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Good Governance and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria: A Study of Mbaitoli Local Government Area, Imo State

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ABSTRACT

More than two decades after Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999, many citizens still question whether elected government has delivered the welfare, security and accountability that democracy promises. This study examined the relationship between good governance and sustainable democracy in Nigeria, using Mbaitoli Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State as the unit of analysis for the period 2020 to 2025. The study adopted a qualitative documentary design. Data were drawn from the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the Electoral Act 2022, court judgments, election observation reports, official statistics, governance indices, peer-reviewed literature and verified press reports, and were analysed through thematic content analysis. Social contract theory provided the framework. Three findings emerged. First, gaps between electoral reform on paper and electoral practice, shown in disputed governorship and local government elections, have weakened citizens' trust in the vote as an instrument of accountability. Second, the over-centralised practice of Nigerian federalism, and especially state control of local government through caretaker and sole-administrator arrangements, has denied Mbaitoli residents elected and accountable local government for long periods. Third, identity-based grievances and the insecurity associated with separatist agitation have disrupted civic life and service delivery in the LGA and across Imo State. The study concludes that democracy in Nigeria cannot be sustained by periodic elections alone, but depends on governance that keeps the terms of the social contract. It recommends faithful implementation of the 2024 Supreme Court judgement on local government autonomy, reform of state electoral commissions, and inclusive approaches to security and identity grievances.

Keywords: Good Governance; Sustainable Democracy; Local Government Autonomy; Electoral Integrity; Social Contract; Imo State

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Introduction

Nigeria returned to civil rule on 29 May 1999, after almost three decades in which military regimes had governed the country for all but a few years. The transition to the Fourth Republic was received with hope that representative government would bring stability, the rule of law, and better public services. Democracy was expected not only to give citizens a voice in choosing their leaders, but also to make those leaders answerable for how they used public power and resources (Diamond, 1999; Linz & Stepan, 1996).

These expectations rest on a close link between democracy and good governance. Good governance refers to the manner in which public authority is exercised in managing a country's economic and social resources for development (World Bank, 1992). Its widely accepted features include participation, the rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity, effectiveness and accountability. Kaufmann et al. (2011) grouped these features into six measurable dimensions: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption. When these qualities are present, citizens have reasons to accept democratic institutions; when they are absent, democracy may survive in form but lose its substance.

Nigeria's experience since 1999 shows this tension clearly. Elections have been held regularly, and power has changed hands between parties at the federal level, most notably in 2015. Yet many studies describe

the Fourth Republic as marked by disputed elections, corruption, insecurity, weak institutions and poor service delivery (Othman & Okpe, 2021; Abumbe & Owa, 2024). Turnout in the 2023 presidential election was 26.72 per cent, the lowest since 1999 (Dataphyte, 2023), and Nigeria scored 26 out of 100 on Transparency International's 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index, unchanged from the previous year (ThisDay, 2026). Such indicators suggest that the relationship between citizens and the state remains fragile.

Much of the debate on governance and democracy in Nigeria has been conducted at the national level. Yet most citizens experience the state through state and local institutions: the roads they use, the schools and health centres near them, the security of their communities, and the councils that are meant to represent them. Local government is the tier of government closest to the people, and the 1999 Constitution guarantees "a system of local government by democratically elected local government councils" (Section 7(1)). Examining governance and democracy at this level can therefore show how national problems take shape in ordinary communities.

Mbaitoli Local Government Area, in the Owerri senatorial zone of Imo State, provides a useful case. The LGA covers about 204 square kilometres, has its headquarters at Nwaorieubi, and recorded a population of about 237,000 at the 2006 census (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009). It lies close to Owerri, the state capital, and has been affected by the same disputed elections, local government administrative practices and insecurity that have shaped politics across Imo State since 2020. This study examines good governance and sustainable democracy in Nigeria with specific reference to Mbaitoli LGA between 2020 and 2025.

Statement of the Problem

The return to democratic rule in 1999 raised high expectations. More than twenty-five years later, many Nigerians are still waiting for the social welfare, justice, equity, infrastructure, poverty reduction and employment that democratic government was expected to deliver. In Imo State, the unemployment rate was estimated at 56.64 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2020, the highest of any state at that time (The Eagle Online, 2021), while 40.7 per cent of the state's population was classified as multidimensionally poor in 2022 (Innonews, 2022; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022).

Several governance problems appear to lie behind these outcomes. They include weak and inconsistently applied electoral rules, the domination of local governments by state governments, corruption, godfatherism, insecurity and the politics of identity. At the local level, the constitutional promise of democratically elected councils has often been replaced by appointed transition committees and sole administrators, and local elections, when held, have been widely criticised as one-sided (Agiri & Morka, 2022; Gazette, 2024). Where citizens do not choose or control those who govern them, the basis of democratic legitimacy is weakened. The problem of this study, therefore, is that the persistence of these governance deficits may be undermining the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria, and that their effects at the local level, as in Mbaitoli LGA, remain under-documented.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to examine the relationship between good governance and sustainable democracy in Nigeria, with reference to Mbaitoli LGA, Imo State. The specific objectives were to:

1. examine how the state of constitutional and electoral reform has affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA;
2. assess how the practice of federalism, particularly state control of local government, has affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA; and
3. examine how identity-based grievances and related insecurity have affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How has the state of constitutional and electoral reform affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA?
2. How has the practice of federalism, particularly state control of local government, affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA?
3. How have identity-based grievances and related insecurity affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA?

Conceptual Review

Democracy

The word democracy derives from the Greek *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule or power), and is commonly understood as rule by the people. In modern states, this usually takes the form of representative democracy, in which citizens choose leaders through periodic, free and competitive elections and hold them to account between elections. Diamond (1999) distinguishes electoral democracy, which requires mainly competitive elections, from liberal democracy, which adds the rule of law, protection of civil liberties, an independent judiciary and effective limits on executive power. Many African democracies, including Nigeria, are often described as meeting the first standard more easily than the second.

Ake (1996) argued that the form of democracy promoted in Africa since the 1990s has frequently focused on elections and market reforms rather than on the social and economic empowerment of ordinary people. For Ake, democracy that does not improve the lives of the majority is unlikely to command lasting loyalty. Gyekye (1997) similarly argued that African societies should combine indigenous democratic values, such as consultation and consensus, with inherited liberal institutions to build forms of democracy that people recognise as their own. These perspectives remain useful in assessing Nigeria's Fourth Republic, where democratic forms have not always produced democratic substance.

Sustainable Democracy

A sustainable democracy is one that endures and deepens over time, rather than one that merely survives from one election to the next. Linz and Stepan (1996) described a democracy as consolidated when it becomes "the only game in the town": when no significant group seeks to overthrow it, when most citizens believe democratic procedures are the best way to govern collective life, and when political actors resolve conflicts within the established rules. Huntington (1968) had earlier argued that political instability, including military intervention, is a function of weak political institutions relative to the demands placed on them. On this view, democratic survival depends on institutions strong enough to channel conflict and deliver results.

Sustainability also has a material dimension. Studies of Nigeria's Fourth Republic suggest that persistent poverty, unemployment and inequality have weakened popular commitment to democracy, as citizens judge democratic government by what it delivers (Apeh et al., 2021). Sustainable democracy therefore requires both credible procedures and governance that improves the lives of citizens.

Good Governance

Governance has been defined in many ways. The World Bank (1992) described it as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Fukuyama (2013) defined governance as a government's ability to make and enforce rules and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic. This definition is useful because it separates the capacity of the state from the form of the regime, and it reminds us that democracy and good governance, although related, are not the same thing.

Good governance adds a normative standard. It describes governance that is participatory, transparent, accountable, responsive, effective and guided by the rule of law. Grindle (2004) cautioned that the full list of good governance requirements is too long for poor countries to achieve at once, and proposed the idea of "good enough governance", in which reforms are prioritised according to what is most needed and most

feasible in each context. For Nigeria, this suggests that reforms which directly restore citizens' control over their representatives, such as credible elections and elected local councils, may deserve priority.

The Nexus between Good Governance and Sustainable Democracy

The relationship between good governance and sustainable democracy runs in both directions. Democratic institutions provide channels through which citizens can demand accountability, remove poor performers and influence policy. At the same time, good governance gives democracy its legitimacy, because citizens are more likely to support democratic institutions when they see them working for them. When governance fails, the result may be political apathy, distrust of institutions and support for alternatives outside the democratic process (Othman & Okpe, 2021).

Nigerian scholarship has drawn attention to features of the political system that weaken this relationship. Ekeh (1975) argued that colonialism produced "two publics" in Africa: a primordial public tied to ethnic and community obligations, which people treat as moral, and a civic public associated with the state, which people often treat as a resource to be exploited. This helps to explain why public office is frequently used for private or sectional gain. More recent work describes how state and federal actors manipulate constitutional mechanisms to entrench incumbents while keeping the outward form of multiparty elections (Madueke, 2026). Studies of godfatherism and internal party democracy point in the same direction (Ahmed & Adam, 2024; Godwin, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted social contract theory, associated with Thomas Hobbes (1651/1996), John Locke (1689/1988) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/1968). Although the three thinkers differed on important points, they shared the idea that legitimate political authority rests on the consent of the governed. Hobbes argued that people surrender their natural freedom to a sovereign in exchange for security and order. Locke held that government is established to protect life, liberty and property, and that citizens may resist or replace a government that persistently violates these rights. Rousseau located sovereignty in the general will of the people and insisted that government is merely an agent of that will.

The central assumptions of the theory, as applied in this study, are that: (a) government derives its authority from the people; (b) this authority is held in trust for specific purposes, including security, welfare and the protection of rights; (c) citizens, in turn, accept obligations such as obeying legitimate laws, paying taxes and participating in public life; and (d) the legitimacy of government depends on how well it keeps its side of the agreement.

The theory is relevant to this study for three reasons. First, it links good governance directly to democratic legitimacy. The 1999 Constitution itself reflects this idea in Section 14(2), which states that sovereignty belongs to the people, that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government, and that the participation of the people in their government shall be ensured. Where government provides security, services and accountability, citizens are more likely to accept democratic authority; where it fails, they may withdraw from participation or seek alternatives. Second, the theory makes elections central, because elections are the main means by which consent is given and withdrawn in a representative democracy. Disputed or non-competitive elections weaken the contract at its foundation. Third, the theory reminds us that the relationship has two sides. Sustainable democracy depends also on citizens who participate, obey legitimate laws and hold leaders to account.

The theory has been criticised for treating consent as a historical fiction, since no actual contract was ever signed, and for paying limited attention to the role of power, class and identity in shaping who benefits from the state (Ekeh, 1975). It is used here not as a historical account but as a normative standard against which the conduct of government and citizens can be assessed.

Empirical Review

Several recent studies have examined the relationship between governance and democracy in Nigeria. Othman and Okpe (2021) assessed political participation and democratic governance in the Fourth

Republic using secondary data and found that electoral violence, corruption, godfatherism and weak institutions had eroded public trust and discouraged participation. Abumbe and Owa (2024) reviewed the 2023 general elections and concluded that, despite the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), the elections were affected by insecurity, technical failures, violence, fraud and poor communication of results. Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), using interviews and documents, found that political interference, corruption and weak adherence to rules limited the capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct credible elections, even after the Electoral Act 2022.

On federalism and local government, Amah (2018) analysed the constitutional provisions on local government and found that they laid the basis for interference by both federal and state governments in local administration. Agiri and Morka (2022) examined caretaker committees and concluded that their use by state governors undermines democratic local government and serves as a channel for controlling local government funds. In a study of Ikeduru LGA, which borders Mbaitoli in Imo State, Amadi (2026) found significant relationships between financial, administrative and political autonomy and rural road maintenance, primary health care and rural security.

On identity and federal practice, Suberu (2022) examined Nigeria's federal character principle and argued that, although it was designed to manage ethnic diversity and inclusion, its impact has been limited by deficits in governmental accountability. Nkwede et al. (2018) identified over-centralisation, sectional domination of leadership and poor implementation of the federal character principle as major problems of Nigerian federalism. Ogechi and Ndaage (2025) found that insecurity in the Fourth Republic diverted resources from public services, compounded poor governance and weakened citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

These studies show broad agreement that weak electoral integrity, centralised federalism, corruption and insecurity undermine democracy in Nigeria. However, few have examined these issues together at the level of a single local government area in the South-East. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining Mbaitoli LGA.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative documentary research design. Documentary research is suited to questions about institutions and policy, where much of the relevant evidence is contained in laws, judgments, official records and reports. The design allowed the study to examine developments over the period 2020 to 2025 without relying on retrospective recall.

Study Area

Mbaitoli LGA is one of the 27 local government areas of Imo State. It lies in the Owerri senatorial zone, north-west of Owerri, and is made up of several towns, including Mbieri, Ogwa, Orodo, Ubomiri and Umunoha. Its headquarters is at Nwaorieubi. The LGA is largely rural and peri-urban, and many of its residents depend on farming, trading and public employment in nearby Owerri. Its closeness to the state capital means that state-level political developments are quickly felt in the LGA.

Sources of Data

Data were drawn from secondary sources in five categories: (a) legal documents, including the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act 2022; (b) judicial decisions, especially the Supreme Court judgement of 11 July 2024 on local government autonomy; (c) reports of election observers and electoral bodies, including Yiaga Africa and the Imo State Independent Electoral Commission (ISIEC); (d) official statistics and governance indices from the National Bureau of Statistics, Transparency International and BudgIT; and (e) peer-reviewed literature and verified reports from national newspapers. Where possible, claims were checked against more than one source.

Method of Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Documents were examined for evidence relating to the three objectives, coded under three themes (electoral reform and practice, federal practice and local government autonomy, and identity and security), and interpreted in light of social contract theory. Because detailed statistics are rarely published at the LGA level, state-level evidence was used where LGA-specific evidence was not available, and this is indicated in the discussion.

Findings and Discussion

Constitutional and Electoral Reform, Good Governance and Sustainable Democracy

The first objective was to examine how the state of constitutional and electoral reform has affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA. The evidence shows that formal reforms have advanced, but their implementation has been uneven, and the gap between law and practice has weakened public confidence in elections.

The Electoral Act 2022 gave legal backing to the use of BVAS for voter accreditation and to the electronic transmission and public display of polling unit results through IReV. Several studies agree that these technologies reduced some forms of malpractice, such as multiple voting, but that their effect was limited by delayed or missing uploads, logistical failures and political interference (Abumbe & Owa, 2024; Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025). The very low national turnout in the 2023 presidential election, at 26.72 per cent (Dataphyte, 2023), suggests that many citizens remained doubtful that their votes would count.

Imo State provides two prominent examples of the gap between electoral law and electoral outcomes. The first is the 2019 governorship election, which was finally decided by the Supreme Court on 14 January 2020. The court set aside the declaration of Emeka Ihedioha as governor and declared Hope Uzodimma, who had been placed fourth in the results announced by INEC, as the winner, after adding votes from polling units whose results had been excluded (*Uzodinma v. Ihedioha*, 2020). Whatever its legal merits, the judgement generated wide public controversy and reinforced a perception among many citizens that the courts, rather than voters, often determine who governs (Abumbe & Owa, 2024).

The second example is the governorship election of 11 November 2023. Yiaga Africa, which deployed observers to a statistical sample of polling units, reported that elections did not take place in about 12 per cent of its sampled polling units, mostly in Orsu, Okigwe, Oru East and Orlu LGAs. It also expressed concern that results were uploaded to IReV for some sampled polling units where no accreditation or voting had taken place, and called on INEC to investigate (Sahara Reporters, 2023). Mbaitoli was not among the LGAs named in the Yiaga statement, and this study found no documented report of the same irregularities in the LGA. However, Mbaitoli residents vote in a single statewide governorship contest, and irregularities elsewhere in the state affect the credibility of the overall result for all voters.

Local government elections show the same pattern more sharply. ISIEC conducted local government elections in September 2024, after the state's 27 LGAs had been run by appointed officials. The ruling party was declared winner of all 27 chairmanship seats, including Mbaitoli, and all 305 councillorship seats. Results were declared without vote totals for each party, the Inter-Party Advisory Council had announced a boycott, and press reports described the exercise as marred by voter apathy, with voting reportedly not taking place in many areas (Gazette, 2024). A one-party sweep of this kind is not unique to Imo; it has been a common feature of local elections conducted by state electoral commissions across Nigeria (Agiri & Morka, 2022).

From the perspective of social contract theory, credible elections are the means by which citizens give and withdraw consent. When elections are widely seen as manipulated, the link between consent and authority is broken. Citizens may continue to obey the law, but they do so with less conviction that government belongs to them. The finding that weak implementation of electoral reform affects good governance and sustainable democracy is consistent with Othman and Okpe (2021) and Madueke and Enyiazu (2025).

Federal Practice, Local Government Autonomy and Sustainable Democracy

The second objective was to assess how the practice of federalism, particularly state control of local government, has affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA. The evidence indicates that local democracy in Imo State has been weakened for long periods by the replacement of elected councils with appointed officials and by state control of local government finances.

Nigeria's federal system has long been described as over-centralised. Fiscal power is concentrated at the centre, states depend heavily on monthly allocations from the Federation Account, and states in turn exercise wide control over local governments (Nkwede et al., 2018; Simbine & Oladeji, 2015). The 1999 Constitution created a State-Local Government Joint Account through which federal allocations to local governments pass, and many state governments used this arrangement to withhold or redirect local government funds (Amah, 2018; Agiri & Morka, 2022).

In Imo State, commentators have noted that local governments operated without substantive elected chairmen and councillors for much of the period after 2007, with transition committees appointed and removed at the discretion of successive governors (Tekedia, 2022). In May 2024, the state government appointed sole administrators for all 27 LGAs, including Mbaitoli, for an initial period of 60 days pending local elections (Within Nigeria, 2024). Such appointees answer to the governor who appoints them, not to the residents of the LGA. This arrangement is inconsistent with Section 7(1) of the Constitution, which guarantees democratically elected local government councils.

On 11 July 2024, the Supreme Court, in *Attorney-General of the Federation v. Attorney-General of Abia State and 35 Others* (2024), held that local governments are entitled to receive their allocations directly from the Federation Account, that paying such allocations through state governments was unconstitutional, and that local governments run by caretaker committees or other unelected bodies should not receive federal allocations (ConstitutionNet, 2024). The judgement was a significant step towards restoring the constitutional status of local government. However, its effect depends on implementation, and the speed with which states organised local elections after the judgement, in some cases producing one-party outcomes, suggests that formal compliance may not translate automatically into local accountability.

For residents of Mbaitoli, the practical effects of weak local government autonomy are likely to include limited local influence over the maintenance of rural roads, primary health care, markets and other services that fall within local government responsibilities. Amadi (2026) found that financial, administrative and political autonomy were significantly related to rural road maintenance, primary health care and security in neighbouring Ikeduru LGA. While comparable data are not available for Mbaitoli, the institutional conditions in the two LGAs are similar.

In social contract terms, local government is where the contract between citizens and the state is most visible. When residents cannot choose or remove their local leaders, and when local funds are controlled elsewhere, the local tier ceases to function as a democratic institution. This supports the finding that ineffective or quasi-federal practice affects good governance and sustainable democracy, consistent with Amah (2018) and Agiri and Morka (2022).

Identity, Insecurity, Good Governance and Sustainable Democracy

The third objective was to examine how identity-based grievances and related insecurity have affected good governance and sustainable democracy in Mbaitoli LGA. In a largely homogeneous Igbo area such as Mbaitoli, ethnicity operates less through rivalry between local groups than through perceptions of the South-East's place within the Nigerian federation.

A sense of political marginalisation among many Igbo people has been widely discussed, especially in relation to representation in federal appointments and the presidency. Suberu (2022) noted that the federal character principle was designed to address such concerns, but that its impact has been limited by weak accountability. These grievances have provided fertile ground for separatist agitation in the South-East since about 2015, and for a cycle of agitation and security responses that intensified from 2021.

Imo State was among the states most affected. On 5 April 2021, armed men attacked the Owerri custodial centre and the state police command headquarters, freeing a large number of inmates. Attacks on police

stations, INEC offices and local government secretariats followed across the state. Mbaitoli was not spared: in April 2022, security operatives repelled an attempted attack on the police station at Mbieri, one of the largest towns in the LGA (Channels Television, 2022). The "sit-at-home" orders associated with separatist agitation also disrupted markets, schools and movement across the South-East.

Insecurity affects democracy and governance in several ways. It discourages voters and electoral officials from participating in elections, as shown by the large number of polling units in parts of Imo where elections did not take place in 2023 (Sahara Reporters, 2023). It diverts public spending from services to security, and it weakens trust between citizens and security agencies. Ogechi and Ndaage (2025) found that insecurity in the Fourth Republic has eroded governance quality and public trust, and that poor governance has in turn deepened insecurity. The present findings are consistent with that conclusion.

From the standpoint of social contract theory, security is the most basic obligation of the state. When government cannot protect lives and property, and when sections of the population feel excluded from the national political community, the foundations of the contract are weakened. This supports the original finding that ethnicity and related identity concerns affect good governance and sustainable democracy, but suggests that, in Mbaitoli and Imo State, the more immediate mechanism is insecurity linked to grievances about inclusion.

Synthesis of Findings

The three themes are connected. Weak electoral integrity reduces the ability of citizens to hold state governments accountable. State governments that are insulated from electoral pressure are better able to dominate local governments. Weak and unaccountable local government, in turn, leaves communities with fewer channels for addressing grievances, which may contribute to alienation and insecurity. Insecurity then further reduces participation and accountability. This cycle suggests that reforms in any one area are likely to have limited effect unless they are accompanied by reforms in the others.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between good governance and sustainable democracy in Nigeria, using Mbaitoli LGA in Imo State as a case, for the period 2020 to 2025. Using documentary evidence and social contract theory, it found that the gap between electoral reform and electoral practice, the domination of local government by the state government, and identity-related grievances and insecurity have together weakened the quality of governance and the sustainability of democracy in the LGA.

The study concludes that democracy in Nigeria cannot be sustained by the regular holding of elections alone. It depends on governance that keeps the terms of the social contract: credible elections through which citizens give and withdraw consent, elected and accountable local governments, the protection of lives and property, and fair inclusion of all sections of the population. Good governance is therefore not merely a product of democracy, but a condition for its survival. Nigeria has the human and material resources to build a stable democracy, but this requires a change in how political actors view public office and how citizens engage with the state.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. INEC and the National Assembly should strengthen the legal framework for electronic transmission of results, so that polling unit results uploaded to IReV become binding for collation, and should ensure that electoral offences are investigated and prosecuted.
2. State Independent Electoral Commissions should be reformed to guarantee their independence from state governors, including through security of tenure for their members and direct funding, or their functions should be transferred to INEC through constitutional amendment.
3. The federal and Imo State governments should faithfully implement the Supreme Court judgement of 11 July 2024 by ensuring that local government allocations are paid directly to elected councils, and that no appointed caretaker body administers any LGA.

4. The Mbaitoli Local Government Council should publish its budgets and project reports and hold regular town hall meetings with community leaders, town unions and civil society, so that residents can follow and influence local spending.
5. Federal and state governments should address identity-based grievances through dialogue, fair representation in public appointments and inclusive development programmes, while ensuring that security operations respect human rights and the rule of law.
6. Civil society, religious bodies and the media should intensify civic education in Mbaitoli and across Imo State to encourage participation in elections and community oversight of public office holders.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

The study relied on secondary data, and published statistics at the LGA level are scarce. Some of the evidence used therefore relates to Imo State as a whole rather than to Mbaitoli in particular. Press reports, although checked where possible, may contain errors. Future studies should collect primary data from residents, community leaders and local government officials in Mbaitoli, through surveys and interviews, to measure perceptions of governance quality and democratic commitment directly. Comparative studies of several LGAs in the South-East would also help to show whether the patterns identified here are general.

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