ISRG Journal of Economics, Business & Management (ISRGJEBM)

ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: Isrg J Econ Bus Manag

**ISSN: 2584-0916 (Online)**

Journal homepage: https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjebm/

Volume – IV Issue - IV (July – August) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly

# Good Governance and Economic Development in Nigeria: A Public Administration Perspective — An Opinion-Based Review

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| **Received:** 02.08.2026 | **Accepted:** 08.08.2026 | **Published:** 12.08.2026

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## Abstract

*Good governance has become one of the most widely invoked yet inconsistently practiced ideals in the discourse on national development, and Nigeria offers a compelling, if troubling, case study of the gap between governance rhetoric and governance reality. This paper presents an opinion-based review of the relationship between good governance and economic development in Nigeria, approached specifically through the lens of public administration. Rather than relying on primary data collection and inferential statistics, the paper adopts a narrative, desk-review methodology, drawing on secondary literature, institutional reports, and the author's reasoned interpretation of the Nigerian administrative experience since independence. The review argues that public administration, as the operational machinery of the state, is the decisive variable that determines whether the abstract principles of good governance, participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness, and equity, translate into concrete economic outcomes such as productivity, infrastructure, investment, and improved living standards. The paper contends that Nigeria's development challenges are not primarily a shortage of policy ideas, natural resources, or human capital, but rather a persistent failure of public administration to institutionalize the principles of good governance in bureaucratic practice. Weak accountability mechanisms, politicized bureaucracy, corruption, poor policy implementation capacity, and fragmented institutional coordination are identified as the central administrative pathologies undermining Nigeria's economic development. Drawing on dynamic capability and institutional perspectives adapted to the public sector, the paper submits that improving Nigeria's economic fortunes requires deliberate administrative reforms: professionalization and depoliticization of the civil service, stronger public financial management and audit institutions, digitalization of service delivery, and a governance culture that rewards performance rather than patronage. The paper concludes that good governance is not merely a political aspiration but an administrative discipline, and that Nigeria's economic development will remain elusive until public administration is reoriented from a culture of control to one of service, competence, and accountability.*

**Keywords:** *Good governance; economic development; public administration; accountability; institutional reform; Nigeria.*

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Study

The idea that governance quality shapes economic outcomes is no longer a contested proposition in development studies; it is close to a settled consensus. Cross-country evidence assembled through instruments such as the Worldwide Governance Indicators consistently shows that nations which score higher on voice and accountability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption also tend to record stronger and more inclusive economic performance (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2011; Kaufmann & Kraay, 2024). Nigeria, Africa's largest economy by nominal GDP and its most populous nation, presents an instructive paradox: it possesses abundant natural resources, a large and youthful labour force, and a sizeable domestic market, yet it continues to underperform relative to its potential on virtually every human development and competitiveness index. This paper takes the position as an opinion-based review rather than an empirical hypothesis-testing study that the missing link in Nigeria's development equation is not resources or policy design but the quality of public administration through which governance is translated into everyday economic life.

Public administration is the institutional bridge between the political promises of good governance and the lived economic experience of citizens. It is the ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), the civil service, the regulatory bodies, and the local government structures that decide, in practice, whether a budget is executed, whether a contract is awarded transparently, whether a business license is issued in days or months, and whether public revenue is spent on productive infrastructure or diverted through illicit channels. Where public administration is professional, rule-bound, and accountable, governance ideals acquire economic traction; where it is politicised, under-capacitated, and unaccountable, even well-intentioned policies collapse at the point of implementation (Asaju & Wunuji, 2026). It is this administrative dimension of the governance-development nexus that this review foregrounds.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Successive Nigerian governments, since the return to civil rule in 1999, have articulated development blueprints from the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) to Vision 20:2020, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, and more recent medium-term national development plans — all of which explicitly invoke good governance as a precondition for economic transformation. Despite this rhetorical consistency, Nigeria's economic indicators tell a discouraging story: high youth unemployment, a large informal economy, recurring fiscal deficits, infrastructural deficits in power and transportation, and a business environment frequently rated as difficult by international competitiveness assessments. The problem this paper interrogates is therefore not whether good governance matters for economic development that much is well established but why Nigeria's public administration system has been unable to operationalize the principles of good governance in a manner that produces measurable economic dividends. Is the failure one of institutional design, bureaucratic culture, political interference, capacity deficits, or some combination of these? This review offers a reasoned, literature-grounded opinion on the matter.

## 1.3 Objectives of the Review

The broad objective of this paper is to critically examine, from a public administration perspective, the relationship between good governance and economic development in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Clarify the conceptual relationship between good governance, public administration, and economic development within the Nigerian context.
2. Review the theoretical and empirical literature linking governance quality to economic performance, with attention to public administration reform models.
3. Offer a reasoned appraisal of the specific administrative failures that have constrained Nigeria's economic development.
4. Proffer opinion-based, practice-oriented recommendations for reorienting Nigeria's public administration toward the achievement of good governance and economic development.

## 1.4 Guiding Questions

This review is organized around the following questions:

1. What is the conceptual and theoretical relationship between good governance, public administration, and economic development?
2. How has the practice of public administration in Nigeria helped or hindered the translation of governance ideals into economic outcomes?
3. What administrative reforms are most likely, in the author's assessment, to strengthen the good governance-economic development nexus in Nigeria?

## 1.5 Justification and Scope of the Review

This paper is deliberately framed as an opinion-based review rather than an empirical study using primary data, questionnaires, or regression analysis. This approach is justified on two grounds. First, the governance-development relationship in Nigeria is heavily documented in a large and growing body of qualitative, doctrinal, and policy literature; a narrative synthesis and critical appraisal of this literature, filtered through a public administration lens, adds value by identifying patterns, contradictions, and gaps that a single empirical study of one organization or sector cannot capture. Second, questions of institutional quality, political will, and administrative culture are not always reducible to Likert-scale measurement; they benefit from reasoned, literature-informed argumentation of the kind offered here. The review draws principally on public administration, development administration, and governance literature relating to Nigeria and comparable developing countries, and its scope is limited to the post-1999 Fourth Republic period, while drawing on relevant historical antecedents where necessary.

# 2.0 Conceptual Clarification

## 2.1 The Concept of Good Governance

Good governance is generally understood as the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority in a manner that is participatory, transparent, accountable, effective, equitable, and grounded in the rule of law (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2011). It is not synonymous with government; rather, it describes the quality and character of the processes and institutions through which government authority is exercised, including the capacity of


DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21897760

the state to formulate and implement sound policies, the mechanisms by which citizens hold public officials to account, and the extent to which state institutions treat citizens fairly and predictably. Essien (2015) frames good governance and effective public service delivery as inseparable, arguing that the twenty-first century public sector faces the dual challenge of legitimacy and performance, citizens expect governments not only to be democratically constituted but also to deliver tangible public goods efficiently.

### 2.2 The Concept of Public Administration

Public administration refers to the machinery, processes, and personnel through which government policy is formulated, translated into programmes, and implemented for the benefit of citizens. It encompasses the civil service, parastatals, regulatory agencies, and local government administrative structures, and it is concerned with matters such as personnel management, public financial management, policy implementation, service delivery, and administrative accountability. Public administration scholarship has evolved considerably from the classical Weberian bureaucratic model emphasizing hierarchy, rules, and impersonality, through New Public Management (NPM) reforms emphasizing efficiency, performance measurement, and market-like mechanisms in the public sector (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2006; Indahsari & Raharja, 2020), to more recent post-NPM and public value approaches that stress collaboration, citizen participation, and outcomes-oriented governance (Donadelli, Cunha, & Dussauge-Laguna, 2020; Knox, 2023). For a developing country such as Nigeria, the relevant scholarly debate has been whether NPM-style reforms transplanted from developed economies are suitable, given weaker institutional capacity and different administrative traditions (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2015).

### 2.3 The Concept of Economic Development

Economic development is broader than economic growth; while growth refers to a quantitative increase in output (typically measured by GDP), development encompasses structural transformation, improved living standards, poverty reduction, employment generation, infrastructural expansion, and the diversification of productive capacity. In the Nigerian context, economic development is frequently assessed with reference to indicators such as GDP growth and diversification away from oil dependence, employment and productivity in the non-oil sectors, infrastructural adequacy (power, transportation, and digital connectivity), human capital indices, and the ease of doing business. The central argument of this review is that these outcomes are not autonomous economic phenomena; they are, in large part, administrative outcomes — the product of how effectively public institutions plan, finance, regulate, and deliver.

### 2.4 Pillars of Good Governance Relevant to Public Administration

The literature on good governance typically identifies a set of interrelated pillars. Table 2.1 summarizes these pillars and their administrative expression in the Nigerian public sector, as a basis for the discussion that follows.

Table 2.1: Pillars of good governance relevant to public administration

| Pillar of Good Governance | Conceptual Meaning | Administrative Expression in Nigeria |
|---|---|---|
| Participation | Involvement of citizens and stakeholders in decisions that affect them | Limited citizen input into budgeting and policy design at most MDAs |
| Rule of Law | Fair, impartial, and consistent application of laws and regulations | Selective enforcement of regulations; weak contract enforcement |
| Transparency | Open access to information on public decisions and finances | Improving but uneven fiscal disclosure across federal and state MDAs |
| Accountability | Obligation of officials to answer for the use of public resources and authority | Weak sanctions for non-performance; audit reports rarely acted upon |
| Effectiveness and Efficiency | Institutions produce results that meet needs while using resources optimally | Persistent project abandonment and cost overruns in public procurement |
| Equity and Inclusiveness | Fair distribution of opportunities and public goods across groups and regions | Regional and rural-urban disparities in infrastructure and service delivery |

*Source: Author's synthesis, adapted from Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2011) and Essien (2015).*

## 3.0 Literature Review

### 3.1 Good Governance and Economic Development: The Global Discourse

The empirical association between governance quality and economic performance has been extensively documented at the cross-country level. The Worldwide Governance Indicators project, for instance, aggregates several hundred variables from dozens of data sources into six composite measures of governance, and repeated rounds of this exercise show a robust positive correlation between governance quality and per-capita income, even after accounting for reverse causality concerns (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2011; Kaufmann & Kraay, 2024). The logic underlying this relationship is straightforward from a public administration standpoint: predictable rule enforcement lowers transaction costs for investors, transparent public procurement reduces resource leakage, accountable bureaucracies allocate capital expenditure more efficiently, and effective regulatory institutions create a stable environment for enterprise. Where any of these administrative functions is compromised, the economic costs manifest as capital flight, under-investment in infrastructure, and a large informal sector operating outside formal regulatory and tax structures, all features that resonate strongly with the Nigerian experience.


DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21897760

### 3.2 Public Administration as the Engine Room of Governance

A recurring theme in the public administration literature is that governance ideals are only as good as the administrative machinery available to implement them. Haque, van der Wal, and van den Berg (2021) note that comparative public administration scholarship must move beyond simply importing governance models from industrialized democracies and instead account for the distinct institutional histories and capacities of developing states. Kadakure and Twum-Darko (2024) similarly trace the evolution of public administration thought, showing how the field has continually adjusted its emphasis, from rule-following bureaucracy, to managerial efficiency, to today's concern with public value and citizen-centered service delivery in response to the practical failures of preceding models. For Nigeria, this evolution matters because it suggests that neither a purely Weberian rule-based approach nor an unmodified market-style NPM approach is, by itself, sufficient; what is required is a context-sensitive blend that strengthens rule-based accountability while also improving service delivery efficiency.

### 3.3 Public Sector Reform Experience in Developing Countries

The experience of New Public Management reforms in developing countries offers cautionary lessons directly relevant to Nigeria. Vyas-Doorgapersad (2011) documents the paradigm shift from New Public Administration to New Public Management across African administrations, observing that the transplantation of managerial techniques without corresponding investment in institutional capacity, professional ethics, and political will frequently produces only cosmetic reform. Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2015) argue that public sector reform in developing countries should move beyond NPM orthodoxy toward approaches that are sensitive to weak state capacity, informal institutions, and political economy constraints. Knox (2023) reinforces this point, noting that post-NPM reform in developing countries has often resulted in a hybrid, layered administrative landscape in which new reforms are superimposed on unreformed legacy structures, producing only incremental improvement, a pattern that closely mirrors Nigeria's own history of civil service reform panels and commissions whose recommendations are frequently only partially implemented. Donadelli, Cunha, and Dussauge-Laguna (2020) similarly show, in the cases of Brazil and Mexico, that administrative reform trajectories are shaped as much by political bargaining as by technical design, an insight with clear resonance for Nigeria's federal character and patronage-based political system.

### 3.4 Nigerian Public Administration and Development: Empirical Insights

Directly focused Nigerian scholarship reinforces the administrative diagnosis advanced in this paper. Asaju and Wunuji (2026), in a qualitative study of public administration and development administration in Nigeria, find a persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation, weak institutional synergy across MDAs, and limited public service capacity, all of which continue to impede development progress; they attribute these intricacies to bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, policy inconsistency, and the politicisation of the public service. Asaju and Giwa (2024) similarly frame the Nigerian public service as a potential strategy for national development, contingent on its professionalisation and de-politicisation. Ukwandu and Ijere (2020) examine post-independence public sector reforms in Nigeria and conclude that reform initiatives have tended to be reactive and poorly institutionalised, undermining their developmental impact, while Uchime and Onuorah (2024) show that federal government financial management reforms have had a measurable, though incomplete, positive relationship with Nigeria's economic growth trajectory, suggesting that where financial administration is strengthened, economic dividends do follow.

## 4.0 Theoretical Framework

This review is anchored on two complementary theoretical perspectives that together justify a public administration reading of the governance-development nexus in Nigeria.

### 4.1 Good Governance Theory

Good governance theory, as operationalized in the Worldwide Governance Indicators framework, posits that development outcomes are systematically related to the quality of six governance dimensions: voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2011). Applied to Nigeria, the theory suggests that the country's persistent development challenges can be substantially explained by its comparatively weak scores on government effectiveness, rule of law, and control of corruption — dimensions that fall squarely within the domain of public administration rather than electoral politics alone. This theoretical lens supports the paper's central opinion that administrative, not merely political, reform is the more proximate lever for economic development.

### 4.2 New Public Management (and Post-NPM) Perspective

The New Public Management perspective, and its refinements in post-NPM and public value scholarship, provides the administrative-reform vocabulary for this review (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2006; Donadelli, Cunha, & Dussauge-Laguna, 2020). NPM emphasises performance measurement, managerial autonomy, competition, and citizen-as-customer orientation in public service delivery; post-NPM approaches temper this with attention to coordination, collaboration, and public value creation. For Nigeria, this framework is useful less as a prescription to be adopted wholesale and more as a diagnostic tool: it helps identify specifically where Nigeria's public administration lacks performance orientation (for example, in procurement, public financial management, and service delivery) and where reform must be tailored to local institutional realities rather than imported uncritically (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2015).

Taken together, these two perspectives frame the paper's opinion: good governance sets the normative standard against which Nigeria's administrative performance should be judged, while public administration reform theory supplies the practical toolkit for closing the gap between that standard and Nigeria's lived economic reality.

## 5.0 Methodology of the Review

As an opinion-based review, this paper does not employ primary data collection instruments, sampling procedures, or inferential statistical testing. Instead, it adopts a qualitative, narrative


**DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21897760**

document-analysis approach, which Bowen (2009) describes as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents — including academic literature, policy documents, and institutional reports — to elicit meaning and develop empirical or, as here, reasoned conceptual knowledge. The paper's argument is built through: (a) a purposive review of public administration, governance, and development literature relevant to Nigeria and comparable developing countries; (b) thematic synthesis of recurring administrative failures identified across this literature; and (c) the author's critical interpretation and opinion, informed by this literature, on the causal weight of public administration in Nigeria's economic development trajectory. This approach is appropriate for a review whose purpose is conceptual clarification and reasoned argumentation rather than the testing of a specific statistical hypothesis, and it follows a tradition well established in public administration scholarship that relies on qualitative synthesis of secondary sources (Haque, van der Wal, & van den Berg, 2021; Asaju & Wunuji, 2026).

# 6.0 Discussion: An Opinion-Based Appraisal

### 6.1 The State of Governance in Nigeria: A Candid Assessment

It is the author's opinion, grounded in the reviewed literature, that Nigeria's governance deficit is best understood not as an absence of governance frameworks, the country has no shortage of laws, agencies, and policy documents, but as a persistent implementation deficit rooted in public administration. Nigeria has anti-corruption legislation, a Fiscal Responsibility Act, a Public Procurement Act, freedom of information legislation, and numerous oversight agencies; on paper, the architecture of good governance is reasonably comprehensive. Yet the lived administrative experience of citizens and businesses — protracted delays in business registration, opaque and frequently uncompetitive procurement processes, inconsistent enforcement of regulations, and weak follow-through on audit findings — tells a different story. This gap between formal rules and informal administrative practice is, in this reviewer's assessment, the crux of Nigeria's governance-development problem.

### 6.2 Public Administration Challenges Undermining Economic Development

Several administrative pathologies stand out as especially consequential for economic development, in the author's opinion. First, the politicization of the civil service, where appointments, promotions, and postings are frequently influenced by political loyalty rather than merit, erodes institutional memory, professional competence, and continuity of policy implementation across administrations (Asaju & Wunuji, 2026). Second, weak public financial management, including poor budget credibility, delayed capital releases, and limited linkage between budgeted allocations and actual project delivery, undermines infrastructural development even where fiscal resources notionally exist; Uchime and Onuorah (2024) suggest that where financial reforms have taken hold, growth outcomes have improved, which by implication indicates how much is lost where they have not. Third, fragmented institutional coordination among federal, state, and local government administrative structures produces duplication, policy inconsistency, and gaps in service delivery, particularly in infrastructure and regulatory functions that cut across tiers of government. Fourth, weak accountability and audit follow-through, where the Auditor-General's reports and legislative oversight recommendations are rarely enforced with real sanctions, allows administrative inefficiency and outright corruption to persist with limited consequence.

### 6.3 Corruption, Accountability Deficits, and the Economic Cost of Administrative Weakness

Corruption deserves particular attention because of its outsized economic cost when it operates through administrative channels rather than merely political ones. Public procurement, licensing, customs administration, and tax collection are all administrative processes vulnerable to rent-seeking; when these processes are compromised, the economic effects include inflated project costs, substandard infrastructure, discouraged foreign and domestic investment, and a widened trust deficit between citizens and the state (Campos & Pradhan, 2007). It is the author's opinion that anti-corruption strategy in Nigeria has historically overemphasised high-profile prosecutions at the expense of the more mundane but arguably more consequential task of administrative systems reform, digitalising procurement, strengthening internal audit units, and reducing the discretionary human interface in routine transactions such as customs clearance and business registration.

### 6.4 Weighing Alternative Perspectives

A balanced review must acknowledge perspectives that qualify or complicate the administrative-centred argument advanced here. Some scholars caution against attributing Nigeria's development challenges too heavily to domestic administrative failure alone, pointing instead to structural constraints such as global commodity price volatility, historical patterns of resource-dependent growth, and the legacies of colonial administrative structures that were never designed for developmental purposes (Ukwandu & Ijere, 2020). Others argue that political factors, weak party institutionalization, clientelism, and the high cost of electoral politics are the more fundamental drivers of administrative dysfunction, such that administrative reform without prior political reform is unlikely to be sustained (Donadelli, Cunha, & Dussauge-Laguna, 2020; Knox, 2023). These are legitimate counterpoints, and this review does not claim that public administration reform alone is sufficient for Nigeria's economic transformation. Rather, the position taken here is that public administration is the most tractable and immediately actionable point of intervention, given that political and structural reforms are typically slower-moving and more contested; strengthening administrative capacity and accountability can, in the author's opinion, deliver meaningful economic gains even in advance of, and indeed as a foundation for, broader political reform.

### 6.5 Implications for Economic Development

If the administrative diagnosis advanced in this paper is correct, then the practical implication is that Nigeria's economic development strategy should give at least as much weight to how public institutions are organised, staffed, financed, and held accountable as it gives to the substantive content of sectoral policies. A well-designed industrial policy, agricultural transformation agenda, or infrastructure master plan will underperform if the administrative apparatus responsible for its implementation lacks the professionalism, financing discipline, and accountability structures to execute it faithfully. Good governance, in this sense, is not an abstract precondition to be checked off before development can begin; it is the ongoing administrative


DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21897760

discipline through which development is continuously produced or continuously undermined.

## 7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1 Conclusion

This opinion-based review has argued that the relationship between good governance and economic development in Nigeria is mediated, decisively, by the quality of public administration. While Nigeria possesses a reasonably comprehensive formal architecture of governance laws, institutions, and policy frameworks, the practical translation of these into economic outcomes has been consistently undermined by a politicised civil service, weak public financial management, fragmented inter-governmental coordination, and shallow accountability enforcement. Drawing on good governance theory and New Public Management and post-NPM perspectives, the paper concludes that closing Nigeria's development gap requires treating public administration reform not as a technical afterthought but as the central developmental project. Good governance, ultimately, is not merely a political slogan; it is an administrative discipline that must be built, institution by institution, into the everyday practice of the Nigerian state.

### 7.2 Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, this review proposes the following opinion-based recommendations:

1. Depoliticise and professionalise the civil service. Appointments, promotions, and postings within the public service should be governed by merit-based criteria and insulated, as far as practicable, from partisan political interference, in order to preserve institutional memory and technical competence across changes in political administration.
2. Strengthen public financial management and audit enforcement. Budget credibility should be improved through more realistic revenue projections and timely capital releases, while the recommendations of the Auditor-General and legislative oversight committees should carry binding consequences rather than remaining advisory.
3. Digitalize administrative processes prone to discretion and rent-seeking. Public procurement, business registration, customs administration, and tax collection should be progressively automated to reduce direct human discretion, in line with the efficiency logic of New Public Management, while retaining safeguards for equity and due process.
4. Deepen inter-governmental coordination. Federal, state, and local government administrative structures should establish clearer frameworks for coordinating infrastructure and regulatory functions that cut across tiers of government, to reduce duplication and policy inconsistency.
5. Institutionalize citizen participation and transparency mechanisms. Routine, structured avenues for citizen and stakeholder input into budgeting and policy design, including proactive publication of budget and procurement data should be embedded as standard administrative practice rather than treated as optional public relations exercises.
6. Reframe anti-corruption strategy around systems reform. Beyond prosecutorial approaches, sustained investment in administrative systems reform, particularly the reduction of discretionary human interfaces in routine transactions, should be prioritized as a more durable anti-corruption strategy.

Taken together, these recommendations reflect the paper's central opinion: that Nigeria's path to sustained economic development runs through the quality of its public administration at least as much as through the ambition of its economic policies.

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**DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21897760**