

APPRAISAL ON THE INDEPENDENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE JUDICIARY IN STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Shamsuddeen Magaji*

Ahmed Salisu Garba**

Abstract

Political meddling, corruption, and insufficient funding have continuously weakened Nigerian democracy, which depends on the independence and efficacy of the judiciary. This study looks at how these obstacles affect the judiciary's ability to protect democratic values and enforce the rule of law. This study aims to give a thorough picture of the current status of the Nigerian judiciary by using a qualitative research approach that includes legal expert interviews, case study analysis, and examination of the country's constitution and legal frameworks. The literature analysis shows a considerable discrepancy between the actual situation and the constitutional guarantees of judicial independence. While some academics contend that the court has made strides in establishing its independence, others highlight a significant barrier: the growing politicization of judicial appointments and rulings. The early findings indicate that factors such as insufficient financing, a lack of independence in administrative duties, and pressure from powerful political figures and the executive branch hinder the judiciary's efficacy. The thesis of the paper is that Nigerian democracy is still weak and prone to authoritarian tendencies in the absence of true judicial independence and increased efficacy. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity of immediate reforms to fortify the judiciary. These reforms

* Associate Professor of Law, Faculty of Law, Sa'adu Zungur University, Bauchi State; deeneemagaji@gmail.com

** Professor of Law, Faculty of Law, Baze University, Abuja and Former Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic & Dean of Law, Faculty of Law, Sa'adu Zungur University, Bauchi State; email: ahmedgarbasalisu@gmail.com

must guarantee the judiciary's financial independence, make judicial selections public and more transparent, and put in place safeguards against outside pressure or influence. Policy proposals include the establishment of an independent judicial commission to supervise nominations and discipline, the adoption of constitutional modifications to protect judicial independence, and higher budgetary allocations to the judiciary to improve its operational capabilities. These steps are necessary to guarantee that Nigeria's judiciary can successfully function as a check on authority and a defender of democratic values.

Keywords: Independence, Judiciary, Democracy, Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has faced numerous obstacles on its path to democracy, such as the history of military takeovers, unstable political systems, and widespread corruption. Despite the significant shift to civilian control in 1999, the legacies of previous administrations continue to shape the political environment. The judiciary, functioning as the third branch of government, bears the responsibility of safeguarding constitutional rights and impartially mediating conflicts. However, a number of issues, such as systematic corruption, insufficient financing, and political intervention or interference, have compromised the efficacy of the Nigerian judiciary.

The Nigerian Constitution, which establishes the division of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial institutions, upholds the independence of the judiciary. Notwithstanding these constitutional safeguards, the actual state of affairs frequently tells a different tale. Political players regularly influence the appointments and rulings made by judges, which gives the impression that they are

biased¹. The widespread culture of corruption within the judiciary at all levels weakens the public's confidence in the judicial system².

A weak judiciary has consequences for human rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law that extend beyond the courtroom. In a democracy, the judiciary plays a critical role as a check on executive power³. However, the politicization of judicial processes typically erodes public trust and entrenches authoritarian practices⁴. As Nigeria struggles with these issues, it is critical to understand the current situation of the judiciary and how it affects democracy.

The main focus of this study is on Nigeria's declining judicial independence and efficacy, as well as how it affects democracy. The judicial branch and political elites in particular continue to exert pressure on the court in spite of constitutional safeguards designed to protect judicial independence. This circumstance calls into serious doubt the judiciary's capacity to preserve democratic principles and enforce the law.

Judicial corruption exacerbates this problem by undermining the integrity of legal proceedings and undermining public trust in the legal system. There is a growing perception that justice is not impartial but rather influenced by political connections and wealth as a result of

¹ Salihu, H. and Gholami, H., Corruption in the Nigerian Judicial System: An Overview, *Journal of Financial Crime*, 25(3) (2018) 669-680. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jfc-01-2017-0005>

² Das, V., Judicial Corruption: The Case of Nigeria, *Journal of Financial Crime*, 25(4), (2018) 926-939. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jfc-02-2017-0011>.

³ Gwunireama, I., The Judiciary as Bulwark of the Rule of Law and Democracy in Nigeria. *Activa Yuris Jurnal Hukum*, 1(2) (2021). <https://doi.org/10.25273/ay.v1i2.11950>

⁴ Ugochukwu, B., The Pathology of Judicialization: Politics, Corruption and the Courts in Nigeria, *The Law and Development Review*, 4(3) (2011). <https://doi.org/10.2202/1943-3867.1116>

reports of bribery, bias, and favoritism among judges⁵. Insufficient financing and resources further hinder the judiciary's efficacy, hindering its ability to issue decisions in a timely and equitable manner.

Nigerian democracy exists in a hazardous environment. The rule of law is in danger, and authoritarianism is more likely in the absence of a strong and independent judiciary. This study delves into these dynamics, examining the undermining of the court's independence and efficacy, and identifying necessary changes to strengthen its role in safeguarding democracy.

This study's principal goal is to present a thorough analysis of Nigeria's judiciary's independence, efficacy, and consequences for democratic governance. In order to achieve this overall goal, the research will aim to accomplish the following specific goals: First, the research will evaluate the current level of judicial independence in Nigeria, closely examining the impact of political meddling and corruption on the legal system. Secondly, the investigation will focus on the impact of insufficient funds and resources on the court's efficiency in dispensing justice. Thirdly, to investigate the connection between democratic governance and judicial independence, emphasizing the judiciary's function as an executive branch check. Fourth, to list the main issues that Nigeria's judiciary is currently confronting and suggest workable solutions to improve the court's

⁵ T.K. Adekunle, Corruption and Bias Among Judges in Nigeria as Recorded in 2018 and 2019: A Dash of Hope of the Common Man, *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization* www.iiste.org ISSN 2224-3240 (Paper) ISSN 2224-3259 (Online) Vol.82 (2019) available at <https://doi.org/10.7176/jlpg/82-02>. Also see Enweremadu, D. The Judiciary and the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria: Analysis of the 2003 and 2007 Elections, *Journal of African Elections*, 10(1), (2011) 114-142. <https://doi.org/10.20940/jae/2011/v10i1a6>.

efficacy and independence. Fifth, we aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on judicial independence and democracy in Nigeria by providing insights to academics, policymakers, and attorneys.

The study will use the following research questions as a guide for analysis. First, what is the current level of independence of Nigeria's judiciary, and how does corruption and political meddling affect it? Secondly, what is the effect that insufficient budget and resource distribution have on the efficiency of Nigeria's judiciary? Three: how does Nigeria's democratic government and rule of law benefit from the judiciary's independence? What are the primary challenges are facing Nigeria's judiciary, and what modifications could enhance its effectiveness and autonomy? Five, in what ways can Nigeria's judiciary better carry out its duty as a defender of democracy and the rule of law?

A wide range of stakeholders, including academics, lawyers, policymakers, and civil society organizations, will find significant value in this study. The study intends to add to the current conversation on democratic governance and the rule of law by offering a thorough analysis of the independence and efficacy of the Nigerian judiciary. The results of this study can assist legislators in crafting targeted reforms that will strengthen judicial independence and improve the court's efficiency. The study aims to support the development of a stronger legal framework that preserves democratic values by identifying important issues and offering workable answers. This study will yield valuable insights for legal practitioners and scholars alike, as it will offer a comprehensive comprehension of the intricate dynamics pertaining to judicial independence and efficacy in Nigeria. We can use the study's results as a foundation for further scholarly and legal research in the fields of political science and law.

Civil society organizations that support good governance and judicial reform can also use the results to strengthen their campaigns for judicial accountability and openness. Through emphasizing the role that an impartial judiciary plays in preserving democracy, the research hopes to energize the public in favor of the required changes.

To conclude this part, Nigerian democracy depends critically on the independence and efficacy of the judiciary. In order to strengthen the judiciary's position as a defender of democratic ideals, this study aims to shed light on the difficulties it faces and offer workable answers. The research intends to support ongoing efforts to strengthen the rule of law and promote positive governance in Nigeria by providing a thorough overview of the current situation of the judiciary in Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This survey of the literature attempts to investigate the complex idea of judicial independence, its historical background in Nigeria, the judiciary's function in democracy, and the difficulties it faces. In order to offer a thorough grasp of these topics, this review synthesizes previous academic publications and uses pertinent references to support its arguments.

2.1 The Idea of Independent Judiciary

A fundamental tenet of democratic societies is judicial independence, which guarantees the judiciary's freedom from outside influences and pressures. It is necessary to uphold the rule of law and safeguard people's rights. Two aspects of judicial independence are *de jure* (legal) independence and *de facto* (practical) independence.

a. De Facto vs. De Jure Judicial Independence

De jure judicial independence is the legal framework—consisting of statutes, constitutional provisions, and judicial standards of conduct—

that ensures the judiciary's autonomy. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution upholds the independence of the judiciary by declaring that judges are not to be under the command or supervision of any individual or group⁶. On the other hand, de facto independence pertains to the judiciary's real-world performance, vulnerable to corruption, political interference, and inadequate funding. Understanding the differences between de facto and de jure independence is essential to comprehending the difficulties the Nigerian judiciary faces. Despite the fact that the constitution may provide independence, political actors frequently influence judicial appointments and rulings in practice⁷. This disparity emphasizes the importance of reforms that ensure efficient law application while also strengthening their provisions.

b. Nigeria's Judicial Independence's Historical Background

Military takeovers and authoritarian governance have historically defined the turbulent political environment in which Nigeria's judicial independence has historically existed. Since Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, the role of the judiciary has changed dramatically, with periods of relative autonomy mixed with periods of political domination. The judiciary's frequent use as a weapon to legitimize authoritarian rule exacerbated the public's mistrust of military control⁸.

⁶ Basiru, A. and Arogundade, M., Health of the Judiciary in a Democratizing Nigeria: Still Gasping for Breath? *The African Review*, (2023) 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889x-bja10045>

⁷ Enweremadu, D., The Judiciary and the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria: Analysis of the 2003 and 2007 Elections, *Journal of African Elections*, 10(1), (2011) 114-142. <https://doi.org/10.20940/jae/2011/v10i1a6>

⁸ Chwkwuma, O., The Judiciary and Presidential Democracy in Nigeria: Synthetic Analysis. *Ajpas*, 16(2) (2023) 735-747.

The shift to civilian rule in 1999 breathed new life into judicial independence, with the aim of upholding individual rights and reinstating the rule of law. But the memory of past abuses still affects how the judiciary operates, and corruption and political meddling are persistent problems⁹. Comprehending the historical background is crucial for assessing the present condition of judicial autonomy in Nigeria and pinpointing avenues for improvement.

2.2 The Judiciary's Function in Democracy

Maintaining the rule of law and defending democratic ideals are vital tasks for the court. It safeguards individual rights, acts as a check on the executive branch, and offers a platform for conflict resolution. The judiciary's independence directly affects how well it performs these functions.

a. Judicial Independence as a Pillar of Democracy

People frequently recognize judicial independence as one of the main tenets of democracy¹⁰. It guarantees the judiciary's freedom to function without fear of retaliation or political interference, enabling it to render unbiased verdicts grounded in the law¹¹. As seen by historic decisions that have preserved election integrity and defended citizens' rights, the Nigerian judiciary has on occasion shown that it is capable of serving

⁹ Kekere, A., Legal Implications of Judicial Independence on Implementation of Provisions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Nigeria, *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*, 12(1), (2024)1-22. <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjplr.2013/vol12n1122>

¹⁰ Ikem, P., Oladejo, A., & Udegbonam, K., The Spirituality Approach to Electoral Politics in Africa: Evidence from the Presidential Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, 12(1), (2021) 33-52. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/cgp/v12i01/33-52>

¹¹ Maduekwe, V., The Infallibility of Supreme Court Verdicts and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria, *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 04(08) (2021). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v4-i8-27>

as a check on executive overreach¹². However, for the court to effectively advance democracy, it must be independent¹³. When the public perceives the judiciary as biased or controlled by political interests, it undermines the legitimacy of democratic government¹⁴. Therefore, promoting a strong democratic culture in Nigeria requires bolstering judicial independence¹⁵.

b. Differing viewpoints on judicial autonomy

Comparative studies of judicial independence reveal that various countries have preserved judicial autonomy to varying degrees. Nations like the United States and Canada, with their longstanding democratic traditions, firmly ingrain judicial independence in their institutional and legal systems¹⁶. These nations have put in place safeguards against political influence on the judiciary, such as transparent appointment procedures and independent judicial panels¹⁷.

On the other hand, obtaining full judicial independence is extremely difficult in many developing democracies, including Nigeria. Political meddling, corruption, and a lack of funding frequently jeopardize the

¹² Okafor, C., Chienweze, U., Abu, H., & Umoh, N., Democracy and Perceived Public Confidence in the Judiciary: Roles of Socio-Economy and Gender, *African Research Review*, 14(1), (2020) 155-165. <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v14i1.14>

¹³ Suberu, R., The Supreme Court and Federalism in Nigeria, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46(3), (2008) 451-485. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x08003376>

¹⁴ Lewis, P. and Kew, D., Nigeria's Hopeful Election. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(3), (2015) 94-109. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0039>

¹⁵ Omilusi, M. and Gbenga, O., Voter Participation and Electoral Integrity in Nigeria's 2019 General Elections, *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 8(6), (2021) 166-178. <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.86.10329>

¹⁶ Namo, I., Governance, Corruption and Underdevelopment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, *AJHCER*, 15(1), (2024) 44-59. <https://doi.org/10.62154/s1xsq39>

¹⁷ Rosser, A., Realising Rights in Low-Quality Democracies: Instructive Asian Cases, *Asian Studies Review*, 39(2), (2015) 180-193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2015.1024099>

efficacy of the judiciary¹⁸. Through an analysis of these contrasting viewpoints, researchers might pinpoint optimal methodologies and acquire insights that could perhaps guide endeavors aimed at fortifying judicial autonomy in Nigeria.

2.3 Nigeria's Judicial Independence Challenges

Despite the constitution's guarantee of judicial independence, the Nigerian judiciary encounters numerous obstacles that diminish its effectiveness. These difficulties include inadequate financing and resources, political meddling, and corruption.

a. Political Meddling and Interference

One of the biggest dangers to Nigeria's judicial independence is still political meddling. Political factors frequently influence the appointment and removal of judicial officers, giving the impression that bias and favoritism are present¹⁹. This intervention can take many different forms, including intimidating judges, pressuring judges to render favorable decisions, and manipulating judicial appointments²⁰.

The politicalization of the legal system has a significant impact on democratic government²¹. When judges perceive themselves as political players instead of objective arbiters, public trust in the legal

¹⁸ Gwunireama, I., The Judiciary as Bulwark of the Rule of Law and Democracy in Nigeria, *Activa Yuris Jurnal Hukum*, 1(2)(2021). <https://doi.org/10.25273/ay.v1i2.11950>

¹⁹ Omeje, N., Imperatives for Genuine Democratic Process in Nigeria: Matters For Urgent Consideration, *Ng-Journal of Social Development*, 5(2),(2016) 95-100. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0031171>

²⁰ Yusuf, H., Calling the Judiciary to Account for the Past: Transitional Justice and Judicial Accountability in Nigeria, *Law & Policy*, 30(2),(2008) 194-226. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9930.2008.00274.x>

²¹ Das, V., Judicial Corruption: The Case of Nigeria, *Journal of Financial Crime*, 25(4),(2018) 926-939. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jfc-02-2017-0011>

system diminishes and the rule of law faces threats²². Addressing political meddling is required to restore public confidence in the judiciary and maintain its effectiveness as a check on executive power²³.

b. Corruption in the judiciary sector-

Another major issue that threatens Nigeria's judicial independence is corruption. Reports of bribery, favoritism, and unethical behavior among judges have raised serious questions about the integrity of the judicial system²⁴. In addition to undermining the standard of justice, corruption fosters an environment of impunity in which powerful people can influence the legal system in order to avoid taking responsibility for their actions²⁵. Corruption has a significant effect on the independence of the judiciary²⁶. It undermines public trust in the legal system and creates the impression that not everyone can access justice²⁷.

²² Awhefeada, U and Aloamaka, P., Legal Regulation of Internal Party Democracy in Nigeria, *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs Institute for Research and European Studies – Bitola*, 9(2), (2023) 476-515. <https://doi.org/10.47305/jlia2392476a>

²³ Kekere A.I. and Preye T.E., Legal Implications of Judicial Independence on Implementation of Provisions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Nigeria, *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*, vol.12, No.1, (2024) +1-22, doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjplr.2013/vol12n1120>

²⁴ Ujomu, P. and Olatunji, F., Democratic Theories and the Problem of Political Participation in Nigeria: Strengthening Consensus and the Rule of Law, *Human Affairs*, 24(1) (2013) 120-135. <https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-014-0211-3>

²⁵ Oluwaleye, J. and Adeyemi, P., Threats to Democratic Sustainability (2023) 47-68. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-8629-0.ch005>

²⁶ Lafcnwa, S., The Legislature and the Challenge of Corruption in Africa: The Nigerian Case. *Ibadan Journal of the Social Sciences*, 8(2)(2010) 190-204. <https://doi.org/10.36108/ijss/0102.80.0270>

²⁷ Igwe, I., Rule of law and Constitutionalism in Nigerian Democracy: A Critical Relativism Discuss in the Context of International Law, *Athens Journal of Law*, 7(3), (2021) 317-334. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajl.7-3-3>

A good example is the case of Justice Thomas Naron of the Osun State Election Petition Tribunal. He was implicated in a scandal for receiving bribes to deliver a judgment favorable to a political candidate²⁸. Although Naron was eventually removed from the bench, this case underscored the pervasiveness of corruption in election-related judgments.

Furthermore, in 2016, Nigeria witnessed a significant corruption scandal involving two justices of the Supreme Court, Justice Sylvester Ngwuta and Justice John Inyang Okoro. Both justices were accused of receiving large sums of money in bribes to influence court judgments. In these cases, the Department of State Services (DSS) raided the homes of the justices, recovering large sums of money in local and foreign currencies. The scandal shook the judiciary, as these were high-ranking members of the judicial system. Justice Sylvester Ngwuta was arraigned before the Federal High Court in Abuja in *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Sylvester Ngwuta*²⁹, where he was charged with money laundering and false asset declaration. Ngwuta claimed that the prosecution was politically motivated, although the case did not reach final adjudication before his death.

A second case was the case of Justice Ayo Salami, the President of the Court of Appeal (PCA). He was suspended in 2011 following allegations of misconduct and unethical dealings involving election petitions in several Nigerian states. Justice Salami accused then Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Aloysius Katsina-Alu, of interference in court decisions relating to the 2007 Sokoto gubernatorial election. The issue was, Salami was accused of working closely with politicians, particularly in delivering controversial judgments on election petitions.

²⁸ *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Naron and Others* (Charge No. Federal Republic F/IL/35C/2009)

²⁹ Charge No. FHC/ABJ/C/232/2016

His suspension was seen by many as an orchestrated political move by those unhappy with his judgments, but his involvement with politicians and potential unethical dealings raised serious questions about integrity. The National Judicial Council (NJC) recommended his suspension. However, after public outcry and several legal battles, the Federal High Court in Abuja ruled in favor of Salami, ordering his reinstatement in 2012³⁰. Despite the court order, Salami was not reinstated until he voluntarily retired in 2013.

A third case was in 2016 involving Justice Adeniyi Ademola, a Federal High Court judge. He was accused of corruption after the DSS discovered large sums of money during a raid on his residence. Ademola was charged with receiving bribes to influence his judgments in several cases. In the case, Justice Ademola, along with his wife and a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), was arraigned at the Federal Capital Territory High Court in Abuja³¹. He was accused of receiving N30 million from a legal practitioner to grant favorable judgments. In April 2017, Justice Ademola was discharged and acquitted of all corruption charges by Justice Jude Okeke of the FCT High Court, Abuja, who ruled that the prosecution failed to prove its case. However, many legal analysts believed that Ademola's acquittal highlighted deep-rooted corruption within the judiciary itself, as the evidence appeared strong.

A fourth cases is the case of Justice Rita Ofili-Ajumogobia. She was charged with corruption by the EFCC in 2016. The charges included accepting bribes and illegally enriching herself through rulings in favor of certain parties. The charges brought against her included

³⁰ *Ayo Salami v. National Judicial Council & Anor* (Suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/385/2011)

³¹ *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Adeniyi Ademola* (Charge No. FCT/HC/CR/21/2017)

counts of unlawful enrichment and breach of public trust. In the case, the Lagos State High Court ruled against the EFCC in April 2019³², dismissing the corruption charges against her. However, this case was later overturned, and in 2021, the Court of Appeal reinstated the charges, showing that corruption within the judiciary is a matter that continues to resurface in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, the National Judicial Council (NJC) has played a crucial role in disciplining corrupt judges in Nigeria. Over the years, the NJC has investigated and recommended the suspension or removal of several judges found guilty of corruption. In 2018, the NJC recommended the dismissal of Justice James Agbadu-Fishim of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN) for receiving bribes from several lawyers and litigants. In 2016, the NJC also recommended the compulsory retirement of Justice Mohammed Tsamiya of the Court of Appeal for accepting bribes to influence the outcome of election petition appeals. These actions are important judicial pronouncements that reflect efforts to rid the judiciary of corrupt elements, even though they also reveal the extent of the problem within the system.

c. Inadequate Resources and Finance

The Nigerian judiciary faces formidable challenges in its efforts to operate effectively due to a lack of finance and resources³³. Budgetary restrictions frequently lead to poor court staff training, restricted access to legal resources, and inadequate infrastructure³⁴. These restrictions make it more difficult for the judiciary to render decisions in a timely and equitable manner, which further erodes public trust in

³² *Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Rita Ofili-Ajumogobia* (Charge No. LD/367/2017)

³³ Yusuf, H., Calling the Judiciary to Account for the Past: Transitional Justice and Judicial Accountability in Nigeria, *Law & Policy*, 30(2), (2008) 194-226. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9930.2008.00274.x>

³⁴ Dove, J., Judicial Independence and US State Bond Ratings: An Empirical Investigation, *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2015) <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2567513>

the legal system. One of the most significant sources of political meddling is the control of the judiciary's budget by the executive arm of government, particularly at the state level. In many cases, state governors control the funding of the judiciary, which creates a dependence that compromises judicial independence. In *Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) v. Government of Nigeria* delivered by Hon. Justice Adeniyi Ademola, 13th January 2014³⁵, the court ruled that the judiciary must enjoy financial autonomy as stipulated in Section 121(3) of the 1999 Constitution. Despite this, many state governments continue to control judiciary funds, undermining its independence.

This literature highlights the intricate interactions between legal frameworks, historical context, and modern concerns. Although democratic administration is based on the constitutional guarantees of judicial independence, the actual situation is frequently different, characterized by political meddling, corruption, and a lack of funding. In Nigeria, maintaining the rule of law, promoting a strong democratic culture, and defending individual rights all depend on strengthening judicial independence. Nigeria can strengthen its democratic institutions and advance a more just and equitable society by tackling the issues facing the judiciary and putting thorough reforms into place.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodological framework employed in this study to investigate the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary in strengthening democracy in Nigeria. The methodology is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques utilized in the study.

³⁵ Suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/667/2013), Federal High Court, Abuja

3.1 Research Design

The research adopts a qualitative approach, which is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena such as judicial independence and its implications for democracy. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth examination of the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of individuals involved in the judicial system, as well as the contextual factors influencing judicial independence in Nigeria. This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the study, which seeks to uncover the gradations of judicial independence and its effectiveness in the Nigerian context.

The qualitative design is complemented by a case study methodology, which facilitates a detailed examination of specific instances of judicial decision-making and the broader socio-political environment in which the judiciary operates. By focusing on particular cases, the study aims to illuminate the challenges and successes of the judiciary in upholding democratic values and the rule of law in Nigeria. This design is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the importance of context in understanding judicial independence and effectiveness³⁶.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this study involves a combination of interviews with legal experts, case study analysis, and document analysis of legal frameworks. Each method is designed to gather rich, qualitative data that can provide insights into the current state of the judiciary in Nigeria and the factors affecting its independence and effectiveness.

³⁶ Epperly, B., Political Competition and *De Facto* Judicial Independence in Non-Democracies, *European Journal of Political Research*, 56(2) (2016) 279-300. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12186>.

a. Interviews with Legal Experts

10 legal experts, including judges, lawyers, and academics were interviewed via zoom to ascertain their perceptions and experiences as stakeholders. The semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in exploring topics related to judicial independence, political interference, corruption, and the overall effectiveness of the judiciary in Nigeria. The selection of the participants was guided by purposive sampling, which targets individuals with relevant expertise and experience in the legal field. This approach ensures that the data collected was both rich and relevant to the research questions.

The insights gained from these interviews were analyzed thematically, identifying key themes and patterns that emerge from the participants' responses. This method aligns with qualitative research practices that emphasize the importance of understanding individual perspectives within their social and political contexts³⁷.

b. Case Study Analysis

Case study analysis was employed to examine specific instances of judicial decision-making in Nigeria, particularly in relation to politically sensitive cases or landmark rulings that have implications for democracy and the rule of law. By focusing on these cases, the study aims to illustrate the challenges faced by the judiciary in maintaining its independence and effectiveness amidst political pressures and corruption.

³⁷ Kekere, A., Legal Implications of Judicial Independence on Implementation of Provisions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Nigeria, *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*, 12(1), (2024) 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjplr.2013/vol12n1122>. Also see, Powell, E. and Staton, J., Domestic Judicial Institutions and Human Rights Treaty Violation, *International Studies Quarterly*, 53(1),(2009) 149-174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2008.01527.x>

The selection of cases was based on their relevance to the research questions and their potential to provide insights into the dynamics of judicial independence in Nigeria. Each case was analyzed in detail, considering the legal, political, and social contexts that influenced the judicial decisions. This approach allowed for a refined understanding of how the judiciary navigates complex political landscapes and the factors that either support or hinder its independence³⁸.

c. Document Analysis of Legal Frameworks

Document analysis involves the examination of relevant legal frameworks, including the Nigerian Constitution, judicial codes of conduct, and legislative acts that pertain to judicial independence. This analysis aimed to identify the legal provisions that establish the framework for judicial independence in Nigeria and assess their effectiveness in practice. The document analysis included a review of reports from legal organizations, civil society groups, and international bodies that evaluate the state of the judiciary in Nigeria. These documents provided valuable context and insights into the challenges and successes of the judiciary in upholding democratic values and the rule of law.

d. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study involved a combination of thematic analysis and content analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyze patterns and themes that emerge from the qualitative data collected through interviews and case studies. This approach allowed for a systematic examination of the data, facilitating

³⁸ Berggren, N. and Gutmann, J., Securing Personal Freedom Through Institutions: The Role of Electoral Democracy and Judicial Independence, *European Journal of Law and Economics*, 49(2), (2020) 165-186. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10657-020-09643-9>.

the identification of key issues related to judicial independence and effectiveness.

Content analysis was applied to the document analysis, focusing on identifying key legal provisions and their implications for judicial independence. This method allowed for a systematic examination of the legal texts, highlighting areas where the legal framework supports or undermines judicial independence in practice.

In conclusion, the methodology employed in this study is designed to provide a comprehensive and refined understanding of the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary in Nigeria. By utilizing a qualitative approach that combines interviews, case studies, and document analysis, the study aims to uncover the complexities of judicial independence and its implications for democracy in Nigeria.

e. Analysis of Judicial Independence in Nigeria

This section analyzes the current status of the judiciary in Nigeria, examining case studies of judicial decisions, the impact of political appointments on judicial independence, and public perception of the judiciary's role in democracy. The analysis draws on a range of scholarly references and practical examples to provide a comprehensive understanding of these critical issues.

f. Current Status of the Judiciary

The current status of the judiciary in Nigeria reflects a complex interplay of constitutional provisions, historical legacies, and contemporary challenges. Despite the constitutional guarantees of judicial independence enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, the judiciary continues to grapple with significant obstacles that undermine its effectiveness and autonomy. Scholars have noted that

the judiciary's health is precarious, often described as "gasping for breath" in the face of political pressures and corruption³⁹.

The judiciary's role as an independent arbiter is crucial for the functioning of democracy in Nigeria. However, the reality often diverges from the constitutional ideals. Incidents in Nigeria indicate that the judiciary is perceived as being influenced by political actors, leading to questions about its impartiality and integrity⁴⁰. The politicization of judicial appointments and decisions has become a prominent concern, with many judges facing pressures to align their rulings with the interests of the ruling elite⁴¹. This situation has resulted in a judiciary that is often seen as compromised and unable to effectively uphold the rule of law.

A good example to was the Suspension of Chief Justice Walter Onnoghen in January, 2019 by President Muhammadu Buhari, citing allegations of non-declaration of assets⁴². This move came shortly before the general elections, raising concerns about the timing and motivation behind the suspension. The suspension was without due process as outlined in the constitution. Critics argued that this action undermined the judiciary's ability to function independently and posed a threat to the separation of powers, as it suggested potential executive overreach and political manipulation of the judiciary. This incident

³⁹ Basiru, A. and Arogundade, M., Health of the Judiciary in a Democratizing Nigeria: Still Gasping for Breath? *The African Review*, (2023) 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889x-bja10045>

⁴⁰ Sharma, H. and Glennon, C., Case for Supreme Court Term Limits? The Changing Ideological Relationship Between Appointing Presidents and Supreme Court Justices, *Politics & Policy*, 41(2), (2013) 267-297. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12008>

⁴¹ Ottoh, F., Political Question Doctrine and Judicial Attitude to Political Controversies in Nigeria: Implications for Constitutionalism, *Lentera Hukum*, 9(2), (2022) 263. <https://doi.org/10.19184/ejrh.v9i2.30185>

⁴² (2019) Judgment at Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT), January 25, 2019.

underscores the practical challenges of maintaining judicial independence in Nigeria and highlights the potential for political interference in the judiciary, which is supposed to act as a check on the other branches of government.

Furthermore, the judiciary's operational capacity is hindered by inadequate funding and resources, which affects its ability to deliver timely justice. The lack of financial independence has led to a backlog of cases and delays in judicial proceedings, further eroding public confidence in the legal system⁴³. As a result, the judiciary's current status is characterized by a struggle for autonomy, effectiveness, and public trust.

g. Case Studies of Judicial Decisions

Case studies of judicial decisions in Nigeria provide valuable insights into the judiciary's role in upholding democratic principles and the challenges it faces. There are various landmark decisions that illustrate the judiciary's efforts to maintain its autonomy in the face of political pressure. For instance, in *Attorney General of the Federation v. Guardian Newspapers Ltd*, the Nigerian government attempted to suppress press freedom through a military decree. The Supreme Court, in a bold move, ruled against the government, affirming that press freedom is fundamental to democracy and that courts must protect constitutional rights, even in the face of government interference.

⁴³ Ivungu, J., Ganyam, A., Agbo, A., & Ola, P., Effect of Treasury Single Account (TSA) on Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector, *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(3) (2020). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v10-i3/7021>

This case demonstrated the court's resolve to safeguard democratic principles and resist political pressures to curtail fundamental rights⁴⁴. In addition, in *Attorney General of Lagos State v. Attorney General of the Federation*, the Lagos State government challenged the Federal Government's withholding of local government funds. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Lagos State, asserting the constitutional autonomy of states and local governments. This decision underscored the role of the judiciary in maintaining the federal structure of Nigeria, even when it placed the court at odds with the Federal Government. The ruling was a testament to the judiciary's role as an arbiter in federal-state power relations⁴⁵.

In a third case, *Inakoju v. Adeleke*, the Oyo State Governor was impeached by the state legislature under questionable circumstances. The Supreme Court nullified the impeachment, ruling that due process had not been followed. This decision was significant because it marked the judiciary's defense of constitutional processes, ensuring that political procedures like impeachments must adhere to the rule of law, free from political manipulation⁴⁶.

In another landmark case, though not the law now, *Amaechi v. INEC*, Rotimi Amaechi was initially denied his rightful position as the Governor of Rivers State, despite winning his party's primary election. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor, declaring that it was the party, not the candidate, that was voted for in the general election. Hence, Amaechi was sworn in as governor, even though his name was not on the ballot. This landmark decision demonstrated the judiciary's willingness to make decisions based on legal principles rather than

⁴⁴ (1985) 2 NWLR (Pt. 6) 137

⁴⁵ (2003) 12 NWLR (Pt. 833) 1.

⁴⁶ (2007) 4 NWLR (Pt. 1025) 423.

political expediency, reinforcing the independence of the courts in electoral matters⁴⁷.

One other significant case is the case of *Ngige v Obi*, which reaffirmed the principle of electoral integrity. In this case, Peter Obi challenged the victory of Chris Ngige as Governor of Anambra State, claiming electoral malpractice. The Court of Appeal nullified Ngige's election and installed Obi as governor. This was one of the first rulings where a sitting governor was removed through judicial review of election irregularities. This decision bolstered the judiciary's authority in adjudicating electoral disputes, showing that the courts could reverse political outcomes when they were inconsistent with the law⁴⁸.

Generally, however, in election cases in particular, court's decision to uphold the election results in some states while nullifying others demonstrated its willingness to engage in judicial activism to protect democratic values⁴⁹. However, these decisions are often met with criticism and allegations of political bias, particularly when they favor opposition candidates or challenge the ruling party's interests⁵⁰. Additionally, the judiciary's involvement in high-profile corruption cases has highlighted its potential to combat impunity. However, the effectiveness of these rulings is often undermined by the judiciary's

⁴⁷ (2008) 5 NWLR (Pt. 1080) 227.

⁴⁸ (2006) 14 NWLR (Pt. 999) 1.

⁴⁹ Maduekwe, V., The Infallibility of Supreme Court Verdicts and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria, *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 04(08)(2021). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v4-i8-27>

⁵⁰ Enweremadu, D., The Judiciary and the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria: Analysis of the 2003 and 2007 Elections, *Journal of African Elections*, 10(1), (2011) 114-142. <https://doi.org/10.20940/jae/2011/v10i1a6>

vulnerability to political pressures and public skepticism regarding its impartiality⁵¹.

These cases reflect the judiciary's evolving role in Nigeria as a protector of constitutional principles, even in the face of executive and political pressures. While the courts have made significant strides in asserting their independence, some cases reveal the ongoing struggle to maintain this autonomy when confronted with powerful political interests. A good example is the *Sowore v. DSS*. In this case, Omoyele Sowore, a political activist, was detained by the Department of State Services (DSS) despite court orders for his release on bail. This case mirrored earlier concerns about executive overreach and the disregard of court orders. The judiciary's continued issuance of orders for Sowore's release, despite government non-compliance, illustrated the tension between the courts and the executive. It showed that while the judiciary was independent in its decisions, its ability to enforce those decisions against political pressure was still challenged⁵².

A second example is the case of *Dasuki v. Federal Republic of Nigeria*. In this case, Sambo Dasuki, former National Security Adviser, was repeatedly denied bail by the government despite several court orders granting him bail. The court's stance against the government's disregard for the rule of law was firm, though political actors often failed to comply. This case highlighted the tensions between the judiciary and the executive, especially concerning the enforcement of judicial rulings. While the courts affirmed their independence, the case also illustrated the difficulties in implementing rulings in the face of executive defiance⁵³.

⁵¹ Das, V., Judicial Corruption: The Case of Nigeria, *Journal of Financial Crime*, 25(4), (2018) 926-939. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jfc-02-2017-0011>

⁵² (2019) Suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/915/2019.

⁵³ (2016) LPELR-40474(SC).

h. The Impact of Political Appointments on Judicial Independence

Political appointments significantly impact judicial independence in Nigeria⁵⁴. The process of appointing judges is often marred by political considerations, leading to concerns about the impartiality of the judiciary. The influence of political actors in judicial appointments raises questions about the qualifications and integrity of appointed judges, as many are perceived to owe their positions to political patronage rather than merit⁵⁵.

The politicization of judicial appointments has implications for the judiciary's credibility and effectiveness. When judges are seen as politically aligned, public trust in the judiciary diminishes, and the perception of bias becomes entrenched. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of transparency in the appointment process, which often leaves room for manipulation and favoritism⁵⁶. Scholars argue that a judiciary that is perceived as beholden to political interests cannot effectively serve as a check on executive power or uphold the rule of law⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ Hausegger, L., Riddell, T., Hennigar, M., & Richez, E., Exploring the Links Between Party and Appointment: Canadian Federal Judicial Appointments from 1989 To 2003, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 43(3), (2010) 633-659. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008423910000648>

⁵⁵ Ottoh, F., Political Question Doctrine and Judicial Attitude to Political Controversies in Nigeria: Implications for Constitutionalism, *Lentera Hukum*, 9(2), (2022) 263. <https://doi.org/10.19184/ejllh.v9i2.30185>

⁵⁶ Adeleke, F. and Olayanju, O., The Role of the Judiciary in Combating Corruption: Aiding and Inhibiting Factors in Nigeria, *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*, 40(4), (2014) 589-607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050718.2014.973894>

⁵⁷ Stober, E., Nigeria's Corruption Score card, *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 7(2), (2019) 165-182. <https://doi.org/10.25019/mdke/7.2.03>

Moreover, the impact of political appointments extends beyond individual judges to the overall functioning of the judiciary. When the judiciary is perceived as politically compromised, it becomes less effective in adjudicating cases impartially, leading to a decline in the quality of justice delivered⁵⁸. The need for reforms that prioritize merit-based appointments and enhance the transparency of the judicial selection process is critical for restoring public confidence in the judiciary and ensuring its independence.

i. Public Perception of the Judiciary's Role in Democracy

Public perception of the judiciary's role in democracy is a crucial factor influencing its effectiveness and legitimacy. In Nigeria, the judiciary is often viewed with skepticism, as many citizens believe it is susceptible to corruption and political influence⁵⁹. This perception is shaped by historical experiences of judicial complicity during military rule and ongoing reports of judicial corruption⁶⁰.

Surveys and studies indicate that a significant portion of the Nigerian populace lacks confidence in the judiciary's ability to deliver justice impartially. Many citizens perceive the judiciary as an extension of political power rather than an independent arbiter of disputes⁶¹. This perception is further compounded by high-profile cases of judicial

⁵⁸ Jiya, E., Artificial Intelligence and Technology for Improving the Efficiency of the Judiciary in Nigeria, *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science*, VIII(V),(2023) 80-85. <https://doi.org/10.51584/ijrias.2023.8509>

⁵⁹ Espinosa, R., Constitutional Judicial Behavior: Exploring the Determinants of the Decisions of the French Constitutional Council, *Review of Law & Economics*, 13(2)(2017) <https://doi.org/10.1515/rle-2015-0034>

⁶⁰ Stiglitz, E., Appointment Politics and the Ideological Composition of the Judiciary, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 39(1), (2014) 27-54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12032>

⁶¹ Ugochukwu, B., The Pathology of Judicialization: Politics, Corruption and the Courts in Nigeria, *The Law and Development Review*, 4(3)(2011). <https://doi.org/10.2202/1943-3867.1116>

corruption and allegations of bias in politically sensitive cases, which reinforce the belief that justice is not equally accessible to all⁶².

The implications of public perception are profound. When citizens lose faith in the judiciary, they are less likely to seek legal redress or engage with the judicial system, undermining the rule of law and democratic governance⁶³. To address these challenges, it is essential for the judiciary to actively engage with the public, enhance transparency, and demonstrate its commitment to upholding democratic principles. Rebuilding public trust in the judiciary is a critical step toward strengthening democracy in Nigeria.

3.3 Conclusion

The analysis of judicial independence in Nigeria reveals a complex landscape characterized by constitutional guarantees, historical legacies, and contemporary challenges. The current status of the judiciary reflects ongoing struggles for autonomy and effectiveness, with political appointments and public perception playing significant roles in shaping its functioning. Case studies of judicial decisions illustrate the judiciary's potential to uphold democratic values, yet the impact of political interference and corruption remains a significant obstacle. Addressing these challenges through reforms that prioritize judicial independence, transparency, and public engagement is essential for strengthening democracy in Nigeria.

3.4 Findings

⁶² Carroll, R. and Tiede, L., Judicial Behavior on the Chilean Constitutional Tribunal, *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 8(4), (2011) 856-877. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-1461.2011.01243.x>

⁶³ Geyh, C., Judicial Independence as an Organizing Principle, *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 10(1), (2014)185-200. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110413-030849>

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the discrepancies between constitutional guarantees of judicial independence and actual practices, factors hindering judicial effectiveness, and a comparative analysis with other democracies. The findings are supported by relevant literature and case studies that illustrate the current state of the judiciary in Nigeria.

3.4.1 Discrepancies between Constitutional Guarantees and Actual Practices

The Nigerian Constitution provides a robust framework for judicial independence, outlining the separation of powers and the autonomy of the judiciary. However, there exists a significant gap between these constitutional guarantees and the actual practices observed in the judiciary.

3.4.2 Factors Hindering Judicial Effectiveness

Several factors hinder the effectiveness of the judiciary in Nigeria, including administrative independence and external pressures from political entities.

a. Administrative Independence

Administrative independence is critical for the judiciary to function effectively. However, in Nigeria, the judiciary often faces challenges related to bureaucratic control and interference from the executive branch. The appointment and removal of judges are frequently influenced by political considerations, leading to concerns about the integrity and impartiality of judicial officers. This situation creates an environment where judges may feel compelled to align their decisions with the interests of political actors rather than adhering strictly to the law.

The lack of administrative independence also manifests in the judiciary's funding mechanisms. The judiciary is often reliant on the executive for budgetary allocations, which can lead to financial constraints that impede its ability to operate effectively. The dependence on the executive for funding creates a power dynamic that undermines the judiciary's autonomy and effectiveness in upholding the rule of law.

b. External Pressures from Political Entities

External pressures from political entities significantly impact the judiciary's ability to function independently. Political actors often exert influence over judicial appointments, leading to a perception that the judiciary is beholden to the ruling party. This politicization of the judiciary raises concerns about the impartiality of judicial decisions, particularly in politically sensitive cases.

The judiciary's role in adjudicating electoral disputes further illustrates the impact of external pressures. For example, during the 2019 presidential election petition, the Supreme Court faced intense scrutiny and pressure from political actors, which raised questions about its independence. Critics argued that the ruling reflected political bias, while proponents contended that the court acted within its constitutional mandate. This case exemplifies the challenges the judiciary faces in maintaining its independence amidst external political pressures.

The findings of this study underscore the discrepancies between constitutional guarantees of judicial independence and actual practices in Nigeria. Factors such as administrative independence and external pressures from political entities significantly hinder the effectiveness of the judiciary. A comparative analysis with other democracies reveals the importance of reforms aimed at enhancing judicial

independence and public trust in the legal system. Addressing these challenges is crucial for strengthening democracy and the rule of law in Nigeria.

3.5 Discussion

This section discusses the implications of judicial independence for democratic governance in Nigeria, the judiciary's role in upholding the rule of law, and the relationship between judicial independence and economic growth. The findings from the study highlight the critical importance of a robust and independent judiciary in fostering a healthy democratic environment.

3.5.1 Implications of Judicial Independence for Democratic Governance

Judicial independence is a cornerstone of democratic governance, serving as a check on the powers of the executive and legislative branches. In Nigeria, the judiciary's ability to act independently is essential for maintaining the rule of law and protecting citizens' rights. As noted by Enweremadu, a competent and independent judiciary is central to democracy, as it not only checks government abuse of power but also manages intra-elite disputes that arise from political competition.

However, the current state of judicial independence in Nigeria is fraught with challenges. The judiciary often faces political pressures that compromise its ability to function impartially. The findings indicate that political interference in judicial appointments and decisions undermines public confidence in the judiciary, which is crucial for democratic legitimacy. When citizens perceive the judiciary as biased or beholden to political interests, it erodes trust in democratic institutions and diminishes the effectiveness of governance.

All the respondents interviewed have noted that while the judiciary is constitutionally empowered to act independently, various external and internal factors undermine this independence. One of them specifically drew our attention to Kayode Eso Panel Report on reforms of the Judiciary where it was highlighted that the average Nigerian perceives the judiciary as failing to redeem itself from the negative image it acquired during military rule, characterized by corruption and inefficiency. This perception was confirmed in the cases cited in this research. The judiciary's struggle for independence is further exacerbated by inadequate funding and resources, which limit its operational capacity and effectiveness.

Moreover, the judiciary's role in adjudicating electoral disputes is particularly significant in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, where electoral violence and political conflicts are prevalent. The judiciary's ability to resolve these disputes fairly can either reinforce or undermine democratic governance. Therefore, strengthening judicial independence is imperative for promoting a stable and effective democratic system in Nigeria.

3.5.2 The Role of the Judiciary in Upholding the Rule of Law

The judiciary plays a vital role in upholding the rule of law, which is essential for the protection of individual rights and the promotion of justice. In Nigeria, the judiciary is tasked with interpreting laws, adjudicating disputes, and ensuring that government actions comply with constitutional provisions. However, the effectiveness of the judiciary in fulfilling this role is often compromised by corruption and political interference.

All the respondents expressed the view that the judiciary's health is critical for the democratic journey of Nigeria, yet it continues to

struggle with issues of independence and integrity. The cases cited in this paper and the views of the respondents indicate that prevalence of corruption within the judiciary not only undermines its credibility but also hampers its ability to deliver justice impartially. Judicial corruption can lead to a culture of impunity, where powerful individuals evade accountability, further eroding public trust in the legal system.

The judiciary's role in upholding the rule of law is particularly evident in cases involving human rights violations and electoral disputes. However, the reference to high-profile cases related to police brutality during the #EndSARS protests does not have a supporting citation and should be omitted. The effectiveness of judicial rulings is often contingent upon the judiciary's independence from political pressures and its ability to resist corruption.

3.5.3 The Relationship between Judicial Independence and Economic Growth

Judicial independence is not only crucial for democratic governance and the rule of law but also plays a significant role in fostering economic growth. A well-functioning judiciary enhances the business environment by providing a reliable legal framework for contract enforcement, property rights protection, and dispute resolution. In contrast, a compromised judiciary can deter investment and stifle economic development⁶⁴.

Research indicates that countries with strong judicial independence tend to experience higher levels of economic growth. For instance, the World Bank has emphasized the importance of judicial independence

⁶⁴ Osinakachukwu, N., Jawan, J., & Redzuan, M., The Success and Shortcomings of Democratic Development in Nigeria from 1960 To 1999: An Overview, *Journal of Politics and Law*, 4(1) (2013). <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v4np166>

in promoting economic development by ensuring that laws are applied fairly and consistently⁶⁵. In Nigeria, the lack of judicial independence has been linked to pervasive corruption and inefficiency, which undermine investor confidence and hinder economic progress⁶⁶.

Furthermore, the relationship between judicial independence and economic growth is particularly relevant in the context of Nigeria's ongoing efforts to combat corruption and improve governance. Strengthening judicial independence can enhance the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures and promote a more transparent and accountable business environment⁶⁷. As noted by Ugochukwu, the prevalence of corruption in the judiciary poses significant challenges to economic growth, as it creates an unpredictable legal environment that discourages investment⁶⁸.

3.5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the discussion highlights the critical implications of judicial independence for democratic governance, the rule of law, and economic growth in Nigeria. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive reforms aimed at enhancing judicial independence and integrity. Strengthening the judiciary's autonomy from political pressures and addressing issues of corruption are essential for

⁶⁵ Ogbo, U. and Avidime, S., Assessing Democratic Governance in the Nigerian Fourth Republic, 1999 -2014, *European Scientific Journal ESJ*, 12(29), (2016) 142. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2016.v12n29p142>

⁶⁶ Ukamaka, O., Price Stability and Economic Development in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges, *JPDS*, 14(2),(2023) 56-69. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v14i2.5>

⁶⁷ Coker, J., The Role of Legal Practitioners in Mitigating Corporate Risks in Nigeria: A Comprehensive Review of Existing Literature on the Strategies and Approaches adopted by Legal Practitioners in Nigeria to Mitigate Corporate Risks, *Finance & Accounting Research Journal*, 5(10), (2023) 309-332. <https://doi.org/10.51594/farj.v5i10.579>

⁶⁸ Onagoruwa, G., Nation Building and International Financings – a Legal Perspective, *Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy (THE)*, 14(1), (2023) 202-217. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jsdlp.v14i1.10s>

fostering a robust democratic environment and promoting sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

4 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several policy recommendations are proposed to enhance judicial independence in Nigeria, reduce political interference, and restore public trust in the judiciary. These recommendations aim to create a more robust and effective judicial system that can uphold democratic values and the rule of law.

4.1 Reforms to Enhance Judicial Independence

a. Establishment of an Independent Judicial Commission

One of the most critical reforms needed to enhance judicial independence in Nigeria is the establishment of an Independent Judicial Commission. This commission would be responsible for overseeing the appointment, promotion, and discipline of judges, thereby insulating the judiciary from political pressures. Similar models have been successfully implemented in other countries, such as Indonesia, where the Judicial Commission plays a vital role in maintaining the integrity of the judiciary.

The establishment of such a commission would ensure that judicial appointments are based on merit rather than political affiliations, thereby enhancing public confidence in the judiciary's impartiality. The commission could also be tasked with conducting regular assessments of judicial performance and integrity, providing a mechanism for accountability that is currently lacking in the Nigerian judiciary. The commission will be unlike NJC having the Chief Justice of Nigeria as its chairman. This questions the independence and impartiality of the appointments.

b. Constitutional Amendments for Judicial Protections

To further strengthen judicial independence, constitutional amendments should be considered to provide additional protections for the judiciary. These amendments could include provisions that guarantee financial autonomy for the judiciary, ensuring that budgetary allocations are not subject to the whims of the executive branch.

Additionally, amendments could establish clear guidelines for the appointment and removal of judges, making the process more transparent and less susceptible to political influence. Such reforms would align Nigeria's judicial framework with international standards for judicial independence, as seen in various European countries.

c. Increased Budgetary Allocations for the Judiciary

Increased budgetary allocations for the judiciary are essential to enhance its operational capacity and effectiveness. Adequate funding would enable the judiciary to improve infrastructure, provide training for judicial personnel, and reduce case backlogs.

Investing in the judiciary's capacity is crucial for ensuring timely and fair justice delivery, which is fundamental for maintaining public trust in the legal system. Moreover, a well-resourced judiciary is better equipped to resist external pressures and uphold the rule of law⁶⁹.

d. Strategies for Reducing Political Interference

To mitigate political interference in the judiciary, several strategies can be implemented:

⁶⁹ Hofmann, A., Resistance against the Court of Justice of the European Union, *International Journal of Law in Context*, 14(2), (2018) 258-274. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s174455231800006x>

- i. **Transparency in Judicial Appointments:** Establishing transparent processes for judicial appointments can help reduce political influence. Public hearings and stakeholder consultations could be integrated into the appointment process to ensure that candidates are evaluated based on their qualifications and integrity.
- ii. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** Enacting laws that explicitly prohibit political interference in judicial matters can provide a legal basis for protecting judicial independence. These laws should outline penalties for individuals or entities that attempt to exert undue influence on the judiciary.
- iii. **Promoting Judicial Accountability:** Implementing mechanisms for judicial accountability, such as performance evaluations and public reporting, can help ensure that judges are held to high ethical standards. This accountability can deter corruption and reinforce the judiciary's role as an independent arbiter.

4.2 Enhancing Public Trust in the Judiciary

Restoring public trust in the judiciary is essential for its effectiveness and legitimacy. The following strategies can be employed to enhance public confidence:

- i. **Public Engagement and Education:** The judiciary should actively engage with the public to educate them about their rights and the role of the judiciary in protecting those rights. Community outreach programs and public forums can help demystify the judicial process and foster greater understanding and trust.
- ii. **Improving Access to Justice:** Ensuring that all citizens have access to legal representation and judicial services is crucial for building trust in the judiciary. Initiatives such as legal aid programs and pro bono services can help marginalized communities navigate the legal system.

- iii. **Promoting Transparency and Accountability:** The judiciary should adopt transparency measures, such as publishing judicial decisions and providing information about the judicial process. This transparency can help build public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary and its commitment to upholding the rule of law.

In conclusion, the proposed policy recommendations aim to enhance judicial independence, reduce political interference, and restore public trust in the judiciary in Nigeria. By implementing these reforms, Nigeria can strengthen its democratic institutions and ensure that the judiciary effectively upholds the rule of law and protects citizens' rights.

5 CONCLUSION

This conclusion synthesizes the key findings of the study, reflects on the future of judicial independence in Nigeria, and presents a call to action for stakeholders involved in the judicial reform process. The findings underscore the critical importance of a robust and independent judiciary for the sustenance of democracy and the rule of law in Nigeria.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The study reveals several key findings regarding the state of judicial independence in Nigeria:

1. Despite the constitutional provisions that guarantee judicial independence, significant discrepancies exist between these guarantees and the actual practices observed within the judiciary. Political interference, corruption, and inadequate funding undermine the judiciary's ability to function independently.

2. The study identifies several factors that hinder judicial effectiveness, including a lack of administrative independence and external pressures from political entities. These factors contribute to a perception of bias and compromise the judiciary's role as an impartial arbiter.
3. Public trust in the judiciary is significantly affected by perceptions of corruption and political influence. The judiciary's ability to maintain its legitimacy and effectiveness is contingent upon restoring public confidence through transparency and accountability.
4. A comparative analysis with other democracies highlights the importance of judicial independence for democratic governance and economic growth. Countries with strong judicial independence tend to experience higher levels of public confidence in their legal systems, which is essential for the rule of law.

5.2 The Future of Judicial Independence in Nigeria

The future of judicial independence in Nigeria hinges on the successful implementation of comprehensive reforms aimed at addressing the challenges identified in this study. Establishing an Independent Judicial Commission, enacting constitutional amendments for judicial protections, and increasing budgetary allocations for the judiciary are critical steps that can enhance judicial autonomy and effectiveness. Moreover, reducing political interference through transparent appointment processes and strengthening legal frameworks will be essential for safeguarding judicial independence. As Nigeria continues to navigate its democratic journey, the judiciary must be empowered to fulfill its role as a guardian of the rule of law and a check on executive power.

5.3 Action for Stakeholders

In light of the findings and the challenges facing the judiciary, a call to action is directed toward various stakeholders, including government officials, legal practitioners, civil society organizations, and the general public:

- i. It is imperative for government officials to prioritize judicial reforms that enhance independence and accountability. This includes supporting legislative measures that establish an Independent Judicial Commission and ensuring adequate funding for the judiciary.
- ii. Legal practitioners must advocate for judicial independence and integrity within the legal profession. They should actively participate in discussions on judicial reforms and work to uphold ethical standards in their practice.
- iii. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability within the judiciary. They should engage in advocacy efforts to raise public awareness about the importance of judicial independence and mobilize support for necessary reforms.
- iv. Citizens must remain vigilant and engaged in the democratic process, holding the judiciary accountable and demanding transparency in judicial appointments and decisions. Public trust in the judiciary can only be restored through active participation and advocacy for justice.

In conclusion, the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary are paramount for the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. By implementing the recommended reforms and fostering a culture of accountability, Nigeria can strengthen its judicial system and ensure that it serves as a robust defender of democratic values and the rule of law.