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CIVIC CONDUCT, INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE, AND THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONAL RENEWAL: CAN NIGERIANS PERMIT THE EXISTENCE OF A FUNCTIONAL STATE?

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Abstract
This paper examines the relationship between civic conduct, institutional performance, and the challenge of national renewal by asking a fundamental but often overlooked question: Can Nigerians permit the existence of a functional state? Drawing on Institutional Theory, as envisioned by North (1990), the paper argues that effective governance depends not only on formal institutions but also on the civic behaviour and informal norms that shape citizens' interactions with the state. Using a qualitative design based on document analysis, the study relied on verified official records, observer reports, and firsthand observations, including evidence from the 2026 Ekiti State Governorship Election and the Ondo South Senatorial District by-election. Findings reveal that weak governance in Nigeria is sustained not only by leadership failures but also by widespread civic practices such as vote buying, tolerance of corruption, disregard for public rules, weak public service ethics, and limited civic responsibility, all of which undermine institutional performance despite the existence of comprehensive legal and constitutional frameworks. The study further establishes that while historical, political, and economic factors contribute to Nigeria's governance challenges, they do not fully explain the persistent weakness of public institutions. Consistent with Institutional Theory, the study demonstrates that formal laws cannot produce a functional state unless they are reinforced by ethical conduct, public trust, respect for the rule of law, and strong civic norms. Comparative evidence from countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada further shows that institutional effectiveness is achieved where legal frameworks are consistently supported by responsible citizenship and shared societal values. The study concludes that meaningful national

renewal requires both institutional reforms and a fundamental transformation in civic conduct, as sustainable governance depends on the collective responsibility of citizens and public officials alike. It recommends strengthening civic education, enforcing anti-corruption and electoral laws, institutionalizing ethical standards across the public service, and promoting a culture of accountability, integrity, and respect for the rule of law as essential conditions for building a functional Nigerian state.

Keywords: National Development; Civic Responsibility; Institutional Change; Governance Quality; Citizen Behaviour; Corruption; Public Service Ethics; Nigeria; Comparative Governance.

Introduction

Nigeria is a sovereign state of remarkable promise, endowed with vast human and natural resources, yet it continues to struggle to translate these advantages into sustainable national development. The county has fertile land, abundant natural wealth, and more young, energetic people than almost any country on earth. Yet decades after independence, our roads crumble, clinics run short of basic supplies, and trust in public institutions hangs by a thread (Ake, 1996; Lewis, 2007; World Bank, 2023). These have continually posed obvious challenge to democratic governance in the country. According to Abba & Ojiako (2026), democratic governance cannot be consolidated without strengthening participatory processes that enable citizens to hold public officials accountable and actively influence public decision-making. They further posit that the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria depends not only on periodic elections but also on the quality of representation, the strength of legislative institutions, and the depth of citizen participation at all levels of governance.

There is a painful contradiction running through citizens lives: people complain loudly about disorder and poor service, yet the same patterns continue because some citizens treat rules not as shared promises, but as suggestions that apply only when it suits them (Ayittey, 2010; Ekeh, 1975). Most Nigerian's skip queues when they are in hurry; find shortcuts around processes that delay; pay small sums to make problems disappear instead of fixing them properly (NESG, 2025), hoping a new leader will fix everything, yet experience teaches that changing faces without changing ways produces only more of the same (Utomi, 2014). Research confirms what many of citizens already know: bribery and corruption are not just problems of powerful people they are systems Nigerian's citizens all help keep alive (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018).

Anyone who has visited a government office knows the scene: staff arrive late, chat among themselves, or attend to personal business while citizens wait patiently for hours. A simple signature may be delayed until someone offers

"appreciation" (ICPC, 2026). In the UK, by contrast, public service is understood as a duty to the public with clear consequences for those who abuse that trust standards built up over generations of shared expectation (UK Cabinet Office, 2022; North et al., 2009). Nigeria's own rules say exactly the same things, yet they rarely reach beyond the page (NESG, 2025).

Even Nigerian universities which is a place that is meant to teach integrity and excellence show these same cracks. Reviews record absenteeism, neglected duties, and sometimes demands for favours in exchange for marks or progress (National Universities Commission, 2023; ActionAid Nigeria, 2022). Okonofua (2020) pointed out that when our schools teaches that status matters more than service, the Universities should not be surprised when the wider world follows suit.

The elections of June 2026 brought these tensions into sharp focus. In Ekiti State, observers watched as bags of rice, noodles, bread and cash from ₦2,000 to ₦50,000 were handed out along campaign routes, while goods were tossed toward crowds waiting under the hot sun. Across polling units, monitors recorded dozens of confirmed incidents of inducement, even as security personnel stood nearby (CDD, 2026; Yiaga Africa, 2026). The Ondo South Senatorial by-election showed exactly the same pattern (ICPC, 2026). Voters took what was offered, saying "hunger does not wait for good governance," yet, later asked why their communities were neglected. This is the quiet tragedy: citizens trade the country future for relief today (IFES, 2024). Institutions meant to guide us, such as: churches, schools, media, courts are often seen as tools for the powerful, not guardians of the common good (Ibeanu, 2019). In places like the UK, Canada, or the USA, people follow rules not because they are forced, but because they understand them as protecting everyone (North et al., 2009; Putnam, 2000). This work explores whether the biggest barrier to progress lies not in what the citizens lack, but in what Nigerians are not yet ready to do.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has continued to face persistent governance and development challenges despite abundant human and natural resources. Weak civic conduct, manifested in disregard for public rules, corruption, tax evasion, vandalism of public infrastructure, electoral malpractice, and low levels of civic responsibility, has undermined the effectiveness of public institutions and slowed national development (North, 1990; Rothstein, 2011). Structural weaknesses, executive dominance, weak institutional autonomy, and limited accountability constrain legislative effectiveness and undermine democratic governance (Abba & Ojiako, 2026).

While governments have introduced various reforms to strengthen public administration and democratic governance, these efforts have often produced limited results because institutional performance depends not only on formal laws and policies but also on the willingness of citizens and public officials to comply with civic norms and uphold public values (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Fukuyama, 2014).

Although democratic institutions have been established since 1999, the quality of governance remains uneven because legislative processes do not always translate into transparency, inclusiveness, and responsiveness to citizens' needs" (Abba & Ojiako, 2026). Institutional performance in Nigeria continues to be constrained by weak accountability, poor service delivery, inadequate enforcement of laws, and declining public trust in state institutions (World Bank, 2024; Transparency International, 2024). These institutional weaknesses have contributed to rising insecurity, unemployment, corruption, and poor socio-economic outcomes, thereby limiting the country's capacity for sustainable national renewal. Scholars argue that a functional state is sustained by effective institutions operating within a society where citizens demonstrate civic responsibility, respect for the rule of law, and commitment to the public good (North, 1990; Fukuyama, 2014).

This paper, therefore, focuses on three linked challenges that hold the country back. First, Nigerians always blame leaders or systems alone to be the major causes of the problem our dear country is facing, while overlooking the small, repeated choices Nigerians make every day that keep things as they are (CDD, 2026; ICPC, 2026). Second, over time Nigerians learn that following rules only leaves the society behind, so disorder becomes normal, and anyone trying to do things properly faces mockery or resistance (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018). Third, citizens speak endlessly of their rights as citizens, but rarely of the duties: to obey laws, to contribute fairly, to demand accountability from ourselves as much as from those in power (Almond & Verba, 1963). This gap runs right through the institutions meant to set an example (ActionAid Nigeria, 2022).

The country is good at explaining our struggles through history, the scars of colonial rule, the burden of oil dependence, as well as the hardship of poverty (Ake, 1996; Lewis, 2007). These are powerful facts that shaped where the country started. Yet Nigerian’s do not fully explain why nations with similar histories have moved forward, or why laws that work well elsewhere become empty here (North, 1990). This paper does not dismiss those explanations, it adds the human side so often left out. It is on this note that the study aim is to understand how Nigerians daily conduct and shared expectations

shape the quality of governance citizens receive within the country. Specifically: To show how the gap between written rules and lived practice weakens every part of our public life. This study posits that there exists a sort of misalignment between what Nigerian's say and what citizens do, and this has been identified as our most persistent difficulty (North, 1990); To trace these patterns across elections, public offices, and schools, this study confirms that the same habits appear wherever we look (NESG, 2025). To compare our experience with systems that work reliably elsewhere, this study shows that strong institutions grow gradually, as laws and values walk forward together (North et al., 2009); To suggest real ways forward, this study demonstrates that lasting change must begin inside us before it can appear around us (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018).

Although numerous studies have examined governance, corruption, institutional reforms, and public administration in Nigeria, relatively few have integrated civic conduct and institutional performance as complementary drivers of national renewal within the framework of a functional state. Consequently, there remains insufficient empirical and conceptual understanding of whether Nigerians possess the civic values and institutional commitment necessary to sustain a functional state capable of promoting inclusive development, social cohesion, and democratic stability (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Ojiako, Nwafor, Okonkwo, & Onyeulo, 2024). This gap provides the basis for investigating the relationship among civic conduct, institutional performance, and national renewal while addressing the critical question of whether Nigerians can permit the existence of a truly functional state.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between civic conduct, institutional performance, and the challenge of national renewal in determining the existence of a functional state in Nigeria. Specifically, this paper seeks to:

1. examine the effect of governance, corruption, and public duty on institutional performance in Nigeria.
2. assess the influence of public service ethics and institutional decay on national renewal in Nigeria.
3. determine the effect of compliance with rules and societal norms on the existence of a functional state in Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

State

The concept of the state

occupies a central position in political science and public administration. It refers to a politically organized community possessing a defined territory, permanent population, legitimate government, and sovereignty over its affairs. The state serves as the supreme authority responsible for maintaining law and order, protecting citizens, promoting development, and providing public goods. However, the legitimacy of the state is fundamentally measured by its capacity to provide effective governance, maintain institutional order, and improve the welfare of its citizens through responsive public administration (Nnaji, Ojiako, Ukeje, & Nwangbo, 2022; Ojiako, Umeasiegbu, Onyeulo, & Okoye, 2023). Contemporary scholars emphasize that beyond exercising authority, the modern state is expected to deliver quality public services, uphold democratic principles, and promote inclusive governance (Fukuyama, 2013; OECD, 2023).

Max Weber conceptualized the state as the institution that possesses the legitimate monopoly over the use of physical force within a given territory. This definition remains one of the most influential in explaining governmental authority and political legitimacy. In public administration, the effectiveness of the state is increasingly measured by its institutional capacity, responsiveness, accountability, and ability to provide essential services rather than merely exercising political power (World Bank, 2024).

In Nigeria, debates concerning the state have largely focused on issues of governance deficits, institutional weaknesses, corruption, insecurity, and limited-service delivery. Consequently, strengthening state institutions has become a prerequisite for sustainable national development and democratic consolidation (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019).

Functional State

A functional state refers to a government whose institutions effectively perform their constitutional responsibilities and deliver public goods efficiently. Such a state maintains security, enforces laws impartially, protects rights, promotes economic development, provides social services, and commands public confidence. It also refers to one in which competent institutions operate professionally, public policies are

effectively implemented, and administrative decisions are guided by merit, accountability, and the rule of law (Nwafor, Ojiako, Okonkwo, & Onyeulo, 2023).

According to Fukuyama (2013), state functionality depends largely on institutional capacity rather than merely democratic structures. Similarly, the OECD (2023) argues that functional states demonstrate transparency, accountability, policy consistency, administrative competence, and citizen-centered governance.

Abba & Ojiako (2026) maintain that for democratic governance to become more responsive and inclusive, state legislatures must evolve from being largely procedural institutions to becoming vibrant platforms for citizen engagement and public deliberation. Within the Nigerian context, scholars observe that a functional state is characterized by effective institutions capable of translating public policies into tangible developmental outcomes. Weak institutional coordination, corruption, political instability, and inadequate administrative capacity continue to hinder the emergence of a fully functional Nigerian state (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019).

Civic Conduct

Civic conduct refers to the attitudes, behaviours, responsibilities, and ethical practices expected of citizens in their relationship with the state and fellow citizens. It encompasses obedience to laws, respect for public institutions, political participation, tax compliance, environmental responsibility, community service, tolerance, and respect for democratic values.

Democratic governance depends not only on responsible leadership but also on citizens' commitment to lawful participation, electoral integrity, civic responsibility, and respect for constitutional processes (Ojiako, Umeasiegbu, Lawrence, & Okoye, 2023). Modern democratic governance recognizes civic conduct as an essential component of good governance because government performance depends not only on institutional effectiveness but also on responsible citizenship. Civic responsibility strengthens social cohesion, promotes accountability, and enhances public trust in government (Tom, 2021).

In Nigeria, poor civic orientation has been associated with electoral violence, corruption, tax evasion, vandalism of public infrastructure, and weak citizen participation. Consequently, scholars advocate civic education and value re-orientation as

important instruments for democratic consolidation and national development (Ogbonna, 2012).

Institutional Performance

Institutional performance refers to the degree to which public institutions achieve their legally assigned mandates efficiently, effectively, transparently, and accountably. It reflects the capacity of institutions to formulate policies, implement programmes, deliver services, manage resources, and respond to citizens' expectations. The effectiveness of democratic institutions depends not merely on their formal existence but on their capacity to promote transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and meaningful citizen engagement (Abba & Ojiako, 2026).

According to the World Bank (2024), institutional performance is increasingly evaluated through indicators such as service quality, policy implementation, administrative efficiency, accountability, transparency, innovation, and citizen satisfaction. Institutional performance is strengthened through merit-based recruitment, effective feedback systems, administrative professionalism, transparency, and efficient public service delivery (Okoye & Ojiako, 2021; Nwafor, Ojiako, Okonkwo, & Onyeulo, 2023).

Strong institutional performance enhances public confidence, attracts investment, improves policy outcomes, and supports sustainable development. Conversely, weak institutions contribute to corruption, policy inconsistency, poor service delivery, and governance failure (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

Within public administration literature, institutional performance is considered a major determinant of state legitimacy because citizens evaluate governments primarily through the effectiveness of public institutions rather than political rhetoric.

National Renewal

National renewal refers to deliberate political, economic, institutional, social, and moral reforms aimed at transforming a nation toward sustainable development, improved governance, national unity, and enhanced citizen welfare. It involves rebuilding public trust, strengthening institutions, promoting ethical leadership, combating

corruption, encouraging civic responsibility, and improving public service delivery.

National renewal extends beyond economic reforms to include value reorientation, institutional strengthening, constitutional reforms, and citizen participation in governance. Contemporary governance literature views national renewal as a continuous process through which governments improve institutional effectiveness while citizens actively contribute to national development (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

National renewal requires comprehensive institutional reforms that promote accountable governance, strengthen public institutions, improve service delivery, and encourage active citizen participation in national development (Nnaji, Ojiako, Ukeje, & Nwangbo, 2022; Edokobi, Ojiako, & Okoye, 2022).

In developing countries such as Nigeria, national renewal has become increasingly associated with strengthening democratic institutions, improving accountability, promoting inclusive governance, restoring public confidence, and enhancing administrative capacity. Successful national renewal therefore requires collaboration among government institutions, civil society, the private sector, and citizens (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019).

Governance, Corruption and Public Duty

Good governance is fundamentally anchored on effective institutions, accountable leadership, and the capacity of public organizations to formulate and implement policies that promote national development. Governance outcomes depend more on institutional performance than on policy formulation alone (Ojiako, Nwafor, Okonkwo, & Onyeulo, 2023).

Claude Ake wrote that Nigeria's deepest problem is not how we run government, but what we think government is for (Ake, 1996). Peter Ekeh's idea of "two publics" helps explain: citizens feel strong duty to family and kin, but feel little obligation to national institutions that feel distant or unkind (Ekeh, 1975). Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala describes corruption not as isolated greed, but as a system many people protect because they hope to benefit from it one day (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018). This fits Institutional Theory perfectly: when practice clashes with rules, practice always wins in the end (North, 1990). George Ayittey puts it plainly: "We demand good government, but we refuse to be good citizens" (Ayittey, 2010).

Corruption, on the other hand, undermines public duty by weakening accountability, eroding public trust, misallocating public resources, and diminishing the effectiveness of government programmes. Public officials are therefore expected to uphold integrity, transparency, and commitment to the public interest (Ojiako, Oju, Nwosu, & Ojo, 2024; Ojiako, Nwafor, Okonkwo, & Onyeulo, 2023).

Surveys show six in ten Nigerians believe vote buying is common (IFES, 2024). Many justify it as "getting back what has already been stolen," yet this ensures those elected spend their time recovering costs rather than building the nation (CDD, 2026). Pat Utomi and Charles Soludo both argue we will only move forward when we value long-term good more than short-term gain (Utomi, 2014; Soludo, 2022).

Public Service Ethics and Institutional Decay

The declining ethical standards, weak administrative accountability, poor leadership, and inadequate professionalism contribute significantly to institutional decay and poor public service delivery. Institutional renewal requires ethical leadership, merit-based administration, and strengthened accountability mechanisms (Ojiako et al., 2023; Ojiako, Nwafor, Okonkwo, & Onyeulo, 2023).

Official reviews paint a consistent picture: lateness, absenteeism, and private work during official hours are widespread (Federal Civil Service Commission, 2023; NESG, 2025). The UK Civil Service Code demands full loyalty to public work, with clear penalties for misuse standards Nigeria shares on paper but rarely enforces (UK Cabinet Office, 2022).

In universities, reports describe abuse of authority, unfair demands, and neglected teaching (Okonofua, 2020; ActionAid Nigeria, 2022). If the places meant to build character fail to practice it, we cannot expect it elsewhere (National Universities Commission, 2023)

Rules, Norms, and Institutional Strength

Across the globe, strong institutions are sustained through adherence to formal rules, organizational norms, and consistent policy implementation. Institutional effectiveness depends not merely on the existence of laws but on their faithful enforcement and organizational commitment to accountability and professionalism (Ojiako, Oju, Nwosu, & Ojo, 2024; Ojiako, Nwafor, Okonkwo, & Onyeulo, 2023).

Douglass North taught that laws are only ink until people believe in them (North, 1990). Almond and Verba found healthy democracies grow where people understand rights come with responsibilities (Almond & Verba, 1963). Robert Putnam showed trust spreads when we

act fairly beyond our own circle without it, no system can stand (Putnam, 2000).

In the UK, USA, and Canada, rules are generally followed without constant supervision (Institute for Government, 2024; Pew Research Center, 2024). This did not happen overnight, it grew over centuries as laws and values moved forward together (North et al., 2009). Governance rankings place Nigeria far behind these nations on accountability and the rule of law (World Bank, 2023).

Babs Fafunwa reminded us that education is for building people, not just certificates (Fafunwa, 1974). Today our schools focus heavily on exams, while citizenship, ethics, and duty get little space (UNESCO, 2024). In the UK and Ontario, these are core parts of learning from an early age (Department for Education, 2022; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). This study uses Institutional Theory (North, 1990), which distinguishes formal rules (laws, policies) from informal norms (habits, expectations, what we actually do). Where these two conflict, informal norms almost always win. Change therefore requires more than new laws it requires new ways of thinking and acting. Nigeria has excellent formal frameworks; they struggle because our daily habits work against them. Renewal means aligning both.

Nigeria's governance challenges stem largely from institutional weaknesses rather than policy deficiencies. Accordingly, strengthening institutions, promoting ethical public service, enforcing accountability, and improving administrative capacity are indispensable for sustainable governance and national development (Ojiako et al., 2023; Ojiako, Oju, Nwosu, & Ojo, 2024).

Contribution to Knowledge

Sustainable national development is achievable when ethical leadership, effective public institutions, democratic accountability, and citizen engagement function together within a transparent governance system" (Edokobi, Ojiako, & Okoye, 2022; Nnaji, Ojiako, Ukeje, & Nwangbo, 2022; Nwafor, Ojiako, Okonkwo, & Onyeulo, 2023).

Most studies explain Nigeria’s struggles through bad policies, lack of funding, or corruption at the top. This work adds something new: it shows how ordinary people, through small acts and silent acceptance, sustain the very systems they dislike. It explains why importing laws from abroad does not work because the spirit needed to breathe life into them is missing. By looking closely at elections, offices, and classrooms, it offers one clear story for problems that often feel separate. These insights matter wherever people find their laws and their lives moving in different directions (World Bank, 2023).

Methodology

This research draws on verified evidence: peer-reviewed studies, official government reports, independent findings from CDD, ICPC, and Yiaga Africa, reputable media investigations, and long-established policy analysis (Bowen, 2009). Sources were chosen for independence and reliability, with key claims checked against multiple accounts (CDD, 2026; Premium Times, 2026). Comparative insights come from public records in the UK, USA, and Canada (Electoral Commission, 2024; Elections Canada, 2024; Federal Election Commission, 2024). Douglass North's Institutional Theory guides how we see rules and habits working together (North, 1990).

Theoretical Framework

This paper anchored on the Institutional Theory, developed by North (1990) as a framework for analysis. Institutional Theory posits that the effectiveness and development of any society depend on the strength of its institutions. Institutions comprise both formal rules, such as constitutions, laws, and regulations, and informal norms, including values, ethics, customs, and patterns of civic behaviour, which collectively shape human interaction. This theory argues that strong institutions promote accountability, transparency, rule compliance, and effective governance, while weak institutions encourage corruption, institutional decay, poor public service delivery, and declining public trust. North further maintains that sustainable national development can only be achieved where both public officials and citizens respect institutional rules and discharge their civic responsibilities.

Relevance of the Theory to this Study

Institutional Theory is appropriate for this study because it explains that the existence of a functional state depends not only on effective governmental structures but also on responsible civic conduct and strong institutional values. The theory provides a suitable framework for examining how governance, corruption and public duty, public service ethics, institutional decay, and adherence to rules and societal norms influence institutional performance and national renewal in Nigeria. It therefore supports the argument that strengthening institutions and promoting civic responsibility are essential prerequisites for building a functional state.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This paper focuses on how citizen conduct connects to institutional performance in Nigeria, with international comparison. It draws only on public records, so private experiences not captured in reports remain outside its view. It describes national trends, not every community or region - leaving room for deeper local study. International

comparison uses published evidence rather than original fieldwork abroad (World Bank, 2023).

Findings

Findings of this study were summarized as follows:

1. **Governance, Corruption, and Public Duty:** The study found that governance and institutional performance are significantly undermined by corruption, vote buying, and weak civic responsibility. Evidence from the 2026 Ekiti State Governorship Election and the Ondo South Senatorial By-election showed widespread vote buying and material inducement despite existing electoral laws, indicating that citizens and political actors often prioritize short-term personal benefits over public accountability.
2. **Public Service Ethics and Institutional Decay:** The study established that declining ethical standard within the public service contribute substantially to institutional decay and hinder national renewal. Official reports revealed persistent absenteeism, lateness, abuse of office, and unethical practices across public institutions, resulting in poor service delivery, weakened public trust, and reduced institutional effectiveness.
3. **Rules, Norms, and the Functional State:** The study found that although Nigeria possesses comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks, weak compliance with civic norms and inadequate enforcement of rules prevent the emergence of a functional state. In line with Institutional Theory (North, 1990), informal norms that tolerate corruption and rule violation frequently override formal institutions, thereby weakening governance and limiting prospects for sustainable national renewal.

Addressing Alternative Explanations

While structural factors including colonial legacy, resource dependence, and economic hardship shape Nigeria's starting challenges (Ake, 1996; Lewis, 2007), this study finds these do not fully explain persistent underperformance. Nations facing similar historical or economic constraints have built more effective institutions, and identical formal rules function reliably elsewhere indicating that behaviour and collective choice play a decisive role within any given structure. The evidence from Ekiti and Ondo South shows that inducement occurs even when voters understand its consequences, and that practices continue because they are accepted, participated in, or tolerated by citizens themselves.

Conclusion

Nigeria possesses all the resources needed to thrive, yet potential remains unfulfilled. This study finds that weak governance persists not only due to structural challenges, but because citizens' daily choices and widespread acceptance of rule-breaking sustain ineffective systems. Verified evidence from the 2026 Ekiti and Ondo South elections shows how short-term exchange undermines long-term progress, while formal frameworks lack the shared norms required to work.

A functional state cannot be achieved through new laws or leadership changes alone. It depends on citizens upholding standards, respecting rules, and prioritising collective good. Nigerians absolutely can build a working nation but only when readiness for change begins in individual conduct.

Recommendations

In line with the above summary of findings and conclusion, this study makes tie following recommendations:

1. Governments and electoral management agencies should strengthen enforcement of anti-corruption and electoral laws while promoting civic education that emphasizes public duty, accountability, and responsible citizenship.
2. Public institutions should reinforce ethical standards through regular ethics training, effective performance monitoring, transparent disciplinary mechanisms, and merit-based public service management to restore institutional integrity.
3. Government, educational institutions, civil society organizations, religious bodies, and the media should promote a culture of respect for the rule of law, civic responsibility, and institutional accountability to strengthen public confidence and facilitate the emergence of a functional state capable of achieving sustainable national renewal.

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