

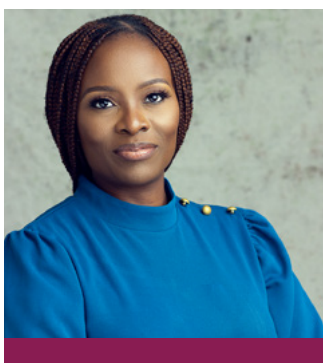
# The Challenges of **Good Governance, Ethics & Accountability in Nigerian Leadership**



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This document reflects views and opinions exchanged by a select group of Nigerian civil society leaders on 14 January 2021 during a roundtable discussion convened by **Africa Practice** and moderated by **Onyebuchi Ajufo** for Stories Africa. *The organisers wish to thank ThisDay, New African and the African Leadership Institute for their support.*

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## Teju Abisoeye

Teju Abisoeye is the [Executive Secretary of the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund \(LSETF\)](#). She is a lawyer with extensive experience in development finance, project planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian projects, government interventions and investment opportunities. She is a [2021 Amujae Leader of the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Centre](#).



## Dr Fatima Akilu

Fatima Akilu is a psychologist and a public speaker in the areas of [Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism \(CVE\)](#) and [Counter Terrorism](#) and the [Executive Director of Neem Foundation](#). She is the former Director of Behavioural Analysis and Strategic Communication at the Office of the National Security Adviser in Nigeria.



## Samson Itodo

Samson Itodo is the [Head of Yiaga Africa](#), an organisation promoting democratic governance and youth participation in Africa through research, capacity development and policy advocacy. He is a [2017 Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellow](#).



## 'Gbenga Sesan

'Gbenga Sesan is the [Executive Director of Paradigm Initiative](#), a pan-African social enterprise working on enhancing digital inclusion and digital rights, with regional offices in Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia and Zimbabwe. He is a [2007 Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellow](#) and a [2020/2021 Stanford Digital Civil Society Fellow](#).



## Onyebuchi Ajufu - Moderator

Buchi is [Associate Director at Africa Practice](#) and [directs Client Servicing for the Group in Nigeria](#). She is an advocacy specialist who has supported foundations and the private sector to promote public policy reform in a wide range of areas including nutrition, financial inclusion, access to water, education, health and wellbeing.

## Context

Nigeria is struggling to find and build the appropriate political and governance institutions to administer a large, youthful and ethnically diverse population in the 21st century. The governance model that the current generation of political leaders inherited needs to adapt to meet changing societal dynamics, the increasing role of technology and the demands of changing demographics.

As Nigeria enters its second recession in five years, the widening gulf which now exists between the country's political elites and those they govern is not simply a matter of wealth, it is also one of empathy. The World Bank estimates have projected that 7 million more people will be tipped into poverty in 2021 due to the pandemic.

The dire state of the country's economy and state of security has - for the average Nigerian - created the perception that the nation's political elites have different social and political values from them, and that they no longer work in solidarity with them.

The **#EndSars movement** was a manifestation of these divisions and frustration with established governance structures. Against this backdrop, a small group of civil society leaders convened to exchange views on ways to improve the state of governance in Nigeria, and specifically ways to improve the social compact which has eroded in the eyes of many citizens, particularly the youth.

Figure 1



## Governance in regression?

Figure 2



In the 2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), Nigeria scores only 45.5% (average across all governance indicators) and ranks 34th out of 54 countries. The country did not fare any better on the 2020 Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index, where governance was placed within the weak spectrum, economic transformation within the very limited spectrum, and political transformation within the highly defective spectrum.

## Inclusion

In the twenty-first century, no conversation about governance and leadership can take place without acknowledging the concept of inclusion. While inclusion in Nigeria is not as elaborated as it is in more established democracies, calls for stronger youth and gender participation have been increasing, in common with much of the rest of Africa.

### Youth representation

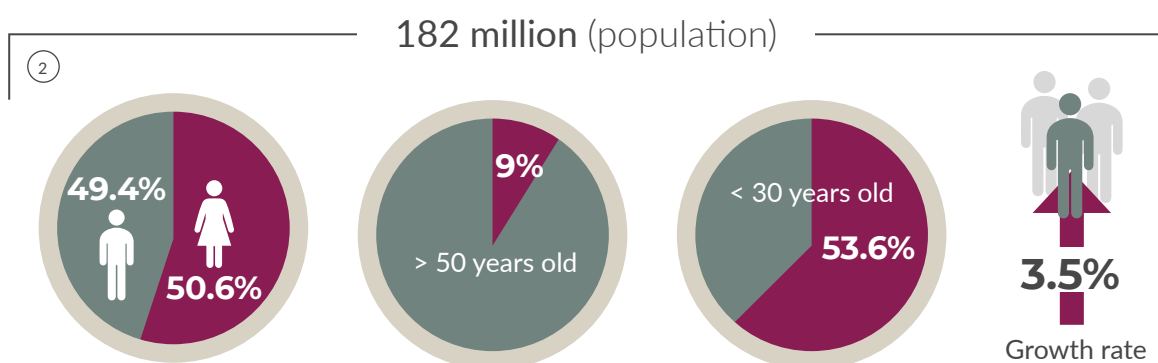


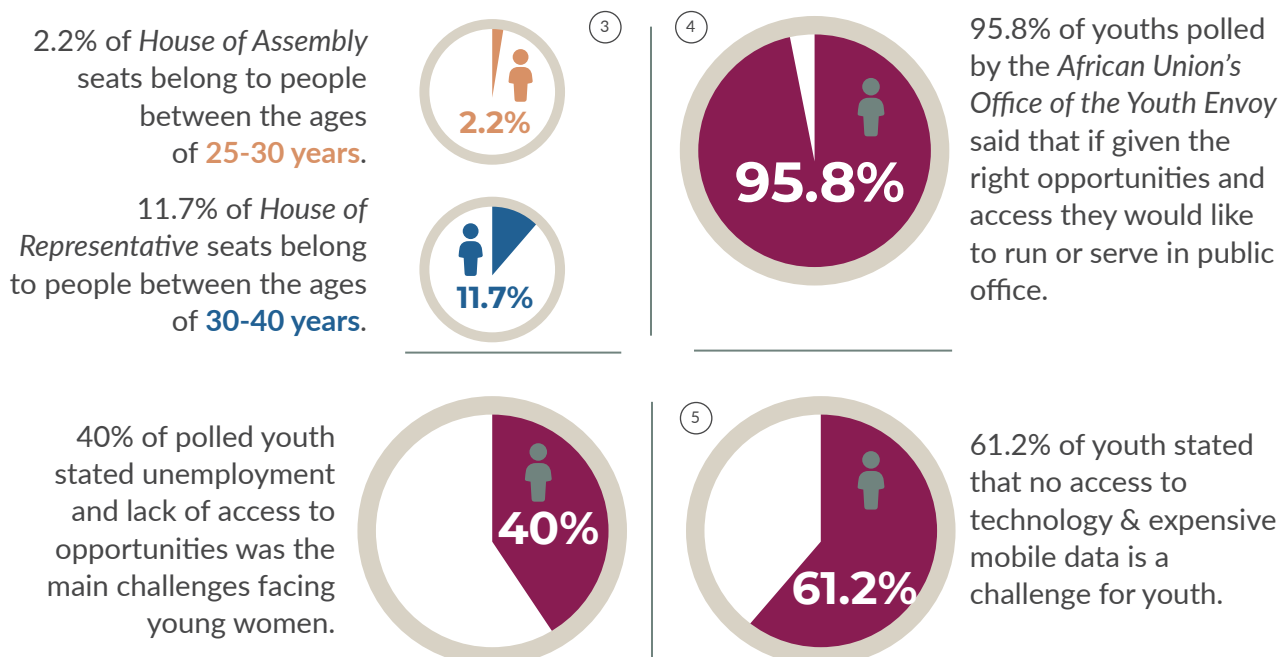
Nigeria's bulging youth population continues to be heavily underrepresented in governance circles. To date all of Nigeria's civilian heads of state have been older than fifty year of age. A combination of structural and systematic exclusionary practices is to blame.

Godfatherism and the weaponization of wealth are commonly meted out by Nigerian political elites when recruiting youth, as Samson Itodo, the founder of *Yiaga Africa* and convenor of *Not Too Young to Run*, explains -

*"This defective recruitment approach should lead to a re-evaluation of how we recruit our leaders—within and beyond the political system."*

Itodo's observation underscores Nigeria's current system of recruitment into politics, which is not meritocratic, and because of this, many well-intentioned and capable youths are exempted from decision-making, with no seat at the table.



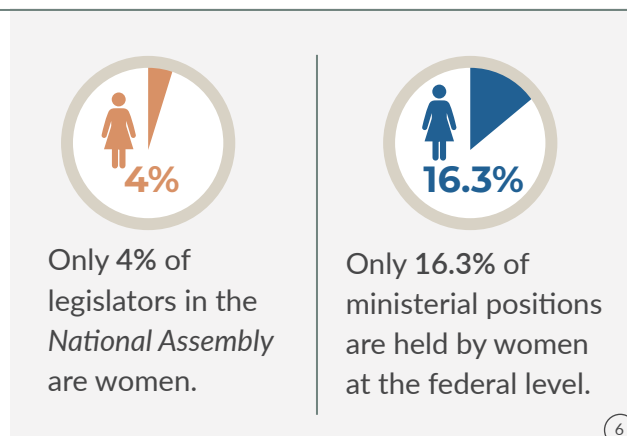


The panel cautioned that stronger youth representation in itself is not a solution, due to what can be described as the absence of a servant leadership culture. Harsh economic realities and the allure of political wealth have led many young people to view public office first and foremost, as their ticket out of poverty – a culture that has been cultivated by successive generations. To resolve this, Teju Abisoye, the Executive Secretary of **Lagos State Employment Trust Fund**, (LSETF), says that -

*“We must inspire our youths with the right examples, showing and teaching them the reality of exactly what it takes to hold public office. The onus must be on society to reframe its political priorities, and to refocus our expectations and perception of public service, in order to overcome prevailing and pejorative views.”*

## Gender representation

On the subject of inclusion, the importance of gender representation was highlighted by the discussants. Recognizing that Nigeria's patriarchy has deep roots is an essential first step towards addressing female under-representation in the nation's governance systems, the panel concluded.



3. How Youth Fared in 2019 Elections

4, 5. Africa Youth Lead Policy Paper: Facts & Figures of Africa Youth Agency, Challenges and Recovery Roadmap on COVID-19 [www.au.int](http://www.au.int)

6. National Assembly Federal Republic of Nigeria: <https://www.nassnig.org/>

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The **COVID-19 pandemic** has reinforced patriarchal tendencies. The combination of school closures and economic hardship has conspired to lead many families to marry off their daughters for economic gain, one panelist noted. More generally, the pandemic has led to a re-domestication of women and a regression in the progress achieved since the advent of the **#MeToo movement**. Consequently, the urgency we attach to challenging bias and stereotypical representations that perpetuate harmful gender norms, is now more acute than ever. Fast-tracking women in sectors with outsized impact on our society - like public office - should assume a greater priority.

The fact that Nigeria remains characterised by patriarchy and hierarchical leadership, with older men occupying senior roles, both underscores and exacerbates the gender challenge. **Dr. Fatima Akilu**, founder of the **Neem Foundation** noted that to drive any true change -

*“... it is imperative that we confront the culture of gatekeeping, as research has shown that once women are allowed into positions of authority they perform very well.”*

Taking a bottom to top approach can contribute to tearing down societal gates put up against women, including both cultural and religious instruments of subjugation.

The reason traditional pathways into politics and public administration work best for men is that they were designed that way, consciously or unconsciously. New pathways that will open more entry points for women must be created. Simultaneously, more women must be inspired to want to occupy public office roles. For this to happen, it's imperative that women see themselves in the examples they are shown, and therefore imperative that women from all backgrounds are attracted and promoted into politics and public administration.

At the same time, identity politics continues to undermine electoral democracy in Nigeria, restricting the viability of all candidates, irrespective of gender or ethnicity. **Samson Itodo** emphasised this point, saying -

*“Representation goes beyond fulfilling a democratic ideal. When we speak about representation, we must ask ourselves the question, for what? It is essential that women, young people or persons with disabilities, when included in governance systems, are actually empowered to make decisions that can lift people out of poverty”.*

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## Transparency & Accountability



### Technology

Technology is a valuable tool for enhancing governance and accountability. By democratizing internet access and leveraging technology to open up more channels for civic engagement, inclusiveness can be strengthened. Technology can reduce entry barriers for persons who might otherwise be excluded from participatory democracy and policy debate. The intersection between technology and governance in some cases extends beyond formal channels such as e-governance, to social media and text messaging. Although social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and more recently, Clubhouse, are popular platforms for political discourse, there's growing evidence that 'lower-tech' messaging platforms like Whatsapp or Signal, are being exploited as safe spaces for dialogue and debate. **Gbenga Sesan**, the CEO of **Paradigm Initiative**, made the case for embracing these as tools for inclusion -

*“As we look to technology as a tool for civic engagement and participation, it's important that we don't focus only on the most expensive and the best looking, but instead, we consider the efficacy of the platform.”*

Technology can both democratise debate and improve policy advocacy. A wide spectrum of platforms should be harnessed in the panel's view, or else we run the risk of perpetuating 'the echo chamber effect' - a term used to reflect conformity of opinions resulting from social media fragmentation.

Technological exclusion and the unconscious dismissal of different manifestations of technology was cited by Dr Akilu as a cause for concern, and is most prolific in areas where insecurity proliferates. **Dr Akilu** said that -

*“Harnessing technology as a tool of inclusion mitigates the prevalence of insecurity”.*



The Neem Foundation which provides trauma services in IDP camps across Nigeria has leveraged technology in areas where security and government presence is limited. The Foundation was able to provide trauma services to up to 7,000 people by leveraging mobile penetration and access.

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While the Federal government does make use of social media as a tool for public communication, it remains a reluctant adopter, the panel observed. The panel also noted that social media can be both a destabilizing force, as well a powerful tool for enhancing governance and accountability. The disputed elections in the U.S.A and the weaponization of social media platforms by nefarious groups, are a case in point. The decision by certain technology firms to de-platform President Trump in the aftermath of the January 6th Capitol insurgency, drew attention to some of the moral challenges associated with regulating social media. Their decisions were met with criticism from leading democrats in Europe, including Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel. Finding the right balance is a challenge for all regulators, and the federal government would be wise to consult extensively to identify the right path for Nigeria.

The emergence of the **Social Media Bill** in Nigeria merited specific consideration by our panel. In this case, the government's response was characterised as being less motivated by the need to standardize norms, and more about exercising control. 'Gbenga Sesan highlighted this, saying -

*“While disinformation and misinformation are genuine concerns, one of the solutions to combating the problem is proactive disclosure by the government.”*

He cited the **Nigeria Centre for Disease Control** (NCDC) as a great example of the government's ability to leverage social media to combat fake news. Technology can contribute to good governance and accountability, by providing a channel for publicising commitments and statements, and helping to keep people and institutions accountable for them.



### Public-Private Partnerships

More consultation and collaboration with the private sector can serve society well. Partnerships are the foundation on which progress is built. Diversity in ideas, resources, networks and expertise creates better and more robust results; they reduce waste and can overcome infrastructure gaps. They can be a valuable mechanism for ensuring continuity and accountability in the delivery of government policies and services. What's more, they can put in place some checks and balances as well as greater levels of accountability given the shared decision-making and shared resource allocation processes as has been evidenced by the **Lagos State Employment Trust Fund** (LSETF).



Additionally, civil society organisations have a vital role to play in advancing accountability in service delivery as initiatives like **BudgIT**, which has afforded the public visibility on government expenditure, has shown. Such tools equip citizens with the information they need to hold leaders accountable. **Dr Akilu** underscored the crucial role that a coordinated response from civil society actors can achieve. She noted that -

*“When civil society comes together in a more united front, we have more strength and more capacity to influence.”*



Good governance cannot exist without strong ethics and professionalism in the civil service. **Teju Abisoye** asserts that -

*“The efficacy of the Nigerian civil service rests in the hands of capable and qualified workers”.*

The example set by high quality leaders is the best way to foster the values of public service. Nigeria needs a citizen-centric, merit-based civil service, whose senior leaders have been appointed based on proven integrity and competence in public service. We need to breed a civil service ethos that demonstrates a commitment to service and empathy, zero-tolerance for corruption, and which embraces technology to bring public services closer to all Nigerians. Those who refuse to embrace transparency and technology, should be assumed to be both purveyors of, and perpetrators of dishonesty and corruption.

## Conclusion

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The democratic gains we have witnessed since the 1990s have been hampered by the glaring absence of widespread values-based leadership. Poor leadership continues to impede the realisation of our potential as a nation.

As we review what is required for good leadership, Onyebuchi Ajufo, Director at Africa Practice, posits that efforts to promote good leadership need to focus on inclusive systems and institutions required to breed good leadership, rather than the individuals, their personalities or where they come from.

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Inclusive governance - the full and effective participation of all sections of society - provides the surest mechanism for improving accountability and the quality of public service. To realise its vast potential as a nation, Nigeria must strive to ensure that historically marginalised groups, such as women and youth, are better represented in the nation's governance structures, while also seeking to cultivate courageous servant leadership at all levels of society.

Fostering a culture of servant leadership requires intentional action from those in government and concerned stakeholders. To have good leaders, we must elect good leaders, and to elect good leaders we must be equipped with the necessary information and tools to make informed choices. We must recognise the power of our voice and play an increased role in calling for accountability from our leaders. A democratic government is a government of the people, by the people and most importantly, for the people.

In the words of Jackie Chimhanzi, CEO of the [African Leadership Institute](#) -

*“Servant leadership is the essence of good leadership, it should never be about yourself, it should be about the people you serve.”*

