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THE EFFECT OF LEGISLATIVE AUTONOMY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF NIGERIA'S 9TH SENATE

Chidiebere Godwin UKACHUKWU[1]
PhD Candidate
Department of Political Science,
Federal University, Lokoja.
ukagod2001@yahoo.com

Philip Terzungwe VANDE[2]
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Political Science,
Federal University Lokoja.

ABSTRACT
This study examines the relationship between legislative autonomy and legislative performance in Nigeria, using the 9th Senate as a case study. Despite constitutional provisions guaranteeing legislative independence, Nigeria's legislature has historically been constrained by executive dominance, financial dependence, and weak institutional capacity. These challenges have raised concerns about its ability to effectively perform its constitutional roles of lawmaking, oversight, and representation. The objective of the study was to investigate whether and how legislative autonomy influences the performance of the 9th Senate. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining survey data with key informant interviews involving legislators, parliamentary staff, and civil society actors. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence revealed a strong consensus on the value of autonomy: 96.5% of respondents agreed that autonomy enhances institutional effectiveness, while 93.7% affirmed that it improves the quality and timeliness of laws. Yet, only 21.6% perceived the 9th Senate as operating independently. Interview narratives supported these patterns, explaining that dependence on the executive for budgetary releases weakened committee oversight, while party-controlled leadership recruitment curtailed institutional assertiveness. This combination of numerical trends and experiential accounts highlighted a paradox: although the Senate passed numerous priority bills efficiently, these largely reflected executive preferences rather than independent legislative initiative, thereby limiting the legislature's credibility as a coequal branch of government. The study concludes that legislative autonomy is indispensable for enhancing performance. It recommends full implementation of constitutional provisions on financial independence, reforms in leadership recruitment to reduce partisan capture, sustained capacity development for lawmakers and staff, and the expansion of citizen engagement mechanisms to strengthen accountability and reinforce democratic legitimacy.

Keywords: *Legislative Autonomy, Legislative Performance, 9th Senate, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION
In presidential systems, legislative performance depends largely on autonomy, understood as the capacity to function independently of the executive in agenda-setting, budgeting, and internal procedures (Omotola, 2025). Without such independence, legislatures risk becoming extensions of the executive, undermining the separation of powers and weakening accountability.

In Nigeria, the Senate is constitutionally empowered to shape policy and hold government to account (Udefuna, 2021; Chilaka, Obianua & Idowu, 2021). Yet in practice, autonomy has been constrained by executive influence, partisan politics, and systemic inefficiencies. The 9th Senate (2019–2023) under President Buhari illustrates this tension. While it passed landmark legislation such as the Petroleum Industry Act and the Electoral Act (Senate, 2024), among others, its perceived alignment with the executive led critics to label it a “rubber stamp” (Gbahabo, 2025). The Senate held only 66 plenary sessions in 2021, far short of constitutional expectations (Iroanusi, 2022), thereby reinforcing concerns about legislative diligence and independence. Leadership selection influenced by the presidency (Emeribe, Adaranijo & Ibileye, 2025) further highlights executive dominance. This paradox, substantial legislative output amid weak autonomy, raises key questions. Can a legislature be productive yet subservient? Does legislative output equate to effectiveness in representation and oversight?

The performance of legislatures is widely regarded as a vital indicator of democratic consolidation (Fish, 2006; Chernykh, Doyle & Power, 2017). In Nigeria, several studies have assessed oversight, representation, and lawmaking (Bakare, 2021; Hamalai, 2014; Abraham, 2021; Gbahabo, 2024). However, few have directly linked autonomy to performance outcomes. Existing studies of executive dominance and legislative weakness (Abah & Obiajulu, 2017; Ita, Edet & Onuoha, 2016; Ukachukwu, 2021) often stop short of empirically examining the effect of autonomy. Research on other African legislatures, including those of Kenya and Uganda (Gitau, 2006; Makhanu, 2015; Opalo, 2017), suggests that autonomy correlates with legislative assertiveness, but similar work in Nigeria remains limited.

This study therefore, examines how autonomy shaped the 9th Senate’s lawmaking and oversight functions, drawing on Montesquieu’s theory of separation of powers. It asks whether legislative autonomy leads to improved performance in Nigeria’s presidential democracy

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Legislative Autonomy

Autonomy is a multidimensional concept commonly defined in terms of independence from external control (Potier, 2001; Deligiorgi, 2012). Within legislative studies, it denotes the extent to which parliaments operate free of executive domination. Formanek and Karpowicz (1999) emphasise decision-making independence, while Makhanu (2015) and Breukel (2017) highlight the ability to legislate and exercise oversight without unlawful interference. For the purpose of this study, legislative autonomy refers to the institutional independence of parliament to carry out its functions of lawmaking, oversight, and representation without undue influence. It encompasses control over agenda-setting, financial management, and internal self-regulation. Autonomy is foundational to democratic governance because it enables legislatures to check executive authority and represent citizens effectively (Ukpe 2012; Ukpe 2024).

It is important to note that autonomy is shaped by a range of conditions (Omotola, 2025). The legal framework, particularly constitutional provisions such as Sections 4, 60, 62, and 88 of the 1999 Constitution, formally empower the legislature. Financial autonomy, including first-line charge funding and control of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, strengthens independence. Institutional capacity in terms of skilled staff, research support, and access to information enhances legislative effectiveness. Political dynamics also matter: party politics and executive interference in the selection of presiding officers have been shown to undermine autonomy, while balanced executive, legislative relations tend to foster it. Political will and the broader political culture determine whether legislators are prepared to assert authority, while continuity and stability allow institutions to develop traditions that reinforce independence (Ukachukwu, 2021; Omotola, 2025). These factors highlight that autonomy is not merely a legal question but one embedded in institutional, political, and cultural realities.

The Legislature

The legislature is an elected body vested with the authority to make laws, represent citizens, and oversee the executive (Heywood, 2007; Hamalai, 2014). Beyond its statutory functions, it channels public interests into policy, ensures accountability, and serves as a check on power (Saliu & Muhammad, 2010). Oversight powers include budgetary control, investigations, confirmation of appointments, and impeachment, as provided for in the 1999 Constitution. Committees are central to this role, providing opportunities for specialisation, continuity, and public engagement (NDI, 2006; Hamalai, 2014). While Nigeria's legislature possesses significant formal powers, its independence continues to be undermined by executive dominance, weak institutional capacity, and political patronage.

Legislative Performance

Legislative performance is a contested concept, but it is typically assessed through the core functions of lawmaking, oversight, and representation. Some approaches measure performance in terms of formal powers, others in terms of productivity such as the number of bills passed, committee effectiveness, or public perception (Barkan, 2010; Bakare, 2020). This study adopts a functional approach, focusing on lawmaking and oversight as primary indicators of performance, and considers how autonomy shapes outcomes in these domains.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Legislative Performance and Autonomy in Nigeria

A substantial body of scholarship has examined the relationship between legislative autonomy and institutional performance in Nigeria. Studies generally converge on the point that weak autonomy undermines the legislature's ability to deliver on its core mandates of representation, lawmaking, and oversight (Ita, Edet & Onuoha, 2016; Abah & Obiajulu, 2017; Hamalai, 2014; Bakare, 2021; Gbahabo, 2024).

For example, Ita, Edet and Onuoha (2016) observed that although the National Assembly is constitutionally empowered to legislate, represent, and oversee, its effectiveness has been curtailed by poor constituency engagement, weak public participation, and a compromised oversight function due to executive dominance and corruption. Similarly, Abah and Obiajulu (2017) found that oversight was largely ineffective, partly because legislators themselves were implicated in corrupt practices and because investigative reports were often inconclusive or unenforced.

Recent work by Gbahabo (2024) on the 9th Senate reinforces these concerns. Despite active use of oversight mechanisms, the Senate failed to constrain executive borrowing or influence policy outcomes. This is revealed by the approval of a ₦22.7 trillion loan with minimal scrutiny. Structural barriers such as limited access to information, underfunding, and partisan interference further weakened accountability. Hamalai (2014) examined oversight committees from 2003–2013. The study noted some successes in uncovering inefficiencies and waste but emphasised persistent capacity and resource constraints.

With regard to lawmaking, Bakare (2021) assessed legislative effectiveness using a bill-processing model and found generally low throughput. While some assemblies demonstrated moderate improvement, the majority of bills stalled due to poor drafting skills, weak sponsorship, and procedural bottlenecks. Abraham (2021) similarly highlighted that despite institutional reforms and better-educated members, productivity remained low, with only 20% of proposed bills passed between 1999 and 2019.

In contrast, the House of Representatives (2024) reported significant legislative activity in its first session, introducing 1,351 bills and passing 89. It also processed hundreds of motions and petitions, reflecting a more responsive posture, though public hearings and citizen engagement remained limited. This suggests gradual institutional strengthening, yet challenges of capacity, timeliness, and inclusivity persist.

Beyond Nigeria, comparative studies of African legislatures further illuminate the dynamics of autonomy and performance. Nwogwugwu and Ishola (2019) observed that Nigerian lawmakers perceive oversight as being carried out mainly through committees and budget approvals, yet these mechanisms often fail to meet public expectations due to weak consultation and inadequate problem identification. Suberu (2014) attributes such weaknesses to Nigeria's neo-patrimonial political context, where patronage, rent-seeking, and executive dominance compromise legislative independence.

Studies in Kenya and Uganda reveal similar struggles but also moments of reform-driven improvement. Gitau (2006) documented a rise in legislative independence in Kenya between 1998 and 2002, facilitated by financial autonomy and strengthened committees, which improved scrutiny of executive bills. Makhanu (2015) traced persistent executive dominance in Kenya, noting that despite reforms, informal patronage networks and weak political will limited parliamentary independence. Johnson (2009) compared Uganda and Kenya, showing that internal reformers, financial autonomy, and constituency development funds bolstered legislative independence, though multiparty competition sometimes reinforced executive dominance. Also, Opalo (2017) linked legislative autonomy to electoral outcomes, demonstrating that incumbents in autonomous legislatures are electorally advantaged, while those in weak parliaments face voter backlash. This finding underscores the broader political value of strong legislatures, not just their institutional capacity.

In advanced democracies, legislative capacity is strongly correlated with performance. Rosenthal (1999), studying U.S. state legislatures, conceptualised legislative capacity in terms of staffing, financial resources, and investigative authority. He concluded that well-resourced, independent legislatures perform better in lawmaking and oversight. Blondel (1990) similarly distinguished between legislatures free from government control and those compliant with executive demands, with the former demonstrating stronger democratic effectiveness.

Classical and contemporary scholars also reinforce the centrality of autonomy. Montesquieu (1748) emphasised the separation of powers to prevent tyranny, while Maseko (2013) stressed the importance of financial autonomy for effective legislative oversight. Both perspectives converge on the principle that legislative independence is not merely legal but functional—rooted in resources, institutional culture, and political will.

The empirical evidence shows that legislative autonomy is an indispensable condition for effective performance. In Nigeria, while the legislature has recorded incremental gains in lawmaking and oversight, its performance is persistently undermined by systemic constraints: executive dominance, corruption, limited capacity, weak engagement with citizens, and inadequate financial independence. Comparative evidence from Kenya, Uganda, and other African contexts suggests that reforms such as financial autonomy, stronger committees, and constituency development frameworks can strengthen legislative assertiveness. Findings from advanced democracies further affirm that institutional resources and independence are critical to effective oversight and representation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory of the Doctrine of Separation of Powers. This study adopts Montesquieu's theory of the Doctrine of separation of powers as its theoretical guide. The doctrine, developed in The Spirit of the Laws (1748), advocates for the division of executive, legislative, and judicial powers, each acting as a check on the others to prevent tyranny and safeguard liberty. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria reflects this principle by allocating distinct roles to the three arms of government. However, frequent frictions, especially between the executive and legislature, reveal the difficulties of translating the principle into practice. Legislative autonomy remains critical for ensuring accountability, protecting rights, and strengthening democracy, yet the dominance of the executive—through control of resources, appointments, and state machinery, continues to weaken this independence.

Applying this theory to the Nigerian context, separation of powers offers a useful lens for examining how legislative autonomy shapes institutional performance. A legislature that enjoys independence is better placed to exercise oversight, scrutinise public spending, and represent citizens' interests without undue interference. Conversely, weak autonomy undermines legislative performance, leading to poor accountability, ineffective oversight, and the erosion of democratic governance. However, a major critique of Montesquieu's framework is that it assumes a clear and balanced distribution of powers, which rarely exists in practice. In Nigeria, the executive often dominates, and informal institutions such as patronage and party loyalty blur the formal boundaries of separation. Thus, while the theory provides a normative foundation for understanding legislative autonomy and performance, it must be complemented with frameworks that capture the practical realities of power relations in emerging democracies.

RESEARCH METHODS

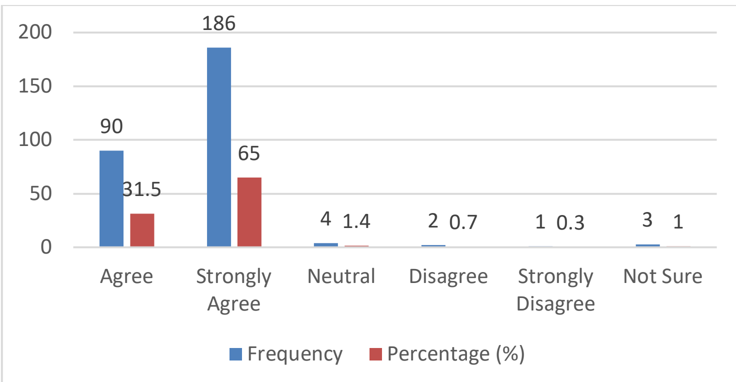
This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research designs to examine the effects of legislative autonomy on performance using the 9th Senate. The use of both research designs enabled the strength of one approach to complement the weakness of the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For the quantitative aspect of the data collection, a total of 324 questionnaires were distributed electronically and in person. Of these, only 257 (79.3%) questionnaires were duly completed. Qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews that were conducted with 8 purposively selected legislators, committee chairpersons, and policy researchers at the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS). In addition, documentary evidence was employed to provide additional data. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to generate trends on the effects of legislative autonomy and performance. Qualitative evidence was thematically analysed to uncover recurring issues and narratives. The integration of both strands provided a holistic understanding of how legislative autonomy or its absence affects institutional performance in Nigeria.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Examine whether and how legislative autonomy affects performance.

Figure 1 indicates overwhelming support for the view that legislative autonomy enhances National Assembly performance. Out of 246 respondents, 96.5% agreed (31.5%) or strongly agreed (65%) that autonomy strengthens lawmaking, oversight, and representation. Only a negligible minority disagreed (0.7%), strongly disagreed (0.3%), or were uncertain (1%). This strong consensus underscores that independence from executive interference is widely seen as vital for improving institutional effectiveness, accountability, and the overall credibility of the legislature's performance.

Figure 1: Legislative Autonomy enhances the performance of the National Assembly



Source: Field Work, June 2025

Table 1 shows overwhelming agreement among respondents (96.1%) on the importance of the National Assembly's independence in decision-making. Specifically, 27.6% agreed and 68.5% strongly agreed that autonomy is essential for shielding the legislature from external influence. Only 1.7% were neutral and 2.1% disagreed, with no strong disagreement or uncertainty. This strong consensus highlights broad recognition that legislative autonomy is central to the integrity, credibility, and effectiveness of the National Assembly, particularly in resisting interference from the executive, parties, or interest groups.

Table 1: The Independence of the National Assembly is crucial to making decisions free from external influence

Category of Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	79	27.6
Strongly Agree	196	68.5
Neutral	5	1.7
Disagree	6	2.1
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Not sure	0	0

Source: Field Work, June 2025

This perspective is supported by key informants' interviews. According to PS4, there is a relationship between legislative autonomy and performance. However, the independence of the National Assembly is only on paper.

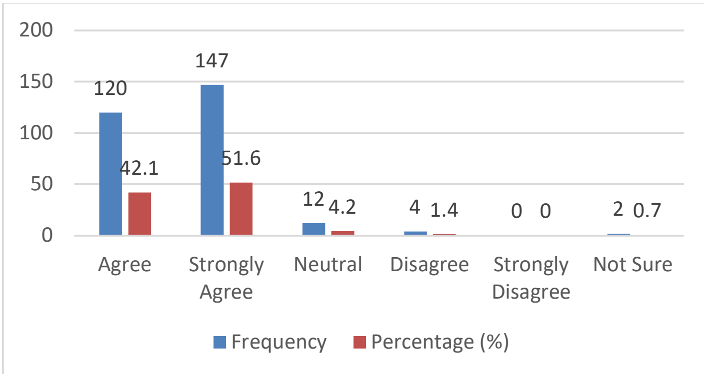
In theory, the legislature is independent, but in practice, autonomy is undermined by the executive's financial dominance, which often shapes legislative decision-making. This makes the Assembly reactive rather than proactive, with external pressures, especially from the executive, heavily influencing outcomes. Adequate funding of committees would reduce overreliance on oversight alone. Past experiences show that when resources and procedures were under legislative control, committees were more effective, responsive, and better positioned to provide checks and balances.

More so, informant Sen2 reported that:
Legislative autonomy is not just symbolic; it directly affects how we perform. Without it, we're essentially an arm of the executive. But where autonomy exists, lawmakers can prioritise constituency needs, initiate bills based on public interest, and scrutinise executive actions. The moment the executive begins to dictate our agenda, the quality of legislation and oversight drops significantly (HoR4, Legislator, Personal Interviews, 13 June 2025, 6.00 pm, National Assembly Complex).

Another interview with a member of the civil society reveals that:
You see, when the legislature does not control its own budget or administrative structure, its ability to function independently is weakened. During the 8th Assembly, the National Assembly had some level of autonomy, and that made oversight more robust. We did not have to wait for directives from the executive to act; we could initiate inquiries and hold agencies accountable without fear of budget cuts or political backlash (CS7, Civil Society, Personal Interviews, 13 June 2025, 3.00 pm, NILDS Office).

Next, the study examined how legislative autonomy influences the performance of the 9th Senate, drawing on both survey and key informant data. Figure 2 shows strong agreement that autonomy enhances the quality and timeliness of lawmaking, with 93.7% of respondents (42.1% agreeing, 51.6% strongly agreeing) affirming this link. Only 5.6% were neutral, disagreed, or uncertain, while none strongly disagreed. This overwhelming consensus suggests that greater independence—particularly from executive dominance, party control, or bureaucratic delays—positions the legislature to enact more effective, responsive, and relevant laws, thereby strengthening its overall lawmaking performance and institutional credibility.

Figure 2: Legislative autonomy positively influences the quality and timely enactment of laws



Source: Field Work, June 2025

On the question of whether Legislative autonomy enabled the 9th Senate to effectively oversee the executive branch and its agencies, the data in Table 2 reveal a strong positive perception of the impact of legislative autonomy on the oversight function of the 9th Senate. A total of 70.6% of respondents (i.e. Agree [35.3%] and Strongly Agree [35.3%]) affirm that legislative autonomy enabled the Senate to effectively carry out oversight of the executive branch and its agencies.

However, a notable 25.5% of respondents expressed either neutrality (12.9%) or outright disagreement (i.e. Disagree [12.6%] and Strongly Disagree [2.5%]). This suggests that while a majority recognise the role of autonomy in enhancing oversight, a significant minority remain unconvinced, possibly due to observed lapses in enforcement, political interference, or weak institutional capacity.

Table 2: Legislative autonomy enabled the 9th Senate to effectively oversee the executive branch and its agencies

Responses Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	101	35.3
Strongly Agree	101	35.3
Neutral	37	12.9
Disagree	36	12.6
Strongly Disagree	7	1.4
Not sure	0	0

Source: Field Work, June 2025

Furthermore, the results in Table 3 reveal that a significant majority of respondents (70.3%), comprising those who agreed (43.1%) and strongly agreed (27.2%), affirm that legislative autonomy enhanced stronger checks and balances between the 9th Senate and the executive branch. This reflects a widespread perception that autonomy enabled the legislature to exercise

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its oversight role more assertively, promoting greater institutional accountability and democratic governance.

Meanwhile, 13.8% of respondents were neutral, indicating a level of uncertainty or ambivalence regarding the extent of this impact. Additionally, a combined 15.9% of participants (14.8% disagree; 1.1% strongly disagree) believe that legislative autonomy did not significantly strengthen the system of checks and balances, possibly due to partisan alignment, executive dominance, or inadequate committee action.

Table 3: Legislative autonomy led to stronger checks and balances between the Senate (Legislature) and the executive

Category of Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	122	43.1
Strongly Agree	77	27.2
Neutral	39	13.8
Disagree	42	14.8
Strongly Disagree	3	1.1
Not Sure	0	0

Source: Field Work, June 2025

The data in Table 4 shows that a majority of respondents (67.3%), made up of those who agreed (49.8%) and strongly agreed (17.5%), believe that increased legislative autonomy enabled the 9th Senate to pass laws more efficiently. This suggests a strong correlation between autonomy and legislative productivity, likely due to reduced executive interference, better control of the legislative agenda, and enhanced internal organisation.

However, 30.2% of respondents were either neutral (17.2%) or disagreed (13.0%), with 2.5% strongly disagreeing. This segment reflects a critical view that either autonomy was not effectively utilised or that other institutional and political bottlenecks may have undermined legislative efficiency despite formal independence.

Table 4: The 9th Senate was able to pass laws more efficiently due to increased legislative autonomy

Responses Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	142	49.8
Strongly Agree	50	17.5
Neutral	49	17.2
Disagree	37	13
Strongly Disagree	7	0
Not sure	0	0

Source: Field Work, June 2025

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The data presented in Table 5 reveals that a significant majority of respondents believe that the autonomy of the Senate contributed to a more efficient and streamlined lawmaking process during the 9th Senate. Specifically, 48.2% of the respondents agreed, while an additional 22.5% strongly agreed with the assertion. This amounts to a combined 70.7% who expressed a positive perception of the relationship between legislative autonomy and lawmaking efficiency.

On the other hand, 14.4% of the respondents disagreed, and 2.1% strongly disagreed, representing a combined 16.5% who were not convinced that autonomy improved the efficiency of the lawmaking process. Meanwhile, 12.7% remained neutral, indicating neither agreement nor disagreement. Notably, none of the respondents selected "Not sure," suggesting that participants had formed definite views on the matter.

Table 5: The autonomy of the Senate contributed to a more efficient and streamlined lawmaking Process

Responses Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	137	48.2
Strongly Agree	64	22.5
Neutral	36	12.7
Disagree	41	14.4
Strongly Disagree	6	2.1
Not sure	0	0

Source: Field Work, June 2025

The data in Table 6 illustrates the perception of respondents regarding the impact of legislative autonomy on the 9th Senate’s capacity to represent constituents' interests in lawmaking. A combined 62.1% of respondents agreed (44.6%) or strongly agreed (17.5%) that increased autonomy enhanced representational capacity. This majority view suggests that autonomy may have allowed senators greater independence in agenda setting, prioritisation of local issues, and reduced executive interference, thereby strengthening constituency representation.

However, 17.2% disagreed and 3.9% strongly disagreed, indicating that a significant minority of respondents remained unconvinced of the link between autonomy and effective representation. These responses may reflect perceived disconnects between legislative outputs and local needs or persisting elite capture within legislative processes. The 16.8% neutrality rate points to a notable portion of respondents who were either indifferent or uncertain, perhaps due to a lack of visible evidence that legislative activities reflected constituents’ interests or due to limited public engagement with Senate activities.

Table 6: Legislative autonomy improved the 9th Senate's ability to represent the interests of constituents in lawmaking

Responses Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	127	44.6
Strongly Agree	50	17.5
Neutral	48	16.8
Disagree	49	17.2
Strongly Disagree	11	3.9
Not sure	0	0

Source: Field Work, June 2025

The study, through key informant interviews, explored how legislative autonomy shaped the performance of the 9th Senate. Respondents highlighted that autonomy improved the quality and timeliness of lawmaking, citing the passage of the Petroleum Industry Act, 2021, which had stalled for nearly two decades. The Senate fast-tracked its passage, demonstrating independence from executive approval. Similarly, the Finance Act was passed swiftly because the Senate controlled its calendar, reducing executive bottlenecks and allowing greater focus on substance. Autonomy also encouraged more private members' bills, enabling senators to represent constituency needs—such as proposals on state policing and youth employment—beyond federal policy priorities.

Respondents further noted that autonomy strengthened oversight. The Senate conducted rigorous investigations, such as uncovering N81.5 billion in irregular spending by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) within five months, exposing mismanagement despite political sensitivities. Additionally, the Senate asserted its oversight role by calling for the removal of service chiefs over persistent insecurity, a bold move that would have been unlikely without greater independence.

Discussion of Findings

The study establishes a strong and consistent link between legislative autonomy and legislative performance in Nigeria. Both survey and interview data affirm that autonomy is not simply desirable but fundamental to legislative effectiveness. Survey findings show near-unanimous agreement: 96.5% of respondents affirmed that autonomy directly influences performance, while 96.1% stressed that the legislature must operate independently to fulfil its constitutional mandate. This consensus reflects lived experience, as legislators and staff pointed to financial and procedural dependence on the executive as a major constraint on oversight, lawmaking, and representation.

Interview evidence reinforced this reality. Legislators and parliamentary staff highlighted how reliance on the executive for funding undermines the independence of committees and weakens oversight credibility. This aligns with Rosenthal's argument that control over finances, staffing, and rules is central to institutional performance, as well as Suberu's analysis of how executive control has historically limited Nigeria's legislature. Comparative insights also confirm these

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patterns: Gitau noted that weak autonomy reduced East African legislatures to ceremonial roles, while Johnson argued that parliaments function best when shielded from executive interference. Nigeria's 8th National Assembly under Bukola Saraki illustrates how relative autonomy and cohesion can strengthen assertiveness.

The 9th Senate (2019–2023) provides a striking case study. Only 21.6% of respondents believed it operated independently, while 78.4% disagreed. Interviews described it as "executive-friendly," with oversight viewed as symbolic rather than substantive. Although the Senate efficiently passed priority bills such as the Petroleum Industry Act and Finance Acts, these were seen as products of executive alignment rather than legislative assertiveness. Party dominance in leadership selection entrenched loyalty to the Presidency, limiting the Senate's capacity to act as an effective check. Civil society respondents further noted weak institutional memory, knowledge gaps among legislators, and inadequate capacity-building as obstacles to performance.

To address these challenges, respondents proposed strengthening financial and operational independence, especially through the full implementation of Section 121(3) of the Constitution on fiscal autonomy. However, legal provisions alone were seen as insufficient without consistent practice. Other recommendations included reforming leadership selection, enhancing training and technical expertise, and establishing independent research and budget offices. Broader reforms were also suggested, such as constitutional amendments to clarify legislative powers, mechanisms for institutional continuity, and deeper citizen–legislature engagement to reinforce legitimacy.

Recommendations and Conclusions

This chapter reviewed the study on Legislative Autonomy and Performance in the Nigerian National Assembly: An Examination of the 9th Senate. The research interrogated how legislative autonomy, or its absence, shapes institutional performance within the Nigerian Senate, situating the analysis in the broader struggle for balance between the executive and legislature in Nigeria's democracy. Guided by principal–agent theory and institutionalism, the study pursued three objectives: (1) to examine the nature of legislative autonomy in the Senate; (2) to assess its impact on the performance of the 9th Senate; and (3) to propose measures for strengthening autonomy and effectiveness.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combined surveys, interviews with senators, aides, staff, and civil society actors, alongside secondary data from parliamentary records and scholarly works. Thematic analysis revealed that although Nigeria's constitutional framework and reforms like the First-Line Charge formally guarantee legislative independence, practical autonomy remains constrained by executive dominance, partisan influence, and weak institutional capacity.

The major findings showed that limited autonomy compromised the Senate's ability to provide oversight, enact robust legislation, and restrain executive excesses. Financial dependence, party loyalty, and informal patronage networks created an environment of legislative passivity, especially in responding to constitutional violations, fiscal mismanagement, and security challenges. The study recommends that there is need to consolidate the financial independence of the National Assembly so as to reduce partisan capture, strengthen committee expertise, and deepen public–civil society engagement to demand accountability. Overall, the study concludes that autonomy is both a prerequisite and determinant of legislative performance. In Nigeria's 9th Senate, constitutional guarantees did not translate into substantive independence, allowing executive dominance to weaken oversight, legislative impact, and public trust in democratic governance.

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