

Policyweekly

Hybrid Hope:

Can Nigeria Bridge the Gap Between Democratic Aspirations and Reality?



Policy Recommendations

- 1 There is a need for sustained investments by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Orientation Agency (NOA), and affiliated civil society organisations in voter education initiatives necessary for raising awareness on voting rights and procedures, stimulating participation, and addressing voter apathy.
- 2 Collaboration between the National Assembly and the Judiciary is imperative to bolster the capacity and autonomy of anti-corruption agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC).
- 3 There is a need for steadfast commitment by both the Federal Government and the international community towards addressing the underlying factors of insecurity.

Introduction

Nigeria's 2023 Democracy Index performance reveals a concerning lack of progress. Nigeria ranks 104 out of 167 countries in the [Democracy Index 2023](#), recently released by London-based Economist Intelligence Unit. Nigeria Received an overall score of 4.23 out of 10, finishing behind Ghana and Benin Republic with an overall score of 6.30 (65) and 4.68 (97), respectively. The report assesses a total of 167 countries and territories in five main categories: civil liberties, electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, and political culture.

While Nigeria's unwavering commitment to democratic principles since the end of military rule in 1999 is commendable, a closer examination of the data reveals a concerning trend in its democratic development. Over the past five years, Nigeria's position on the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Index has remained remarkably stagnant, ranging from a low of 4.10 in 2020 to a high of 4.23 in 2022 and 2023. Despite minor fluctuations, this lack of significant progress raises crucial questions about the challenges hindering its democratic consolidation.

This edition of the Nextier SPD Policy Weekly delves into the complexities of Nigeria's democratic landscape, exploring its persistent challenges alongside its existing strengths. Ultimately, addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a more inclusive, just, and prosperous future for all Nigerians.

A Delicate Balance: Unveiling the Strengths and Challenges of Nigeria's Democracy

Nigeria's classification as a "hybrid regime" by the EIU Index underscores the complexities of its democratic journey. This label reveals a system caught between democratic ideals and authoritarian tendencies, highlighting the challenges Nigeria faces in strengthening its democratic institutions and practices. To fully grasp this intricate situation, it is essential to examine both the advancements and the persistent shortcomings shaping Nigeria's democracy.

Strengths:

Evolving Electoral Process: Nigeria's electoral process has seen significant positive developments despite facing [ongoing challenges](#). The [2022 Electoral Act's](#) establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission Fund demonstrates a greater commitment to INEC's financial autonomy. Innovations like electronic transmission of results and voter accreditation systems promote fairness and efficiency. These advancements are pivotal for strengthening democratic processes and fostering confidence in election results.

Vibrant Media Landscape: Despite increasing concerns by civil society actors regarding [shrinking civic space](#) and limitations on press freedom, Nigeria continues to hold a relatively vibrant media landscape. As of 2023, Nigeria has over 200 independent newspapers, several TV and radio stations, and a diverse online media landscape. However, a [2023 report](#) by Reporters Without Borders ranked Nigeria 123th out of 180 countries in their World Press Freedom Index, highlighting continued challenges with threats and harassment journalists face.

Active Civil Society: Nigeria boasts a robust civil society with numerous organisations playing a critical role in upholding democratic principles. These organisations represent diverse interests and backgrounds, encompassing human rights groups, environmental watchdogs, community development organisations, and professional associations. One crucial contribution of civil society is advocating for electoral reforms. They actively participate in the electoral process by monitoring voter registration, observing elections, and reporting irregularities.

Additionally, they push for reforms to strengthen the legal framework for conducting free and fair elections. They have also played a crucial role in holding the government accountable by demanding transparency and accountability. By engaging in these diverse activities, civil society organisations form a cornerstone of Nigeria's democratic journey. They contribute significantly to fostering civic engagement, holding power accountable, and promoting a culture of transparency and good governance. However, despite their immense contributions, civil society organisations in Nigeria face challenges, such as limited resources, restrictive legislation, and threats from influential individuals or groups. Addressing these obstacles is crucial for ensuring civil society's continued growth and effectiveness in promoting a more robust democracy in Nigeria.

Challenges:

Enduring Security Threats: The ongoing security crisis poses a significant threat to Nigeria's stability and democratic progress, casting a long shadow over its development. Despite a global decrease in terrorist attacks by 23% in 2023, Nigeria recorded its first increase in terrorism-related deaths in three years, with a 34% surge to 524 casualties. This unfortunate rise tragically marks Nigeria's highest death toll from terrorism since 2020, as reported by the [2024 Global Terrorism Index](#). The Index ranks Nigeria 8th globally with a score of 7.6, placing it just behind Somalia and Afghanistan.

This alarming increase in terrorism is primarily attributed to the intensified conflict between the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) and Boko Haram. Their violent activities not only claim lives but also displace communities, disrupt livelihoods, and fuel fear and uncertainty across affected regions. However, the security challenges in Nigeria extend far beyond terrorism.

Beyond the immediate threat posed by terrorism, widespread criminality in the form of banditry, farmer-herder clashes, and kidnapping further destabilises the nation. Bandits, particularly in the northwest and north-central regions, terrorise rural communities, disrupts transportation and trade, and hinders agricultural activities. Farmer-herder clashes, rooted in competition over resources and historical grievances, have resulted in the displacement of thousands and the loss of countless lives. Additionally, the rise in kidnapping, targeting individuals across various social and economic strata, creates an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, impacting both citizens and potential investors.

These intertwined security challenges fundamentally undermine the ability of the government to function effectively and deliver essential services to its citizens. The constant threat of violence diverts resources away from crucial areas like education, healthcare, and infrastructure development. Economic activity is also disrupted, hindering job creation and investment. Most importantly, these insecurities restrict the exercise of fundamental rights for many Nigerians, limiting their freedom of movement, association, and expression.

Persistent Inequality and Poverty: The stark economic inequality in Nigeria, where vast wealth exists alongside widespread poverty, poses a severe challenge to achieving a truly inclusive and equitable democracy. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) [2022 poverty rate of 40.1%](#) underscores the large portion of the population struggling to meet basic needs. This economic hardship limits the ability of marginalised groups to fully engage in the political process, hindering their voices from being heard and contributing to social unrest and instability. The rise of military rule has partly been fuelled by public disillusionment with existing political systems and widespread poverty. The perceived failure of the political class to uphold democratic principles and deliver effective governance and economic progress has eroded faith in electoral democracy for a growing number of citizens.

Endemic Corruption: Corruption remains a deeply entrenched problem in Nigeria, undermining public trust in institutions, obstructing effective governance, and ultimately hindering democratic progress. Transparency International's [Corruption Perception Index 2023](#), which ranked Nigeria 145 out of 180 countries, highlights the widespread perception of corruption within the country. While efforts such as the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2000 signal a commitment to addressing this issue, tangible results in curbing corruption have been limited. The perception of widespread corruption and limitations within the democratic process can significantly erode public trust in government institutions. This lack of trust can hinder effective policy implementation and citizen cooperation, creating a vicious cycle that weakens democratic foundations.

Recommendations for Strengthening Nigeria's Democracy

The 2024 EIU Democracy Index ranking of Nigeria offers valuable insights into the nation's democratic governance landscape. Implementing targeted measures is imperative to bolster the nation's democratic journey. Below are some recommendations for consideration:

- Sustained investments by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Orientation Agency (NOA), and affiliated civil society organisations in voter education initiatives are pivotal in raising awareness of voting rights and procedures, stimulating participation, and addressing voter apathy. These efforts may entail leveraging communication channels, including local media, community outreach programs, and digital platforms, to effectively engage diverse populations and to disseminate essential information. By fostering a well-informed electorate, these initiatives contribute to promoting democratic principles. Moreover, they empower citizens to make informed choices and actively participate in shaping the nation's future.

- Collaboration between the National Assembly and the Judiciary is imperative to bolster the capacity and autonomy of anti-corruption agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). It is essential to ensure that these agencies receive adequate resources for efficient investigation and prosecution of corruption cases. Furthermore, efforts should focus on promoting transparency in their operations and enacting legislation to safeguard individuals who expose corruption.
- Addressing the underlying factors of insecurity, such as poverty, inequality, and limited opportunities, requires the steadfast commitment of both the Federal Government and the international community. It is crucial to prioritise the promotion of good governance and investment in sustainable development goals. This involves guaranteeing a fair distribution of resources across all regions, a measure that can effectively alleviate grievances contributing to violence and instability. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance the capacity and professionalism of security forces in effectively addressing security threats while upholding human rights and the rule of law. The Federal Government, with the support of the international community, should provide adequate training and resources to security forces. Moreover, promoting accountability within security institutions and fostering cooperation between different agencies is crucial to achieving sustainable security outcomes.

Conclusion

Nigeria’s journey towards a robust and flourishing democracy remains an ongoing process. While the 2024 EIU Democracy Index classification as a “hybrid regime” highlights areas for improvement, it also presents an opportunity for self-reflection and proactive action.

Strengthening Nigeria’s democratic foundation is not just about improving its standing on an international index; it is about creating a more just, stable, and prosperous society for its citizens. It necessitates acknowledging existing challenges and taking decisive action to bolster the nation’s democratic journey with genuine commitment and collaborative efforts.

This journey requires the collective effort of various stakeholders, including government at all levels, civil society organisations, the private sector, and the international community. Though the path towards a stronger Nigerian democracy presents obstacles, dedication, collaboration, and a shared vision pave the way for a brighter future overflowing with possibilities.

Author:

Ndidi Anyanwu is a Policy and Research Consultant at Nextier.

Nextier Sample Publications



Food, Fear, and Fortitude: Rural Women’s Journey Amidst Armed Conflicts in Plateau State

Plateau State has been under the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. The region has been grappling with an increasing threat of armed attacks, particularly in its rural areas. The aftermath of these bloodbaths...



Why is Fuel Subsidy Removal Hurting Many Nigerians? Examining Six Ways to Reduce the Pains

Fuel subsidy ended in Nigeria when on 29th May 2023, the newly sworn-in President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, subtly announced the end of subsidy by thanking the outgoing...



Leveraging Popular Frustration and Split in IPOB Halting the Persistent Sit-at-home in South-East Nigeria

You are currently viewing Leveraging Popular Frustration and Split in IPOB Halting the Persistent Sit-at-home in South-East Nigeria...



Would the Worsening Poverty Increase Insecurity in Nigeria?

Third World nations in general, particularly Africa, which includes Nigeria, struggle greatly with poverty. Many individuals in Nigeria live in poverty due to the country’s...



Safety of Buildings Versus Claims of Vengeance: Exploring Issues around the Alaba Market Demolitions

On Sunday, February 18, 2023, videos were circulating about the commencement of demolitions in Alaba International Market, Ojo Local Government Area of...



Strengthening Child Protection in Post-Conflict Communities in North East Nigeria

Children are usually the most vulnerable in armed conflict and post-conflict environments. Beyond being afflicted by humanitarian crises occasioned by armed...



Nigeria’s Off-Cycle Elections and the Impending Violence

Off-cycle elections are held outside the regular elections calendar. General elections take place in the same year in Nigeria as part of the country’s...



Engaging the Census Preparation to Mitigate Post-Census Tensions

Barring the last-minute suspension of Nigeria’s housing and population census, scheduled to start on 3rd May and end on 7th May 2023, the country would...