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Assessing Democratic Backsliding in Nigeria through IIAG 2022–2024: The Imperative for Legislative Actions

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Executive Summary

Recent governance assessments, including the Chandler Institute of Governance's Chandler Good Government Index (CGGI) and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) 2022–2024, indicate a pattern of democratic stagnation and institutional decline in Nigeria. Nigeria ranks 116th globally in the 2025 CGGI and performed below the West African regional average in the IIAG, with particular deterioration in security & rule of law, participation, and economic opportunity, despite modest gains in human development. When compared with selected West African countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mauritius, Nigeria's governance indicators reflect weakening institutional effectiveness, shrinking civic space, persistent insecurity, and limited economic inclusion. Sequel to this state of affairs, this brief recommends:

- There is an urgent need for legislative intervention to reverse democratic backsliding, strengthen institutional accountability, and restore public trust ahead of 2027.
- National Assembly may wish to encourage the Judiciary to establish a special terrorism court in order to fast-track terrorism-related cases and deter would be offenders
- National Assembly is encouraged to effectively oversight MDAs in the communication sector and internet service providers to ensure adequate provision of effective internet services across the country. This will help in strengthening electoral oversight and boost voter education, enhancing transparency through digital electoral processes, and institutionalizing performance-based governance reporting and benchmarks aligned with international standards.
- The relevant Committees of the National Assembly should ensure effective oversight of the defense, security and intelligence sector and prevail on the executive to make the most out of the current temporary military partnership between the Nigeria and the United States to reduce the impact of terrorism to the bearless minimum. This will enable victims of forceful evictions to return to their communities before the 2027 General Elections in order to be able to vote.

1. Background

The 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, produced by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, examines governance performance across 54 African countries over the period of 2021–2022.¹ It assesses

how governments deliver public goods and services across political, social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The 2024 report reveals that governance progress across Africa has stalled, with significant deterioration in security, rule of law, and

¹ Index Report. (2024). 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance. Retrieved from:

<https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024-index-report.pdf>



democratic participation, despite modest improvements in human development and infrastructure. For Nigeria, these continental trends are particularly relevant. Persistent insecurity, declining public trust, governance inefficiencies, and institutional weaknesses threaten democratic consolidation and economic stability. The National Assembly has a constitutional responsibility to provide legislative and oversight interventions to reverse these trends.

While Nigeria remains Africa's largest economy and most populous country, it lags behind smaller but institutionally stronger states such as: Mauritius, Botswana, Cape Verde, and Ghana. In contrast, Nigeria, despite being Africa's largest economy and most populous country, performs below the continental average in governance indicators. Persistent insecurity, weak institutional enforcement, corruption perception challenges, and judicial inefficiencies have constrained its overall governance ranking. IIAG evaluated Governance performance using four major dimensions (pillars). Security & Rule of Law, Participation, Rights & Inclusion, foundations for Economic Opportunity, and Human Development. The 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) shows that overall governance in Africa has stalled since 2022, with shrinking democratic space, particularly in "Security & Rule of Law" and "Participation, Rights & Inclusion.

After years of steady progress, Africa's overall governance has stalled, grinding to a halt in 2022. For almost half of the continent's population, overall governance performance got worse in 2023 than it was

in 2014. The main driver of this is a deepening security crisis and shrinking participatory environment almost all over the continent. This also reflects what is happening at the global level. Escalating conflicts and deepening mistrust in democratic institutions are not specific to Africa. However, it is specifically concerning in Africa because it threatens the progress achieved in economic and social development, as well as the progress yet to build by the continent.

Africa is a huge continent of 54 countries, with highly diverging trends, some with strikingly successful trajectories, and other with concerning warning signs. Countries in Africa have seen mixed performance across the CGI pillars. The region's average score for strong institutions has improved, while those for financial stewardship, global influence & reputation, and helping people rise, have declined, with the remaining two pillars recording flat performance. Of most concern is Financial Stewardship, which has experienced the most sustained decline, as fiscal envelopes tighten and government debt burdens bite across the region," the report added². Despite a relatively better standing in Financial Stewardship, Nigeria's low scores in other areas illustrate the steep task facing policymakers in improving governance and strengthening public institutions

2. Highlight of Nigeria Performance

Despite Nigeria being Africa's largest economy, it continues to struggle with governance challenges across multiple dimensions. Nigeria's overall IIAG governance score has stagnated around (45/100), showing decline since 2022. Nigeria lags behind West African peers

² Adigun, O. (2025). Nigeria ranks 116th in 2025 Good Governance Index, misses Africa's top five. Retrieved from:

<https://nairametrics.com/2025/08/27/nigeria-ranks-116th-in-2025-good-governance-index-misses-africas-top-five/>



such as Ghana (63/100), Senegal (62/100), and Côte d'Ivoire (58/100). Indices analysis showing the trajectory are captured below:

i. Safety & Rule of Law (42/100)
Declining trend):

Nigeria is facing persistent insecurity, including terrorism in the Northeast, banditry in the Northwest, and communal clashes across several states. IIAG reports indicate that deteriorating security is the primary driver of poor rule-of-law scores, which undermine governance, investment, and development. The Weaknesses in law enforcement, judicial inefficiency, and limited access to justice further reduce public trust in institutions. Comparatively, Nigeria's rule-of-law score is well below the regional average ($\approx 50/100$), highlighting a structural deficit in safety and institutional effectiveness. The rising insecurity had restricts citizen participation in economic activity, and also causes persistent lawlessness discourages foreign and domestic investment.

ii. Participation and Right:

Political participation is declining due to low voter turnout, weak civic education, and perceptions of electoral unfairness. Civil liberties and media freedom are contracting, protests and independent reporting face restrictions. Declining civic space and political participation undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions, Nigeria risks further democratic erosion if current trends persist, with IIAG scores reflecting the downward trajectory.

iii. Economic opportunity:

Despite Nigeria's large GDP, governance in economic opportunity remains weak, indicating a mismatch between resources and institutional performance and management. This is as a result of limited access to finance for small businesses and

rural communities, inefficient public sector delivery of services like infrastructure and utilities and high unemployment rate, especially among youth. It Weak economic governance, limits human development, fuels poverty, and can exacerbate insecurity and civic disengagement.

iv. Human development:

Health, education, and social protection indicators has been improved. There is incremental improvement in human development and women inclusion from 2022 to 2024. However, There is inadequate public health infrastructure, Education quality gaps, Limited social protection programs, and Women's inclusion which shows slight improvement but remains well below the regional average. Poor human development outcomes reduce citizen engagement and erode trust in government institutions.

The IIAG 2022–2024³ data paints a sobering picture of Nigeria's governance performance. The democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space threaten legitimacy and stability. Security and economic governance challenges constrain development despite vast resources. Incremental improvements in women's political representation and human development show potential, but structural reforms are urgently needed.

For Nigeria to improve its governance trajectory, legislative action, institutional strengthening, and evidence-based policy interventions must be prioritized. Addressing these gaps will help Nigeria not only recover its regional standing but also ensure sustainable democracy and inclusive development.

Below is an extensive analysis of Nigeria's performance across the IIAG's governance pillars: Safety & Rule of Law, Participation

³ World bank group (2024). Worldwide Governance Indicators. Retrieved from:

<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators>



& Rights, Economic Opportunity, and Human Development.

Table 1: Evidence / IIAG 2022–2024 Highlights (Nigeria)

Indicator	2022 Score	2024 Score	Trend Regional Average
Political Participation	45/100	42/100	50/100
Civil Liberties & Rights	48/100	46/100	54/100
Economic opportunity	40/100	38/100	50/100
Human Development	28/100	30/100	35/100

3. Nigeria Performance and Other West African Countries

African countries leading in democracy are not just holding transparent elections, they are limiting executive power, strengthening courts, and enforcing term limits. Several countries on this list have recorded peaceful transfers of power in recent years, signaling a quiet but steady shift toward electoral maturity and political accountability across diverse African regions.

One of the most credible measurements of democratic governance around the world is the Democracy Index 2024, provided by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). This index assesses countries on five core pillars: electoral processes and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties.

Mauritius ranks highest not just in Africa but also internationally, with an 80.3 score on the Democracy Index, allowing it the status of a full democracy. The political scene is pluralistic, the elections are transparent, and the judiciary commands respect. It means the country builds its

institutions around accountability, with successive governments chickening away from any hint of authoritarianism

Ghana has remained almost at the forefront among the democratic countries of Africa, and a 63.8 score still puts the country pretty much under the category of a flawed democracy, yet it is above the regional average. There is significant improvement in democratic index of Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone from 2022-2024, while that of Senegal had declined.

Senegal has been viewed as a stable island in West Africa for a long time.⁴ With regularly organized elections and peaceful transitions of power, it stands as an ominously resilient democracy. The 5.93 is in itself the evidence supporting the presence of credible electoral mechanisms, but also areas where these have been tested. Here's a clear table showing the 2022 vs 2024 IIAG Overall Governance Scores for selected West African states and the ECOWAS regional average:

Table 2: IIAG Overall Governance Score (2022 - 2024) - West Africa			
Country	2022 Score	2024 Score	Trend / Observation
Nigeria	46.5	45.7	Slight decline; below regional average

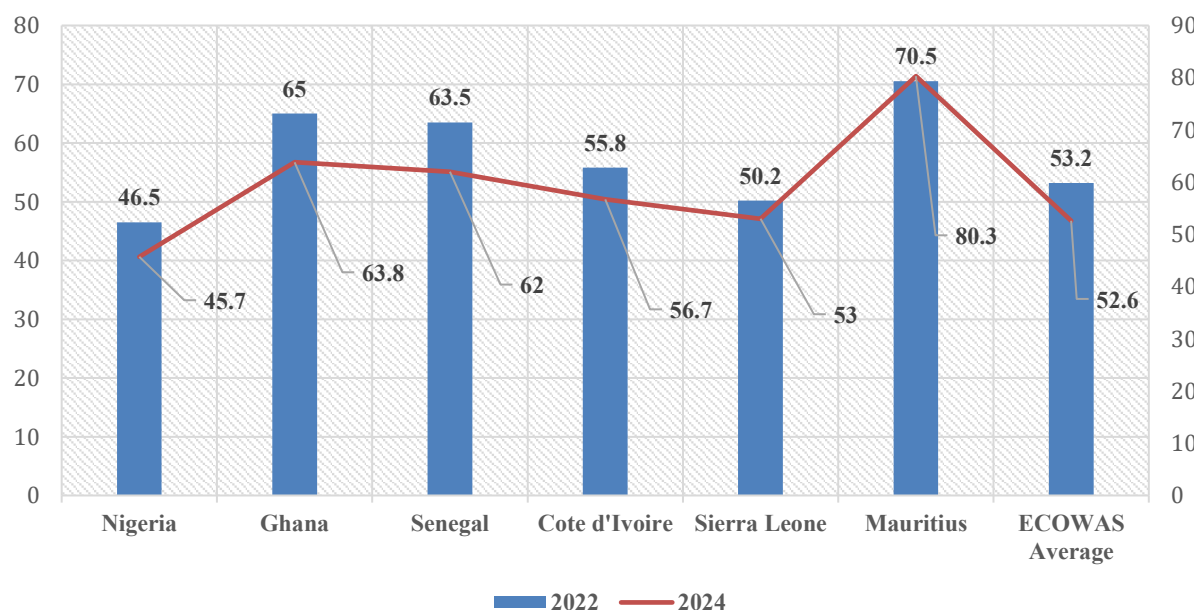
⁴ Olasupo, F. (2025). Top 10 African Countries with the Highest Democracy Index. Retrieved from:

<https://www.africanexponent.com/top-10-african-countries-with-the-highest-democracy-index/>



Ghana	65.0	63.8	High performer; mild decline
Senegal	63.5	62.0	Strong performer; small decline
Côte d'Ivoire	55.8	56.7	Moderate improvement
Sierra Leone	50.2	53.0	Noticeable improvement
Mauritius	70.5	80.3	High performance
ECOWAS Avg.	53.2	52.6	Slight regional stagnation

Figure 1: IIAG Overall Governance Score (2022 - 2024) - West Africa



Nigeria 45.7 overall governance score, lower than regional and continental averages, and showing a deterioration trend (ranked 33rd). Côte d'Ivoire 56.7 overall governance score (ranked 16th in Africa), above both the African and West African averages. Sierra Leone 53.0 highlighted as one of the most improved in Africa, particularly in anti-corruption and transparency scores, performing above the West African average in selected governance dimensions. Ghana 63.8 overall governance score (ranked 8th in Africa), rise above both the Africa and West Africa average. Senegal who scored 62.0 is ranked 9th in Africa and has also rising above the Africa and West Africa average.

4. Areas for Legislative Intervention

To reposition Nigeria as a regional leader ahead of 2027, there is urgent need for legislative intervention to reverse Nigeria's governance decline and strengthen institutional accountability. It is recommended as follows:

- i. There is an urgent need for legislative intervention to reverse democratic backsliding, strengthen institutional accountability, and restore public trust ahead of 2027.
- ii. National Assembly may wish to encourage the Judiciary to establish a special terrorism court in order to fast-track terrorism-related cases and deter would be offenders
- iii. National Assembly is encouraged to effectively oversight MDAs in the communication sector and internet



- service providers to ensure adequate provision of effective internet services across the country. This will help in strengthening electoral oversight and boost voter education, enhancing transparency through digital electoral processes, and institutionalizing performance-based governance reporting and benchmarks aligned with international standards.
- iv. The relevant Committees of the National Assembly should ensure effective oversight of the defense, security and intelligence sector and prevail on the executive to make the most out of the current temporary military partnership between the Nigeria and the United States to reduce the impact of terrorism to the bearless minimum. This will enable victims of forceful evictions to return to their communities before the 2027 General Elections in order to be able to vote.
- v. Amend the electoral law mandating INEC to make voter education a continuous process rather than election season base.
- vi. National Assembly may consider requesting MDAs to submit quarterly governance impact reports to different senate and house committees.
- vii. National Assembly may consider instituting a national governance performance benchmarks/ award aligned with international indices.

5. Conclusion

Nigeria's governance performance is not keeping pace with reforming peers in West Africa. The National Assembly has both constitutional authority and historic responsibility to strengthen democratic institutions, reinforce rule of law, improve security governance, and ensure accountability in public administration. Decisive legislative action now can reverse stagnation and place Nigeria on a sustainable governance recovery path.

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