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EXECUTIVE DOMINANCE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: ASSESSING THE EARLY YEARS OF PRESIDENT TINUBU'S ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

This study examines the prospects of good governance under executive dominance in contemporary Nigeria, with particular reference to the early years of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration. The study is anchored on the Theory of Separation of Powers and adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis of policy documents, government reports and newspapers. Findings suggest that the early administration is characterized by strong executive centralization in policy formulation, particularly in economic reforms such as subsidy removal and exchange rate unification. The study also reveals patterns of legislative compliance and limited scrutiny of executive proposals, alongside indications of expanding executive influence in subnational political dynamics. While these developments enhance policy speed and administrative decisiveness, they raise concerns about weakened institutional checks, reduced participatory governance and constrained accountability mechanisms. The study recommends strengthened legislative oversight, enhanced institutional independence and improved transparency mechanisms to promote balanced governance and sustain democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy, Executive dominance, Good governance, Institutional balance, Power-separation, Political administration.

1. Introduction

It might seem early to embark on an assessment of Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration, particularly given that governance outcomes often require time to fully consolidate and produce measurable impact. However, in political science, early assessments of emerging administrations are both necessary and widely adopted, especially in democratic systems where policy direction, leadership style, and institutional relations begin to take shape from the onset of governance. Such early-stage evaluation provides an opportunity to identify emerging governing patterns and policy trajectories before they become fully institutionalized.

In contemporary Nigeria, the discourse on good governance remains central to democratic consolidation, institutional performance, and public trust in government. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, successive administrations have been assessed on the basis of

transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and effective public service delivery (World Bank, 2017; UNDP, 2022). Within this context, the structure of executive authority and its relationship with other arms of government, particularly the legislature, has continued to raise concerns about institutional balance and governance quality in presidential systems (Ojo, 2018; Agbaje, 2020).

The Tinubu administration, which assumed office in May 2023, has introduced significant policy reforms, including fiscal restructuring, subsidy removal, and exchange rate adjustments, all of which have generated extensive public debate and immediate governance implications (IMF, 2024; World Bank, 2024). These developments make it analytically important to examine how executive authority is being exercised and how it shapes the prospects of good governance under conditions of executive dominance in contemporary Nigeria. Accordingly, this study investigates the prospects of good governance under executive dominance in Nigeria, with particular reference to the early years of the Tinubu administration, situating the analysis within broader theoretical concerns of power concentration, institutional functionality, and governance performance.

2. Literature Review

Executive power refers to the authority vested in the executive arm of government to implement laws, formulate policies, and direct the administration of the state. In presidential systems like Nigeria, the executive is constitutionally strong, but its effectiveness depends on institutional checks and balances. Executive dominance occurs when the executive arm exerts overwhelming influence over other branches of government, particularly the legislature and judiciary, thereby weakening separation of powers. Good governance becomes significantly constrained, as institutional balance are weakened.

According to World Bank group (2011), governance is the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good. This includes the following characteristics (Onolememen, 2015):

a) The processes by which those in authority are selected, monitored and replaced.
b) The capacity of the government to effectively manage its resources and implement sound policies.
c) The respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.

Several multilateral organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have identified key components that characterize good governance. According to the UNDP in Odumu (2017), good governance is built on eight major principles. They include;

a) Accountability: This requires that public officials and institutions are answerable for their actions and decisions, with mechanisms for sanctions, redress, and continuous system improvement.
b) Transparency: This refers to the free flow of information and the accessibility of such information to stakeholders affected by governance decisions, thereby promoting openness and preventing corruption.
c) Responsiveness: This emphasizes citizen orientation, including the timely delivery of public services and effective mechanisms for addressing citizens' grievances.

d) Effectiveness and efficiency: These relate to the optimal use of resources, competence in public administration, and result-oriented governance.
e) Rule of law: This entails the existence of a fair legal framework, impartial enforcement of laws, and an independent judiciary.
f) Participation: This underscores the importance of citizens' involvement in decision-making processes, policy implementation, and the monitoring of government activities, as well as the protection of freedoms of expression and association.
g) Equity and inclusiveness: These ensure that all groups in society, particularly vulnerable populations, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.
h) Consensus orientation: This involves the mediation of diverse societal interests in order to reach broad agreement on policies and actions that serve the collective interest of the community.

According to Odumu (2017), the ultimate aim of governments worldwide is to achieve sustainable improvement in the quality of life of its citizens and that consequent upon this, nation states, no matter their size or development status strive to achieve some level of good governance. It follows therefore that the executive and legislative arms of government and especially the manner of relationship between them go a long way to determine whether this objective of good governance will be achieved or not. This is in view of the fact that though the legislature makes the laws, but it is common to find that the legislature is not authorized to complete the process without the assent of the executive.

In contemporary development discourse, strong institutions are useful devices for exercising good governance. As described by Furubotn and Richter (2005), well-functioning institutions can reduce uncertainty and lower coordination costs by simplifying decision making and by promoting cooperation among stakeholders. Institutions define the rules of the game, because they provide the incentive structures in human exchange in political, social and economic arenas. For the game to be viable, the rules need to be regarded by the players as fair. For fairness to be attained, institutions must be transparent and equitable, particularly those that provide checks and balances. Indeed, the potential for institutions to support good governance may be limited in countries with impotent legislative branches in the face of dominant executive branches (Mansoor, et. al, 2018).

A look at the democratic practice in Nigeria from the inception of the Fourth Republic to date shows a persistent pattern of tension and imbalance in executive–legislative relations, often characterized by executive pre-eminence over other arms of government. Studies have consistently observed that the relationship between both arms of government has remained largely conflictual, unstable, and in many cases skewed in favour of the executive, thereby affecting legislative independence and oversight capacity (Gana, 2023; Emeribe, Adaranijo & Ibileye, 2025). In many instances, the legislature has struggled to assert its independence in the face of executive influence, particularly in matters relating to budget approval, oversight functions, and confirmation of key political appointments (Joseph, 2025). This recurring imbalance has been further reinforced by party dominance at the federal level, where control of the ruling party structure by the executive tends to translate into significant leverage over legislative decision-making (Awotokun & Okotoni, 2020). Consequently, legislative autonomy is frequently weakened, reducing the effectiveness of checks and balances that are

essential for good governance (Murana, 2021). This situation has had mixed implications for governance outcomes in Nigeria, as periods of executive dominance have sometimes facilitated swift policy implementation, while also raising concerns about due process, institutional weakness and democratic consolidation (Oguejiofor, 2018; Oladeji, 2022).

3. Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Separation of Powers is most prominently associated with the French political philosopher Baron de Montesquieu, particularly in his work *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). Montesquieu argued that political liberty can only be preserved when governmental powers are not concentrated in the hands of a single authority. According to him, tyranny is inevitable where the powers of law-making, law-execution and law-adjudication are combined in the same person or institution. To prevent such abuse of power, Montesquieu proposed that the functions of government should be divided among three separate branches: the legislature, responsible for making laws; the executive, responsible for implementing laws; and the judiciary, responsible for interpreting and adjudicating laws.

The strengths of Montesquieu's idea lie primarily in its capacity to safeguard democracy and prevent the abuse of political power. By distributing governmental powers among different institutions, the theory minimizes the risk of authoritarian rule and ensures that no single institution dominates the political system. It also promotes accountability and transparency, as each branch monitors the activities of the others. Furthermore, the doctrine strengthens democratic governance by encouraging deliberation, negotiation and institutional balance among political actors.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth examination and interpretation of issues relating to executive dominance and the prospects of good governance in contemporary Nigeria. The study relies on documentary and textual sources such as scholarly journal articles, textbooks, government publications, policy documents, official statements, newspapers, and other relevant secondary materials. Through qualitative content analysis, the study critically evaluates governance patterns, executive actions, and policy reforms associated with the early years of the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, with emphasis on their implications for accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and effective governance.

5. Discussion of Findings

To frame Tinubu as uniquely anti-democratic in Nigeria's history is not to deny the flaws of those who came before him, but to recognize a qualitative shift in the relationship between power and principle, a shift that demands careful scrutiny and, where necessary, principled resistance (Mahmud, 2026). This is because the health of a democracy is measured not only by the conduct of its leaders but by the willingness of its citizens to defend the values that sustain it. This perspective provides a critical entry point for examining emerging patterns of executive dominance in the early years of the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, particularly as they relate to governance practices, institutional behavior and the evolving prospects of good governance in contemporary Nigeria.

5.1Executive Dominance and Reform-Driven Governance

A recurring theme in documentary assessments of the early administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu is the highly centralized nature of policy formulation, particularly in economic governance. In its Article IV consultation report on Nigeria, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2024) observed that the administration "has embarked on bold and comprehensive reforms, including the removal of fuel subsidies and unification of the exchange rate system" (IMF, 2024). This characterization reflects an acknowledgement of strong executive-driven policymaking. Similarly, in its policy communication, the World Bank (2024) noted that Nigeria's reform trajectory is being "driven by decisive policy actions aimed at restoring macroeconomic stability." While such descriptions suggest policy decisiveness, they also imply a governance structure in which major economic decisions are concentrated within the executive arm.

Further documentary evidence from presidential communications indicates that the removal of fuel subsidy was announced as a direct executive policy decision. In his inaugural address, President Tinubu declared: "The fuel subsidy is gone" (Tinubu, May 29, 2023). This statement reflects an immediate executive policy shift without prior legislative negotiation or phased institutional consultation. This pattern reflects what institutional scholars describe as decision centralization, where policy authority is concentrated in the executive, limiting deliberative input from other governance actors. While this enhances speed of implementation, governance literature warns that excessive centralization may reduce transparency and participatory decision-making, which are core principles of good governance.

5.2 Legislative Compliance and "Rubber-Stamp" Perception

Documentary and media analyses increasingly describe the Nigerian National Assembly as exhibiting limited resistance to executive proposals. For instance, The Guardian Nigeria (2023) editorially observed that "the National Assembly appears more inclined to endorse executive requests than to interrogate them rigorously," raising concerns about oversight effectiveness. Political legislatures sometimes described this as "rubber-stamp institutions," a term used to describe parliamentary bodies that approve executive proposals with minimal amendment or scrutiny (Dahl, 1971).

Empirical legislative records during the early Tinubu administration indicate rapid approval of executive requests.

a) The National Assembly approved an $800 million World Bank loan for social intervention within a short deliberative period in 2023 (National Assembly records, 2023).
b) A ₦2.17 trillion supplementary budget was approved in November 2023 after limited amendment (NASS Proceedings, 2023).
c) Subsequent ₦6 trillion-plus supplementary appropriations in 2024 also passed with minimal recorded opposition (NASS Budget Approvals, 2024).

A legislator, quoted in Premium Times (2024), reportedly stated that: "Most of the major financial requests from the executive are treated as urgent national priorities." While this reflects cooperation, it also illustrates the compression of legislative scrutiny. Such patterns are interpreted as evidence of executive dominance, where legislative approval becomes

procedural rather than deliberative. This weakens oversight functions, which are essential for ensuring accountability and transparency in governance.

5.3 Subnational Political Influence and Federal Executive Reach (Rivers State Case)

Documentary reporting on the political crisis in Rivers State provides further evidence of executive dominance extending into subnational governance dynamics. The crisis involving Governor Siminalayi Fubara and political actors aligned with federal power structures was widely reported across national newspapers. According to Vanguard Newspaper (2024), the crisis "escalated into a constitutional and political standoff involving key federal political actors." Similarly, Premium Times (2024) reported concerns that federal-level political alignments were influencing state-level legislative disputes. A widely cited civil society commentary described the intervention as one that "blurs the line between constitutional mediation and political engineering" (CLEEN Foundation Report, 2024). The interference in Rivers suggests a pattern where executive influence extends beyond federal administration into subnational political restructuring. Such centralization of influence raises concerns about neutrality in governance processes and weakens public perception of fairness in political arbitration.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis indicates that the early years of the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu reveal an emerging pattern of strong executive centralization that significantly shapes governance processes and institutional relations in contemporary Nigeria. Documentary evidence suggests that major policy reforms, particularly in the economic sector, have been characterized by decisive executive action, while legislative responses appear largely compliant and procedurally aligned with executive priorities. Similarly, media and civil society reports indicate that subnational political developments, such as the Rivers State crisis, further reflect the expanding reach of executive influence beyond formal federal boundaries. While such concentration of authority may enhance policy speed and administrative decisiveness, it raises critical concerns regarding the depth of institutional checks, participatory governance, and accountability mechanisms that underpin good governance. Consequently, the study argues that the prospects of good governance under conditions of executive dominance remain mixed, as gains in policy efficiency are offset by potential constraints on institutional balance, transparency and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's evolving political arena.

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