutional capacity, and public trust.

This paper offers a critical analysis of the administration's performance within its first year, focusing on three interrelated dimensions:

- The state of political legitimacy following the 2023 electoral process;
- The capacity and independence of institutions to implement policy;
- The administration's responsiveness to equity, security, and service delivery demands.

Using evidence from domestic and international sources, the paper contends that Nigeria's peace remains fragile due to systemic governance deficits. It concludes by outlining a reform agenda aimed at restoring legitimacy, strengthening institutions, and rebalancing the federation for inclusive development.

Legitimacy in democratic systems derives from both procedural fairness and perceived responsiveness to citizen needs (Easton, 1965). The 2023 general elections exposed significant gaps in both. While voter turnout and civic engagement were notable, the process was undermined by logistical failures, late deployment of materials, and inconsistent application of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) (EU EOM, 2023). The failure to transmit results electronically as anticipated by the Electoral Act 2022 deepened public suspicion and triggered post-election litigation.

Beyond procedural issues, the structural cost of politics in Nigeria limits democratic competitiveness. Campaign financing remains opaque and unregulated in practice, favoring candidates with access to patronage networks over those with policy credentials (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). This dynamic produces a political class insulated from public accountability and incentivizes the capture of state resources for private gain. The result is a legitimacy deficit: citizens participate in elections but do not believe the outcomes reflect their will or interests.

Restoring legitimacy requires electoral reforms that reduce the cost of politics, enforce real-time result transmission, and sanction electoral offenses decisively. Without such measures, elections risk becoming rituals that reproduce elite dominance rather than mechanisms of popular control.

Institutional Capacity and the Challenge of Policy Implementation

The capacity of the state to translate policy into outcomes depends on the professionalism, autonomy, and accountability of its institutions. Nigeria's civil service, historically designed as a neutral instrument of policy implementation, has been progressively politicized (Adebayo, 2020). Recruitment and promotion are often influenced by patronage, undermining merit and institutional memory.

The administration's macroeconomic reforms in 2023 illustrate this challenge. The removal of the petrol subsidy and the unification of the foreign exchange rate were necessary corrections to fiscal distortions. However, the absence of a robust social protection framework and coordinated transportation policy amplified inflationary shocks. Headline inflation rose from 22.4% in May 2023 to 29.9% in January 2024 (NBS, 2024), disproportionately affecting low-income households.

Institutional independence is equally critical. Anti-corruption agencies, the judiciary, and regulatory bodies require operational and financial autonomy to function effectively. When these institutions are perceived as extensions of the executive, their credibility erodes, and compliance with rules declines (Transparency International, 2023). Strengthening institutional capacity therefore requires depoliticizing recruitment, ring-fencing budgets, and enforcing performance-based management systems.

Equity, Security, and the Social Contract

The social contract in Nigeria is fraying under the weight of insecurity and inequality. Armed banditry, insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, and separatist agitation continue to claim lives and displace communities across the North East, North West, and Middle Belt (ICG, 2024). The persistence of these threats reflects both capacity gaps in security architecture and the political economy of conflict.

Simultaneously, economic inequality limits social mobility. The National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reported that 63% of Nigerians experience multidimensional poverty, lacking access to health, education, and adequate living standards. When citizens perceive that public resources are allocated through patronage rather than need, compliance with state authority weakens.

A responsive administration must therefore prioritize two areas: first, security sector reform that emphasizes community policing, intelligence-led operations, and accountability for human rights violations; second, equitable service delivery through targeted investments in education, primary healthcare, and rural infrastructure. Equity is not a concession; it is a prerequisite for national cohesion.

Toward a Reform Agenda: Restructuring, Accountability, and Professionalism

Addressing Nigeria's fragility requires systemic rather than cosmetic change. Three interconnected reforms are proposed:

- 1 Electoral Integrity and Political Finance Reform:** Reducing the cost of politics and enforcing transparency in campaign financing can open political space for new actors and reduce the incentive for post-election rent-seeking. This includes strengthening the Independent National Electoral Commission's financial and operational autonomy, mandating real-time result transmission, and establishing an independent electoral offenses tribunal.
- 2 Fiscal Federalism and Devolution of Powers:** Nigeria's centralized federalism creates a mismatch between fiscal resources and service delivery responsibilities. Devolving policing, education, and healthcare to subnational governments, coupled with a revised revenue allocation formula, can improve responsiveness and accountability (Akinyemi, 2021). Constitutional restructuring should prioritize functional efficiency over ethnic calculation.
- 3. Civil Service and Institutional Renewal:** A professional, merit-based civil service is essential for policy continuity and implementation. Reforms should include merit-based recruitment, performance management systems, and protection against arbitrary dismissal. Oversight institutions must be insulated from political interference to rebuild public trust.

Leadership remains the catalytic variable. Upright leadership that communicates transparently, admits errors, and prioritizes national interest over partisan gain can create the political will necessary for reform.

Conclusion

Nigeria's democratic continuity is an achievement, but democracy without development and peace is incomplete. The fragility of national peace stems not from cultural diversity or

external interference alone, but from governance arrangements that incentivize exclusion and undermine accountability.

The current administration stands at a critical juncture. By pursuing electoral reform, fiscal federalism, and institutional renewal, it can convert policy intentions into tangible improvements in security, equity, and public trust. The alternative—managing symptoms while avoiding structural causes—risks deepening cynicism and instability.

National peace is not the absence of conflict; it is the presence of justice. Without justice, equity, and accountable governance, Nigeria's peace will remain fragile, and its development will remain deferred.

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