

The Legislature and the Preservation of Nigeria's Value System and National

Ideology

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Abstract

Nigeria's constitutional order explicitly embeds the *National Ethics* discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance, and patriotism as guiding principles for statecraft and democratic governance. Yet, despite their normative centrality, scholarship and policy debates have largely overlooked how these values are operationalised within the legislative process, particularly under the ongoing Tenth National Assembly (2023–2027). This study addresses that gap by examining the extent to which parliamentary actions debates, bills, oversight reports, and voting patterns align with or diverge from the constitutional ethics framework. Adopting a qualitative, multi-method design, the analysis draws on parliamentary records (Hansards, committee reports, bills), relevant policy documents such as the *National Ethics and Integrity Policy* and National Orientation Agency (NOA) reports, as well as scholarly and policy literature from 2020 to 2025. Doctrinal policy/legal analysis is combined with thematic content analysis of legislative texts and debates, coding for value categories including integrity, social justice, and tolerance, while triangulating with civil society briefs and media reports. Findings indicate a persistent misalignment between constitutional ideals and legislative practice, reflecting capacity constraints in committee oversight, weak ideological anchoring of political parties, and tensions between executive dominance and legislative autonomy. Policy implications include: enhancing oversight tools and timelines, institutionalising public reporting, fostering structured legislative executive civil society partnerships, and promoting party reforms that tie ideological clarity to national ethics.

Keywords: Legislative Oversight, Legislature, National Ethics, Nigeria, Political Ideology, Value System

1.1 Background to the Study

The foundation of every democratic state rests not only on the structures of governance but also on the values and ideology that guide the exercise of political power. In Nigeria, these guiding principles are explicitly codified in the 1999 Constitution (as amended). Chapter II of the Constitution outlines the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, including the nation's "national ethics," namely: discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance, and patriotism (PLAC, 2020). These ethics are not ornamental; they serve as normative standards for governance and national orientation.

However, Nigeria has consistently faced a gap between constitutional ideals and governance realities. Decades after independence, corruption, political opportunism, insecurity, and socio-economic inequality continue to challenge the sustainability of national values (Dele-Dada, 2024). The erosion of discipline and integrity within public institutions has weakened public trust in the state. Similarly, the lack of social justice and religious tolerance has often exacerbated ethnic and sectarian tensions. In this context, the legislature vested with the constitutional powers of lawmaking, oversight, and representation plays a critical role in preserving Nigeria's value system.

Globally, legislatures are regarded as custodians of democratic values and instruments for nation-building. In Nigeria, this role is even more pronounced given the country's heterogeneous composition and the fragility of its political culture (International Policy Brief, 2024). Legislative debates, enactments, and oversight functions directly shape how national ideology is transmitted, protected, and contested in the public sphere. Thus, examining the legislature's role in the preservation of Nigeria's value system is both timely and necessary, particularly in the light of democratic transitions, the 2023 elections, and ongoing governance reforms.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional provisions, Nigeria continues to experience a steady erosion of its national value system. Corruption remains pervasive, undermining discipline and integrity in governance (Parliamentary Centre & AFRODAD, 2025). Weak accountability and ineffective oversight have allowed maladministration, poor budget implementation, and unchecked executive excesses to persist (Ecoma, 2025). Partisan defections and political opportunism further weaken the ideological foundation of Nigeria's democracy, as political parties prioritize personal ambition over programmatic values (Azubike, Ogbuka, & Udentia, 2025).

Scholars argue that Nigeria suffers from ideological poverty, where political parties lack clear ideological orientation tied to the constitutional value system. This has led to legislative practices that often undermine, rather than reinforce, national ideology (Babalola, 2024; Sa'eed, 2024). For example, defections between parties during legislative sessions blur ideological distinctions, eroding public confidence in the legislature's ability to uphold national ethics.

The challenge, therefore, lies in the contradiction between the constitutional mandate of the legislature to act as the custodian of national values—and its practical performance, which often reflects systemic weaknesses, corruption, and political opportunism. The persistence of these problems raises fundamental questions: To what extent has the legislature preserved Nigeria's constitutional values? How do weak oversight, poor party ideology, and corruption affect the transmission of national ideology? And what reforms are necessary to strengthen the legislature's role in this regard?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the role of the Nigerian legislature in the preservation of the national value system and ideology. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the extent to which legislative enactments and debates reflect Nigeria's constitutional national ethics.
2. Investigate the role of legislative oversight in preserving and promoting values such as integrity, social justice, and accountability.
3. Analyze the impact of partisan defections and weak political ideology on the legislature's capacity to safeguard national values.
4. Examine case studies from the 10th National Assembly that illustrate the successes and failures of the legislature in promoting national ideology.
5. Recommend policy reforms and institutional measures to enhance the legislature's effectiveness in preserving Nigeria's constitutional values.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do the activities of the Nigerian legislature reflect the national ethics outlined in the Constitution?
2. How effective is the role of legislative oversight in preserving and promoting values such as integrity, social justice, and accountability?

3. What is the impact of partisan defections and ideological weaknesses on the legislature's role in safeguarding national values?
4. What lessons can be drawn from legislative case studies in the 10th Assembly regarding the preservation of national ideology?
5. What reforms are required to strengthen the legislature's role as a custodian of Nigeria's value system?

1.5 Justification of the Study

This study is justified on several grounds. Theoretically, it contributes to the scholarly understanding of the relationship between legislatures and national ideology, especially in developing democracies. Most existing studies on Nigerian governance emphasize corruption and party politics but pay limited attention to how the legislature specifically functions as a custodian of constitutional values (Sa'eed, 2024; Dele-Dada, 2024).

Practically, the study provides insights into how legislative practices can be improved to align with constitutional ethics. It highlights specific mechanisms such as oversight, constituency representation, and value-driven legislation that can be strengthened to restore public trust. Policy-wise, the findings will be relevant to legislative reform agendas, civic education programs, and value reorientation campaigns spearheaded by institutions such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC, 2022).

Moreover, the study is timely in the context of Nigeria's post-2023 elections and the inauguration of the 10th National Assembly. The period presents an opportunity to evaluate how contemporary legislatures can rise above partisan politics to safeguard national values amidst pressing socio-political and economic challenges.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research is limited to the 9th and 10th National Assemblies, with primary emphasis on the 10th Assembly (2023–2027), inaugurated on 13 June 2023. The study situates its analysis within the broader democratic context of 2019–2025, thereby capturing the transition from the 9th Assembly (2019–2023) into the ongoing 10th Assembly. The focus is on legislative functions related to lawmaking, oversight, and representation, as they pertain to Nigeria’s constitutional value system. While selective references may be made to historical legislative practices for contextual depth, the empirical analysis will prioritize contemporary legislative records, committee reports, and case studies from the 10th Assembly. The study also narrows its conceptual scope to the values explicitly outlined in the Constitution: discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance, and patriotism.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Like all research, this study has limitations. First, access to data such as complete legislative records, committee deliberations, or constituency engagement reports may be restricted, limiting the comprehensiveness of empirical evidence. Second, the dynamic nature of Nigerian politics means that legislative behavior may shift rapidly in response to political crises, making it difficult to generalize findings beyond the study period. Third, given the broadness of Nigeria’s value system, the study focuses primarily on constitutional ethics, leaving out other cultural or traditional dimensions of value. Despite these limitations, the study mitigates risks through triangulation of data sources parliamentary records, scholarly literature, policy documents, and media reports ensuring reliability and validity of findings. The research is thus expected to provide a robust and balanced analysis of the legislature’s role in preserving Nigeria’s value system and national ideology.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 Value System

A value system refers to the set of core principles, beliefs, and ethical standards that guide individual and collective behavior in society (Abdulkadir, 2022; Okoye, 2023). In political science, national value systems embody shared ideals such as integrity, justice, and patriotism that underpin governance and public accountability. For Nigeria, these are codified in the 1999 Constitution (as amended), forming the normative foundation of governance.

2.1.2 National Ideology

National ideology refers to a unifying framework of principles and aspirations that give meaning to statehood, foster social cohesion, and orient state policy (Sa'eed, 2024). In Nigeria, constitutional ethics, as well as policy frameworks like the National Ethics and Integrity Policy (NEIP, 2020), provide ideological anchors. However, critics argue that weak political institutionalization and frequent partisan defections erode ideological coherence (Babalola, 2024).

2.1.3 Preservation

Preservation in this context refers to the conscious legislative, policy, and institutional measures aimed at protecting and transmitting Nigeria's constitutional values from one generation to another. It entails not only legal codification but also the institutional practices oversight, representation, and lawmaking that embed values into governance (Ecoma, 2025).

2.1.4 Legislative Institutional Capacity

Legislative institutional capacity refers to the ability of the legislature to perform its constitutional functions effectively, particularly in lawmaking, oversight, and representation (WFD, 2022). It includes resources, committee structures, technical expertise, and autonomy from executive dominance—all of which influence how well legislatures preserve national ideology.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: New Institutionalism

This study adopts New Institutionalism as its primary analytical framework. The theory is widely associated with scholars such as James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, particularly in their seminal

work *“The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life”* (1984). The framework has since evolved through contributions from scholars like Guy Peters (2021).

New Institutionalism emphasizes the role of formal structures, rules, procedures, and norms in shaping political behavior and outcomes. It argues that institutions are not merely passive arenas where political actions occur, but active forces that influence how actors behave, make decisions, and interpret their roles. Within legislative contexts, institutional arrangements such as committee systems, procedural rules, and oversight mechanisms significantly determine the effectiveness of governance and accountability.

The central proposition of this theory is that “institutions matter”—they structure incentives, constrain opportunism, and provide frameworks within which values such as integrity, accountability, and transparency can either be reinforced or undermined. In the Nigerian context, the legislature operates within a constitutional and procedural framework that is expected to uphold national ethics as outlined in Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution.

The relevance of New Institutionalism to this study lies in its capacity to explain how legislative structures and processes influence the preservation—or erosion—of Nigeria’s value system and national ideology. For instance, weak committee systems, inadequate oversight mechanisms, and executive dominance can be understood as institutional deficiencies that hinder the legislature’s ability to enforce constitutional ethics. Conversely, strong institutional practices can promote accountability, transparency, and value-driven governance.

However, one major limitation of New Institutionalism is its tendency to underestimate the role of individual agency and political culture, particularly in contexts where informal practices, patronage networks, and personal interests significantly shape political outcomes, as is often the case in Nigeria. The theory may therefore not fully capture the influence of political opportunism, party defections, and elite behavior that operate outside formal institutional rules.

Despite this limitation, New Institutionalism remains the most suitable framework for this study because it provides a structured lens for analyzing the formal mechanisms through which legislative values are embedded and operationalized. To address its weakness, this study incorporates insights from empirical observations and secondary literature on political behavior, thereby complementing institutional analysis with contextual understanding of Nigeria’s political

dynamics. This integrative approach ensures a more comprehensive explanation of how both formal institutions and informal practices shape the legislature's role in preserving national values.

2.3 Nigeria's Value System and National Ideology

The 1999 Constitution (as amended) explicitly enshrines national ethics discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance, and patriotism (PLAC, 2020). Complementing this is the National Ethics and Integrity Policy (NEIP, 2020), developed by the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to reorient governance culture.

Yet, scholarly debates highlight a widening gap between these normative frameworks and governance practice. Nigeria's party system is widely criticized for ideological poverty, where parties prioritize electoral victory over coherent value-based governance (Babalola, 2024; Sa'eed, 2024). This ideological weakness undermines the transmission of constitutional values and creates a disconnect between state institutions and citizen expectations.

2.4 The Legislature's Formal Roles in Value Preservation

The Nigerian legislature performs three constitutionally mandated roles that directly influence value preservation:

1. **Lawmaking** – Enacting statutes that enshrine values such as transparency (Public Procurement Act), integrity (anti-corruption laws), and justice (labour rights legislation).
2. **Representation** – Engaging constituencies in civic education, value orientation, and grassroots participation in governance.
3. **Oversight** – Holding the executive accountable through hearings, investigations, budget scrutiny, and confirmation of appointments (Ecoma, 2025; WFD, 2022).

Through these functions, the legislature acts as a guardian of national ideology, ensuring that governance reflects public ethics and the common good.

2.5 Mechanisms Through Which the Legislature Preserves Values

1. **Statutory Instruments** – Laws such as the *Fiscal Responsibility Act* and *Public Procurement Act* embed values of accountability and integrity. Civic education initiatives legislated by the Assembly also contribute to value reorientation (Okeke, 2023).

2. **Oversight of Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs)** – Critical in ensuring agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of Education transmit constitutional values effectively (Ibrahim, 2024).
3. **Agenda-Setting and Deliberation** – Motions and debates on corruption, youth ethics, and religious tolerance frame national discourse and influence public consciousness (Sa’eed, 2024).
4. **Constituency Representation** – Legislators act as intermediaries, promoting patriotism and civic values through constituency projects and citizen engagement.

2.6 Empirical Terrain (2019–2025): Illustrative Cases

2.6.1 Oversight and Accountability

The 9th and 10th Assemblies conducted inquiries into Nigeria’s rising debt profile and budget performance, exposing weak fiscal discipline (WFD, 2022; Parliamentary Centre & AFRODAD, 2025). These oversight actions reinforced constitutional values of integrity and accountability.

2.6.2 Legislative Responses to Ethical Concerns

The legislature supported the rollout of the National Ethics and Integrity Policy (2020), debated motions on youth re-orientation, and intervened in electoral reforms to uphold transparency (ICPC, 2022; NEITI, 2023).

2.6.3 Party Defections and Ideology

Between 2019–2023, multiple defections blurred party distinctions in the National Assembly, raising questions about ideological coherence (Babalola, 2024). The 10th Assembly has continued this trend, further weakening the legislature’s role in transmitting national ideology (Azubike et al., 2025).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, multi-method research design to examine the role of the Nigerian legislature in preserving the national value system and ideology. The approach was considered suitable for providing in-depth insights into legislative processes and value-oriented governance.

Data were drawn from primary and secondary sources. Primary data included parliamentary records such as Hansards, legislative debates, committee reports, bills, and voting patterns from the 9th and 10th National Assemblies. Policy documents, including reports from the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), were also utilized. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly articles and reports (2020–2025), including publications from the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, the Centre for Democracy and Development, and Transparency International.

The study employed doctrinal legal analysis and thematic content analysis, coding legislative texts based on key value categories such as integrity, social justice, and accountability. Data were triangulated across multiple sources to ensure reliability. This approach enabled a balanced assessment of the legislature's alignment with Nigeria's constitutional value system.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a complex relationship between Nigeria's constitutional value system and legislative practice. While the constitutional framework clearly articulates national ethics such as integrity, social justice, and accountability, the extent to which these values are reflected in legislative activities remains uneven.

Analysis of legislative debates and policy outputs from the 10th National Assembly indicates that, although references to national values are frequently made in plenary discussions and motions, their practical translation into lawmaking and oversight is often limited. In several instances, legislative enactments align with constitutional ethics, particularly in areas related to transparency and fiscal responsibility. However, these efforts are undermined by inconsistencies in implementation and weak follow-through during oversight processes.

A major factor contributing to this gap is the limited institutional capacity of the legislature. Committee systems, which serve as the backbone of legislative oversight, often face constraints

related to technical expertise, time, and resources. These limitations reduce the effectiveness of oversight functions and weaken the enforcement of accountability standards. Furthermore, the dominance of the executive arm in policy initiation and implementation creates an imbalance that restricts legislative autonomy.

Another critical issue identified is the weakness of political party ideology. Frequent defections and shifting political alliances within the National Assembly reflect a lack of ideological commitment, which in turn affects the legislature's ability to consistently uphold national values. This ideological fluidity encourages opportunistic behavior and diminishes public confidence in the legislature as a custodian of national ethics.

Despite these challenges, the study identifies instances where legislative oversight has been effective, particularly in cases where transparency mechanisms are strengthened and civil society organizations actively engage in the process. Such cases demonstrate that the legislature has the potential to uphold constitutional values when institutional conditions are favorable.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the Nigerian legislature plays a critical role in preserving national ideology, its effectiveness is constrained by institutional weaknesses, political dynamics, and limited ideological coherence. Strengthening these areas is essential for aligning legislative practice with constitutional ethics.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of the Nigerian legislature in preserving the national value system and ideology, with particular focus on the 10th National Assembly. The findings revealed a noticeable gap between the constitutional articulation of national ethics—such as integrity, social justice, accountability, and patriotism—and their practical reflection in legislative activities. While legislative debates and policy outputs occasionally aligned with these values, their consistent integration into lawmaking and oversight processes remained limited.

The study further showed that institutional constraints, including weak committee capacity, limited technical expertise, and executive dominance, significantly affected the legislature's ability to uphold constitutional ethics. In addition, the absence of strong ideological grounding within political parties—evidenced by frequent defections and opportunistic alliances—undermined the legislature's role as a custodian of national values. Despite these challenges, instances of effective

oversight demonstrated that the legislature retains the potential to promote accountability and value-based governance, particularly when transparency and civil society engagement are strengthened.

Theoretically, the study contributed to existing literature by linking constitutional ethics with legislative institutional practice, thereby bridging the gap between normative frameworks and empirical realities in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. However, the study was limited by restricted access to certain legislative records, especially committee-level proceedings, as well as reliance on secondary data and media reports, which may not fully capture internal legislative dynamics.

Future research could extend this work through comparative analysis across different National Assemblies, particularly from the 8th to the 11th Assembly, to identify patterns of continuity and change. Additionally, sector-specific studies focusing on areas such as education, health, and anti-corruption oversight would provide deeper insights. Quantitative approaches, including citizen perception surveys on legislative ethical compliance, could also complement the qualitative findings of this study.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were proposed to strengthen the role of the Nigerian legislature in preserving the national value system and ideology:

First, The National Assembly should institutionalize a *value-screening framework* for all bills and motions. This framework, to be implemented through its Standing Committees and Legislative Drafting Units, should require that proposed legislation be assessed against constitutional ethics such as integrity, social justice, and accountability before passage. This would ensure that legislative outputs are systematically aligned with Nigeria's normative principles.

Second, oversight functions should be strengthened through coordinated efforts by the National Assembly Committees, the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, and anti-corruption agencies such as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission. These bodies should collaborate to enhance technical capacity, provide continuous training for legislators and committee staff, and develop standardized oversight tools and timelines. This institutional support would improve the effectiveness of monitoring Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) and ensure stronger enforcement of accountability and transparency.

Third, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and political parties should enforce stricter regulations on party discipline and defections. Political parties should be mandated to articulate clear ideological frameworks that reflect national values, while legislative rules should be strengthened to discourage opportunistic party switching that undermines ideological coherence and public trust.

Fourth, the National Assembly, in collaboration with research institutions and civil society organizations, should institutionalize periodic *legislative performance audits*. These audits should document and evaluate key legislative actions, particularly oversight activities and major bills, to identify best practices and areas requiring reform. Such evidence-based reviews would promote learning and improve future legislative performance.

Finally, strategic partnerships should be strengthened between the legislature and key institutions such as the National Orientation Agency, anti-corruption bodies, and civil society organizations. These partnerships should focus on value re-orientation, public engagement, and policy coherence, thereby reinforcing the transmission and institutionalization of Nigeria's constitutional ethics across governance structures.

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