

Two Decades of Policy-Making in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2025): A Systematic Review of Institutional Drivers and Governance Reforms

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Abstract

Over the years, Nigeria has had various administrations that have made considerable changes in the government and policy areas, all with the aim of promoting governance, enhancing the transparency and accountability in public sector management, good economic management as well as tackling the challenges of corruption, insecurity and institutional weaknesses in the country. This review aims to systematically review the empirical and conceptual literature on policy-making in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2025) to synthesis evidence on the institutional drivers that have been at work behind the governance reforms, and eventually the policy outcomes over the two decades. The systematic review method based on PRISMA was used to retrieve peer-reviewed studies from the Web of Science and Scopus databases, which were then screened according to the previously established inclusion criteria and finally synthesized by using narrative and thematic analysis. The findings reveal four main thematic clusters: governance capacity, institutional accountability, corruption and elite capture, and decentralization. The results indicate that in the

course of the last two decades, Nigeria has gone through an unprecedented proliferation of institutions and reforms but the policy outcomes have not been uniform and have mostly been incremental. The legal frameworks and institutions created by formal reforms have often been quite extensive, but, unfortunately, no improvements in enforcement, bureaucratic capacity or accountability have been made concurrently with the legal extensions. The dominance of the executive, lack of checks among institutions, capture by the elite, and informal governance practices continue to mediate and limit the transformations brought about by reforms. In conclusion, while the review confirms that governance reforms in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria have led to the emergence of modest and fragile gains rather than the transformation of institutions, it asserts that the study is an important addition to the governance and political debates.

Keywords

Policy-Making, Institutional Drivers, Public Sector Reform, Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Democratic Governance, Governance Reforms

1. Background

After the re-establishment of democracy in 1999, a lot of changes have taken place within the political, economic, and institutional structures of Nigeria. For over 20 years, successive governments have implemented diverse policy reforms targeted at promoting governance, enhancing the transparency and accountability in public sector management, good economic management as well as tackling the challenges of corruption, insecurity and institutional weaknesses (Ali & Alhassan, 2025; Ashindorbe & Danjibo, 2022). However, arguments are present regarding the reforms' coherence and sustainability in comparison with the intricate Nigerian political setting and its emerging democratic institutions.

Analysing the evolution of policymaking in this time frame can be accomplished by analysing both the institutional drivers of policymaking processes and governance reforms implemented to improve state capacity. These institutions including the presidency, legislature, judiciary, civil service, and regulatory agencies which are key determinants of policy outcomes. However, these institutions have a number of times had their performances impacted by political instability, poor bureaucracy, and changing socio-economic realities (Akpakpan et al., 2025; Ojiridike & Chukwu, 2025). Furthermore, governance reforms such as public service restructuring, fiscal and budgetary management, anti-corruption, decentralisation, electoral governance, and sectoral policies in power, pensions, and privatisation have been some of the major outputs of the Fourth Republic which has generated a thick and varied body of policy initiatives and reform programmes across core governance arenas (Onyekwere, 2023).

The reforms comprising the Treasury Single Account (TSA), the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), and the restructuring of public services have been characterized as flawless and service delivery efficient measures, however, in different ways to varying degrees (Chukwudum & Joshua, 2025). On the one hand, the federal setup, party structures, patronage networks, and executive-legislative bargaining have, more than anything else, influenced the interaction between formal institutions and informal power relations in a complex way (Okolie, 2019). This inclusion of reforms has thus extended to the restructuring of the whole sector, implementation of anti-corruption measures, decentralisation, and the economic diversification policies that all together indicate the state's commitment to adapting to the constantly changing governance challenges (Chukwudum & Joshua, 2025; Onyekwere, 2023; Ukwandu & Ijere, 2020).

There is a mounting accumulation of research that goes into the analysis of Nigeria's democratic consolidation and electoral politics but there is very little that compares these institutional drivers for the purposes of analysing governance reform over the full 1999-2025-time frame (Adeoye, 2025; Mohammed Kucici & Inusa, 2025; Musa et al., 2020). Most of this research focuses government changes, single policy papers, or specific reform areas without relating them to a single story of institutional change, policy continuities and changes within successive Nigerian governments. Therefore, this systematic review of the policymaking process within Nigeria's Fourth Republic aims to synthesise existing evidence from the available research findings, identify the most important institutional factors driving the policymaking process, and assess the degree to which governance reforms have enhanced democratic development and Nigerian national development.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study used a systematic review methodology. The systematic review method was adopted to provide transparency, replicability, and rigor in finding, choosing, and examining the literature (Martin et al., 2017). The review adhered to the established principles for systematic reviews in the social sciences, taking cues from the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Page et al., 2021).

2.2. Data Source and Search Strategy

A comprehensive search of relevant literature was carried out using electronic databases such Web of Science and Scopus. The databases were chosen because of their large-scale coverage of top-tier journals which have been peer-reviewed and published in social sciences and related fields (Powell & Peterson, 2017; Prancutè, 2021).

The search strategy consisted of predefined keywords and Boolean operators that were relevant to the study objectives. The search strings were changed ac-

cording to the syntax of each database so that the best retrieval would be achieved. The search was restricted to journal articles to guarantee academic quality and uniformity. Scopus was searched with the following search terms, “TITLE-ABS-KEY (governance OR “public administration” OR “public sector reform” OR “institutional reform” OR “policy reform” OR “anti-corruption” OR decentralization OR “institutional drivers”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (Nigeria OR Nigerian) AND PUBYEAR > 1998 AND PUBYEAR < 2026”, and Web of Science using, “TS = (governance OR “public administration” OR “public sector reform” OR “institutional reform” OR “policy reform” OR “anti-corruption” OR decentralization OR “institutional drivers”) AND TS = (Nigeria OR Nigerian).”

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Strategy

The inclusion criteria for the articles were as follows: 1) articles that focused on empirical or conceptual work on public policy-making, governance reforms, institutional change, or institutional performance in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, 2) publications that explicitly discusses institutional drivers (e.g., political institutions, bureaucratic structures, legal frameworks, party systems, civil society, international actors) and/or governance outcomes (accountability, transparency, participation, effectiveness, rule of law), 3) publications within 1999 to 2025 to ensure the relevance of the findings, and 4) articles published in peer-reviewed journals or from reputable sources.

2.4. Study Selection Process

All records obtained were exported from both Web of Science and Scopus and then gathered into a reference management software for arranging and removal of duplicates. The initial database search in Scopus and Web of Science yielded a substantial output of 3650 records. After the duplicated were screened, we had an output of 2658 records. A meticulous abstract and title screening process, resulting in 122 articles advancing to the full-text evaluation stage. Then, the full-text screening was done to check the eligibility of the studies according to the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This procedure made sure that only the studies with direct relevance to the research objectives were considered for final analysis. The selection process of studies was recorded by means of a PRISMA flow diagram as shown in **Figure 1**.

2.5. Data Extraction

A narrative and thematic synthesis approach was utilized to integrate the outcomes. The studies were classified based on the themes that reappeared. This made it possible to find the main patterns, the shortcomings in the literature, and the places where the studies reviewed came together and where they differed. The synthesis was mainly concerned with following over time the institutional drivers for policy-making, policy reforms, and governance processes, which was the main aim of the study.

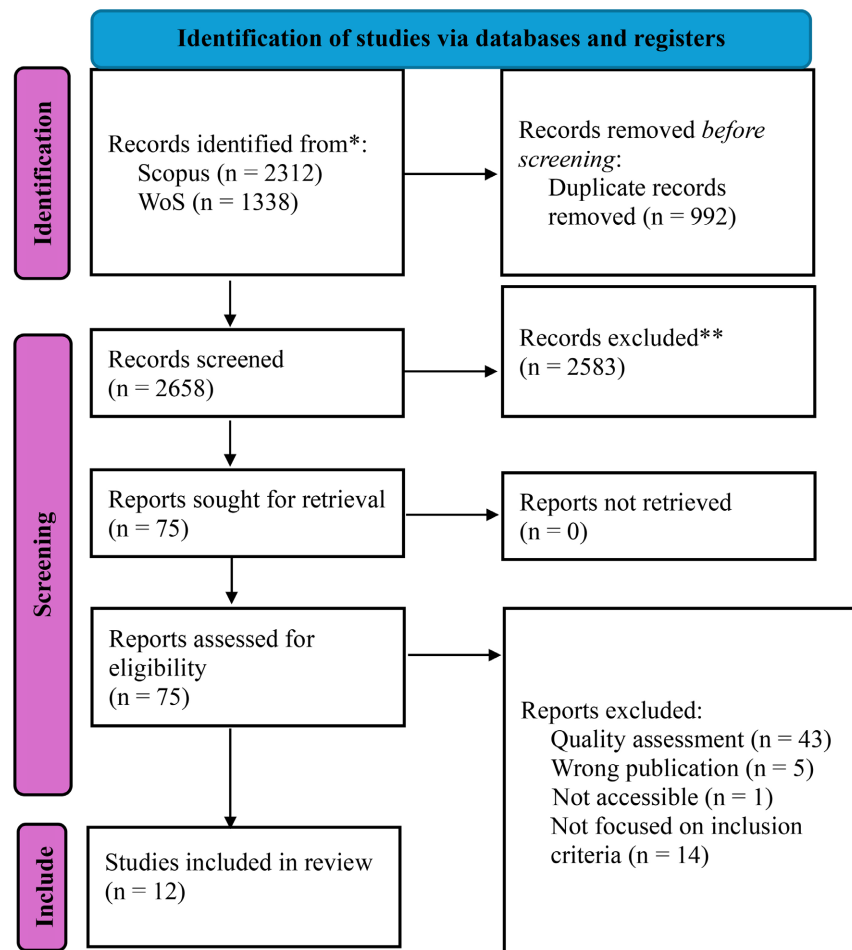


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart.

2.6. Quality Appraisal

The study used the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) developed by [Hong et al. \(2018\)](#) to appraise the methodological rigor of the included papers. The methodological appraisal was carried out on all the studies included in the review and merged into the methods of this review was done with the intention of integrating the qualitative and quantitative methods. The 2018 MMAT was chosen since the included papers comprise qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs, and the tool permits a uniform appraisal across these different methodological traditions.

3. Results

The systematic study reviewed studies published between 1999 and 2025, thereby covering two decades of Nigeria's Fourth Republic policy-making. The twelve (12) included studies used qualitative ([Esavwede et al., 2025](#); [Nwosu et al., 2024](#); [Okpe & Othman, 2020](#); [Othman & Okpe, 2021](#)), quantitative ([Adewoyin et al., 2020](#); [Olaoye & Adebawale, 2017](#); [Salihu, 2020](#)), and mixed-methods ([Adedayo et al., 2024](#); [Adegbite et al., 2021](#); [Awopeju, 2023](#); [Inakefe et al., 2023](#); [Oyebanji & Omale,](#)

2025) research designs and used both primary and secondary data sources. The studies together consider governance reforms at the federal, state, and sectoral levels, as well as institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, decentralization practices, and anti-corruption initiatives with a special focus.

3.1. Reform and Sectoral Focus

Among the reform focus identified, governance and public administration reforms are the ones that have received most attention, which shows that they are still consider as important the institutional bases of democratic governance that have existed since the beginning of Nigeria's fourth republic as reported in the included studies. **Table 1** simplifies the relationship between reform focus, sectoral focus and the key institutional dimensions.

Table 1. Reform focus and sectoral focus of governance reforms in Nigeria's fourth republic (1999-2025).

S/N	Reform focus	Primary sector	Institutional dimensions	Illustrative Reform Areas Covered in the Literature	References
1.	Governance and Democratic Institutions	Electoral governance; legislature; executive institutions	Institutional design; checks and balances; political accountability	Electoral reforms, executive-legislative relations, democratic consolidation, rule of law	(Adegbite et al., 2021; Adewoyin et al., 2020; Inakefe et al., 2023)
2.	Public Sector and Civil Service Reform	Public administration	Bureaucratic capacity; professionalism; administrative efficiency	Civil service restructuring, performance management, public financial management reforms	(Adegbite et al., 2021; Adewoyin et al., 2020; Inakefe et al., 2023)
3.	Anti-Corruption and Accountability Reform	Oversight and integrity institutions (EFCC, ICPC, Auditor-General)	Transparency; enforcement capacity; institutional autonomy	Anti-corruption agencies, procurement reforms, financial accountability mechanisms	(Awopaju, 2023; Esavwede et al., 2025; Oyeboji & Omale, 2025)
4.	Decentralization and Intergovernmental Governance	Federal, state, and local governments	Fiscal federalism; coordination; subnational capacity	Local government autonomy, fiscal decentralization, intergovernmental relations	(Adewoyin et al., 2020; Olaoje & Adebawale, 2017; Salihu, 2020)

3.2. Reform Outcomes

The studies reviewed suggest that governance and institutional reforms in Nigeria's Fourth Republic have produced mixed results and mainly incremental gains. The reforms across various policy areas have been rather conservative, and they are still very much part of the existing governance structures even though some adjustments may be noticed. Changes in formal rules, laws, and organizational arrangements are usually reported but these changes have not consistently resulted in changes in institutional behaviour or policy practice of a considerable magnitude (Adedayo et al., 2024; Adewoyin et al., 2020).

All the studies point to a common finding which is the dominance of reforms

that are either symbolic or procedural. In numerous situations, the creation of new institutions, strategies, or regulatory frameworks was not supported by any increase in enforcement capacity or compliance. This is particularly true for the reforms in accountability and anti-corruption where the institutional expansion on paper coincides with the existing governance problems (Awopeju, 2023; Esavwede et al., 2025). Consequently, the effects of the reforms are usually described as having low potency and being of a temporary nature.

Furthermore, some studies reported cases of reform stagnation and even reversal, particularly in the cases where reforms face political resistance or threaten the interests of the powerful (Adegbite et al., 2021; Awopeju, 2023; Okpe & Othman, 2020). New government leaderships often change the reform momentum, resulting in inconsistent implementation and diminished institutional continuity. In such situations, power relations and political priorities are the main factors influencing the outcomes of the reform rather than the technical design.

Nonetheless, there are some studies that indicate small positive outcomes especially in the area where the reforms are backed by strong legal support, administrative capacity, and institutional stability. The accomplishments are for instance in the fields of procedural accountability, financial management systems, and coordination mechanisms (Olaoye & Adebawale, 2017; Salihu, 2020). Yet even in these situations, improvements remain localized and fragile, lacking the systemic depth required for long-term institutional change.

Conclusively, the evidence from the included studies indicates that the reform results in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are most appropriately characterized as gradual, irregular, and based on conditions, mirroring the relationship between concrete reform measures and the existing institutional limitations.

3.3. Institutional Drivers of Policy-Making

The papers reviewed uniformly point to institutional design and governance arrangements as decisive factors in the policy-making process during Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The authority over policy, the methods of decision-making, and the routes of implementation are determined by the constitution, laws, and the formal structure of the organizations involved, and this is true for all sectors (Ade-dayo et al., 2024; Awopeju, 2023; Esavwede et al., 2025; Salihu, 2020). More specifically, the federal system and the distribution of powers according to the constitution have a major impact on the policy-making and execution processes at the federal, state, and local government levels (Adewoyin et al., 2020; Awopeju, 2023; Esavwede et al., 2025; Inakefe et al., 2023).

One of the main institutional drivers discussed in the reviewed studies is the bureaucratic capacity, which encompasses administrative capabilities, the stability of the organization, and the professional standards in public institutions. Result shows that policy performance differences are strongly tied to institutional capacity differences; in other words, the better the resources and professional expertise of the agency, the stronger the policy implementation outcomes they will have

(Adedayo et al., 2024; Adegbite et al., 2021; Awopeju, 2023). On the other hand, inadequate administrative systems are frequently associated with policy delays, gaps in implementation, and failures in coordination (Nwosu et al., 2024; Oyebanji & Omale, 2025).

Finally, the political-institutional relations, particularly executive dominance in the policy-making process, are pointed out as another significant factor (Adedayo et al., 2024; Adewoyin et al., 2020; Inakefe et al., 2023; Salihu, 2020). The executive branch's control over decision-making shapes the priority of policies and limits the power of the legislature to oversee and the institutions to be accountable. This interplay impacts both the making and the executing of policies, often restricting the freedom of the regulatory and monitoring bodies in their actions.

4. Discussion

From the results, the governance of Nigeria and the institutional landscape in the Fourth Republic have gone through a complicated but patterned evolution, where the formal democratization process and reforms have not resulted in consistently better policy-making. Rather, the evidence synthesised implies that the strengthening of institutions in particular technical areas next to continuing elite capture, weak accountability and unequal decentralization outcomes. This mixed situation is a major reason for understanding the fact that policy reforms, though often appearing to be very ambitious in writing, actually, deliver only limited, fragmented, or reversible gains in practice.

4.1. Governance Capacity and Institutional Performance

One of the very important aspects that the results of this review reveals is the power of governance capacity in policy matters. The findings reveal that capacity building for governance has enabled pockets of effectiveness to emerge in certain policy sectors, especially in public financial management and at the same time, left the wider administrative state unable to function adequately. For instance, the reforms like the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) have shown that the state can drastically cut down on leakages, manage cash better, and restore budget credibility when there is a combination of central political power, clear institutional roles, and ICT tools (Inakefe et al., 2023; Olaoye & Adebawale, 2017; Salihu, 2020). These results indicate that the Nigerian state is not totally weak; on the contrary, it is capable to a certain extent, particularly where reforms are in line with elite interests (e.g. fiscal consolidation, central control anti-leakage measures) and attract international legitimacy. Such revelations further reinforce the opinion that the issue of Nigeria's policy failures is not so much about the design of the policies but rather the limitations of the state capacity (Andrews et al., 2017; The World Bank, 2016).

4.2. Institutional Accountability and Executive Dominance

The review results further highlight the lasting inadequacies in the accountability

of institutions, particularly in the areas of legislative control, judicial independence, and regulatory enforcement, which gives room for executive dominance. In their research, [Okpe and Othman \(2020\)](#) argue that even though the 1999 Constitution stipulates that the legislative and executive branches are equal and that there is legislative monitoring, the relationships between the legislature and the executive have been more conflictual than collaborative, marked by power struggles, threats of impeachment, and coalitions based on limited political interests rather than governance through policies. This situation is a hindrance to the legislature in terms of its role as an effective counterbalance, thereby resulting in policy instability, the slow process of passing laws and poor delivery of services ([Oni et al., 2025](#)).

This incident is more common with the anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC and ICPC. While endowed with formal autonomy, their effectiveness has fluctuated with changes in political leadership, reinforcing the finding that formal institutional design alone is insufficient without political insulation and enforcement credibility ([Owolabi & Olaleye, 2018](#)). Thus, the review strengthens the view that the institutional framework for accountability in Nigeria is still not fully developed, thereby affecting the credibility of the policy and the trust of the public.

4.3. Corruption, Elite Capture and Informal Institutions

Among the various outcomes noticed in the studies that were reviewed, the impact of elite capture and informal institutions on the reform paths taken was the most striking one ([Adedayo et al., 2024](#); [Oyebanji & Omale, 2025](#)). The situation of corruption has not changed much, remaining to be the same as before in the forms of political financing, procurement systems, and intergovernmental transfers, while anti-corruption policies and institutions have been proliferating all the time ([Duyile et al., 2023](#)). This is consistent with the findings of the review which reveal that the elites usually have the say when it comes to the reforms and they do so by making the implementation only partially compliant, watering down the policy or plain resistance. This, in turn, backs up the institutionalist claims that distributional coalitions will not give up unless the reforms do not breach their interests ([Brinks et al., 2020](#)).

4.4. Decentralization and Intergovernmental Governance

The evidence presented here goes against the standard view that decentralization directly leads to improved governance ([Achanso, 2020](#); [Halil, 2024](#)). However, it is still argued that the results of decentralization depend on the sequence of the institutional changes, the building of capacities, and the links of accountability, which have been poor or inconsistent in Nigeria. This agrees with [Abdillahi \(2025\)](#) which enforces the importance of institutional capacity, fiscal autonomy and institutional accountability as contextual factors for successful decentralization.

According to [Adewoyin et al. \(2020\)](#), the establishment of new local government areas resulted in the higher development rankings of some areas, thus indi-

cating that decentralization can improve local access to state resources and encourage regional development if the conditions are right. At the same time, continuous bureaucratic hurdles, shortage of skilled personnel, and corruption in the civil service restricted the wider application of these territorial changes in service delivery (Adewoyin et al., 2020; Bukari et al., 2025; Mukoro & Afonughe, 2025).

5. Conclusion

The governance reforms in Nigeria's Fourth Republic after a policy-making period of twenty-five years has been characterized as one where democratic institutions and reform networks interact with informal institutions to a large extent. The state of Nigeria has shown that it can be capable in a selective manner through public financial management projects. However, the factors of politicised bureaucracy, executive dominance, systemic corruption, and uneven decentralization still prevail, thus, making most of the reforms bring about only incremental, fragile, and often reversible gains. To cope with the situation and ensure that the governance and policy outcomes are sustainable, the country needs to abandon fragmented reforms that are limited to specific sectors and rather adopt the strategies that will, among other things, strengthen the professionalism of the bureaucracy, consolidate and insulate the accountability institutions, rationalise anti-corruption mandates, and deepen meaningful citizen participation at both federal and subnational level.

6. Limitations and Implications for Future Directions

One of the limitations of this study is that this study used largely qualitative and quantitative methods which restricts causal inferences. Another one is that some sector-specific institutional reforms (health, education, energy, etc.) are not explored in this study. Future research should look into longitudinal institutional analysis and some comparative studies that explore other countries.

For the implications for future directions, firstly, the demand for accountability, on one hand, and the struggle against corruption, on the other, necessitate the introduction of new methods in enforcement by means of the consolidation of mandates and clearer hierarchies among the respective bodies. The reforms that emerge from the evidence, include the cutting down of the number of anti-corruption agencies, the granting of budgetary and prosecutorial independence to the remaining ones, the reform of the judicial process to make it faster, and the re-examination of constitutional immunity laws that protect top officials from prosecution. Ultimately, the changes in decentralization and democratic participation would require the actual empowerment of citizens and local institutions for performance monitoring, elite sanctioning, and policy shaping, thus reinforcing the connection between institutional design and inclusive governance outcomes.

Also, public financial management gains should be accompanied by measures that prevent the existing reforms from being politicized and, at the same time, spreading the logic of transparency and accountability to other areas such as pro-

curement, subnational finances, and security sector spending which are complementary to public financial management. If not integrated this way, TSA and IP-PIS run the risk of being mere isolated successes that can easily be reversed or evaded.

Author Contributions

Damilola Oyeyemi: Conceptualization, investigation, data curation, and writing: original draft preparation. Opeyemi Deji-Oloruntoba: Methodology, formal analysis, validation, and writing—review and editing. Rose E. Adoyi: Investigation, resources, literature review, and data curation. Deborah O. Oluwatuyi: Methodology, visualization, validation, and writing: review and editing. Toyin B. K. Oluwatuyi: Investigation, formal analysis, resources, and literature synthesis. Emmanuel O. Osilaru: Data curation, methodology, validation, and writing: review and editing. David T. Asubiojo: Formal analysis, investigation, visualization, and literature review. Joshua S. Aderibigbe: Resources, investigation, validation, and writing: review and editing. Daniel O. Biaoku: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, validation, visualization, supervision, project administration, writing—original draft preparation, and writing: review and editing.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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