

Sub-National Intra-Executive Crisis and Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

In contemporary governance contexts, the performance of elected executive political leaders at the state level is typically evaluated based on their ability to fulfil key indicators of good governance. These indicators include effective and efficient service delivery, accountability, transparency, absence of corruption, adherence to the rule of law, equity, and inclusiveness, among others. Nevertheless, in Nigeria, the attainment of these indicators is often impeded by ongoing political crises between governors and their deputies. The persistent failure to achieve these benchmarks frequently results in poor governance outcomes. While existing scholarship has attributed bad governance to factors such as corruption, weak political will, mediocrity, state fragility, and the lack of transparency among state executive leaders, there remains a dearth of research examining how political disputes between executive governors and their deputies contribute to the erosion of good governance in Nigeria. Utilising secondary data sources and grounded in principal-agent theory, this article investigates the underlying causes of political crises between executive governors and their deputies, assessing the extent to which these conflicts undermine good governance at the state level in Nigeria. It advances knowledge about intra-executive crises in Nigeria and offers informed recommendations for mitigating such conflicts to promote good governance

Keywords: Deputy-governor, Executive, Governor, Good Governance, Intra-Executive Crisis.

Introduction

Across state government systems in Nigeria, the goal of state governors and their deputies is to achieve key benchmarks of good governance (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018; Agunyai, 2018).

Governors and their deputies often emphasise the delivery of good governance as a critical campaign tool during electioneering (Muheeb, 2016). Indeed, they have often promised to achieve key governance indicators to garner more votes. However, the extent to which governors and their deputies fulfil this promise has remained controversial in the face of unhealthy intra-executive relations at the sub-national levels of government in Nigeria. It is a fact that intra-executive conflict can exacerbate poor governance, characterised by corruption, unlawful practices, a decline in social service provision, abuse of rights, and underperformance, among other issues (Banjo, 2013). This is because crises tend to shift the attention of disputing governors and their deputies away from governance, which, in the view of Omoede et al. (2018), often undermines or limits the capacity of state governments to deliver good governance to citizens.

Indeed, at the state level in Nigeria, governors and their deputies, during political crises, have often engaged in activities that tend to distort their capacity and focus on delivering good governance (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018). For instance, the observation of Obaseki's administration in Edo State revealed how the actions of both the governor and his deputy shifted their focus from governance to excessive politicking. Actions, such as the deliberate witch-hunting of the deputy governor, Philips Shaibu, by the governor, Obaseki, during the crisis, according to Muheeb and Jibola (2018), not only affected the deputy governor but also posed hardships for the people of Edo state. The people of Edo State suffer severely from a huge decline in effective and efficient service delivery caused by a shift in the focus of the state government from governance to politics of hate and aggression. The crises, which led to secrecy and a lack of transparency between the governor and his deputy, not only undermine accountability of both executive leaders to the people but also distort the rule of law in the state.

The same scenario was identified in Ondo and Kogi states, where governors and their deputies were in an unhealthy battle for political survival and relevance (Musa, 2024). In Ondo State, during the ailing days of the late Akeredolu, the governor's refusal to delegate powers to his deputy not only caused a crisis but also affected smooth governance (Oluwole, 2023). The deliberate attempts to conceal information about the late governor's health status from his deputy contradict the principle of transparency in good governance. The deputy governor was hardly carried along in the state's day-to-day governance system. This gap had severe implications for good governance, as attention was diverted to a political struggle and survival between the governor and his deputy, at the expense of citizens' welfare (Oluwole, 2023). The fact that the governance of the state was not delegated to the deputy governor, Lucky Aiyedatiwa, by the ailing late governor, Akeredolu, under the pretence that the late governor was back in the country, but administered the state from his home in Ibadan, Oyo State, is evidently enough to slow down the pace of good governance. The directive that all documents requiring the governor's approval must be brought to his house is a clear indication of an ineffective governance system, typified by secrecy and high-level corruption.

Kogi State had a similar experience to Edo and Ondo states. In Kogi State, the crisis between the former governor and his deputy was partly caused by Achuba's advice to his principal to focus more on delivering the key indicators of good governance in the state (Osakede et al., 2017). The governor, instead of considering his deputy's advice, resorted to venting his frustration on his deputy (Lafenwa, 2007). The governor abandons good governance for the witch-hunting of his deputy. Although on the surface, the crisis led to the removal of the deputy governor, in reality, it has had a deeper, ravaging effect on key indicators of good governance. For instance, the crisis often provokes the unlawful impeachment of the deputy

governor; actions of the state government are shrouded in secrecy, which also impugns equity and inclusiveness due to the unlawful removal of the deputy, and distorts the principle of accountability, as the governor consistently remains accountable to the people of Kogi State (Nigerian Tribune, 2019)

The issue is deeply rooted in systemic governance flaws and institutional weaknesses, which exacerbate existing challenges, including corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of transparency. A significant cause is the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities between governors and their deputies, often resulting in power struggles. Deputies, feeling sidelined or underutilised, may act independently or oppose the governor's agenda, while governors may view their deputies as political rivals. These tensions are further exacerbated by partisan politics, where loyalty to political factions heightens mistrust and rivalry. For example, the protracted crisis between the former Edo State governor and deputy governor demonstrated how political disagreements and personal ambitions could disrupt governance processes (Ezeani, 2019). In Kogi State, the 2019 impeachment of Deputy Governor Simon Achuba exemplifies how perceived suspicions of the political ambitions of deputy governors can escalate tensions. Similarly, the relationship between the former Ondo State governor and his deputy, Lucky, underscores how perceived marginalisation and political distrust can destabilise governance structures (Transparency International, 2020). These incidents reflect systemic governance flaws that necessitate institutional reforms to clarify executive roles, enhance collaboration, and mitigate the risks of executive conflicts. The foregoing brings to the fore the main objectives of the article, which clearly seek to ask the following questions:

- i. What are the causes of political crises between executive governors and their deputies at the sub-national level in Nigeria?
- ii. How have crises between executive governors and their deputies' limited capacity to achieve indicators of good governance at the sub-national level in Nigeria?
- iii. What are the mitigation strategies to resolve intra-executive crisis towards the promotion of good governance at the sub-national level in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Intra-Executive Relations/Conflict

Intra-executive relationships lie at the heart of governance, particularly at the state level in Nigeria. Historically, these relationships have been pivotal in shaping the stability and effectiveness of governance structures, particularly in countries with complex federal systems and diverse political landscapes (Hyden et al., 2004). The dynamics between governors and their deputies can either strengthen governance through collaboration or lead to significant challenges, such as policy stagnation and governance crises when conflicts arise (Adejumobi, 2015). Over time, these relationships have highlighted the need for institutional reforms to balance power and foster effective communication within the executive branch. These dynamics define the interactional, collaborative, and conflicting interests between governors and their deputies, which in turn shape policy implementation and governance effectiveness. Day-to-day engagements and mutual collaboration between governors and their deputies help decision-making and conflict resolution, while collaborative governance facilitates seamless policy formulation and execution, ensuring coherence in administration (Olowu, 2012). Effective conflict resolution mechanisms further mitigate disputes and foster stability (Grindle, 2004).

The constitutional definition of roles is crucial for minimising overlaps and tensions (Suberu, 2020). Shared political ideologies and visions strengthen intra-executive cooperation, while trust fosters transparent and effective partnerships (Diamond, 1999). Citizens also gauge leadership effectiveness based on the visible harmony between executives (Transparency International, 2020). These concepts underscore the significance of effective intra-executive relationships in governance and service delivery. However, the Nigerian socio-political and institutional framework provides unique challenges and opportunities for examining these relationships. The country's federal system grants significant autonomy to states, enabling them to independently manage resources and implement localised policies (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018). This autonomy amplifies the significance of harmonious relationships between governors and their deputies. For instance, in Lagos State under former governors Fashola and Ambode and currently under Gov. Sanwolu's administration, a history of cohesive intra-executive relationships has contributed to steady infrastructure development and economic growth (Agunyai, 2018). Conversely, in Kogi State, persistent conflicts between governors and their deputies have led to governance paralysis and policy inconsistencies (Adejumobi, 2015). These contrasting examples underscore how autonomy, while empowering, demands effective intra-executive collaboration to achieve governance stability.

Intra-executive conflicts lead to stagnation in governance activities, resulting in policy paralysis (Adejumobi, 2015). For example, in Ekiti State, a prolonged dispute between the governor and the deputy over budgetary control led to delays in approving critical infrastructure projects (Olowu, 2012). Similarly, in Edo State, intra-executive conflicts led to the suspension of multiple healthcare initiatives, leaving underserved communities without essential services (Transparency International, 2020). Such unresolved disputes directly impede policy execution, exacerbating governance challenges and diminishing public confidence in state leadership (Suberu, 2001). Disputes also divert attention from effective resource utilisation, causing resource mismanagement (Hyden et al., 2004). Visible conflicts erode citizens' confidence in governance, diminishing their trust in public institutions (Diamond, 2007). Persistent disputes destabilise the political environment, fostering political instability (Grindle, 2004). Tensions disrupt program implementation, resulting in inefficient service delivery (Omoede et al., 2018). Conflicts often escalate into political maneuvers, such as impeachments, further undermining governance (Transparency International, 2020). Lastly, state-level disputes can ripple into national political crises, affecting the broader governance framework (Adejumobi, 2015).

The Utility Value and Sustainability of Good Governance in Nigeria

Governance is the ability of a government in a position of power to lawfully rule a state or country, deliver effective and efficient services through accountability and transparency, and promote equity, inclusiveness, and participation of people in making decisions that affect their lives. For Fukuyama (2013), governance represents the ability of the ruling government to make and enforce rules, as well as deliver services, in both democratic and non-democratic states. This demonstrates that governance is about enforcing the law and ensuring that it meets the expectations of the people, regardless of whether the government enforcing the law is democratic or not (Omoede et al., 2018). The process by which a decision is implemented or not can be described as governance. This definition clearly indicates that governance can be good and bad. While good governance is likely to ensure prompt enforcement of decisions that can enhance the rule of law, accountability, respect for human rights, and effective service delivery, severe punishment for corruption, bad governance, on the other hand, seems to be

more prone to the inability to enforce decisions that can address unlawful practices in a state (Agunyai, 2018; Agunyai & Ojatorotu, 2021).

The foregoing may have led World Bank (2001) to opine that for governance to be adjudged good, the following principles (the rule of law, participation, equity and inclusiveness, accountability, effective and efficient service delivery, transparency, responsiveness, and corruption-free) must be inherently available in the enforcement of governance. With the effective enforcement of good governance, it is expected to yield positive outcomes, including political stability, democratic consolidation, respect for human rights, public trust in government, and improved socio-economic conditions for the people, as well as the transformation of the state or country (Agunyai, 2018). For instance, states or countries with a proven track record of the rule of law and respect for human rights are likely the destinations for foreign direct investment. The consistent practice of good governance is likely to attract foreign investors. One other utility value of good governance is a smooth transition from one government to another. This is because the government operates transparently and is accountable to the people. For instance, with good governance in place, it is more likely that general elections would be free, fair, and credible. The credibility of general elections alleviates suspicions and improves public trust in government.

The sustainability of these positive attributes of good governance in Nigeria is a matter of controversy, given the country's prevailing level of poor governance. In the Nigerian context, good governance is often emphasised and desired by successive governments at both the national and sub-national levels; nonetheless, the extent to which this desire has materialised remains largely unclear. This is because the government at both national and sub-national levels is characterised by corruption, secrecy, disobedience to the rule of law, poor service delivery, lack of accountability, suppression of people's voices, inequality, and discrimination, among other issues (Agunyai & Ojatorotu, 2021b). These have caused instability, a political crisis, and the enrichment of a few at the expense of the masses, thereby widening the gap between the rich and the poor, and declining both foreign and local investment (Omoede et al., 2018). Furthermore, it has rendered the Nigerian state highly fragile and pushed it to the brink of collapse (Agunyai, 2024). Today, hardly any Nigerian state government or the federal government claims to be practicing good governance. This is because principles indicative of good governance are rarely found or achieved by both national and sub-national governments. Cases abound to illustrate the failure of successive national and subnational governments in enforcing good governance in Nigeria.

Some of the cases in point are illegal removal of elected deputy governors by their governors, refusal to obey court orders, excessive corruption, and oppression of opposing views against the ruling government, electoral malpractices, and poor service delivery, as well as enforcing public policies that deliberately widen the inequality gap, general irresponsiveness to citizens' plight and conditions, among others (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018). For instance, the current pronouncement by the US to intervene in Nigeria to tackle the Islamic terrorists terrorising the country is a result of the lack of responsiveness of the Nigerian government at both the national and sub-national levels towards the massive killings of Nigerians.

This demonstrates that despite the desire and quest of successive Nigerian governments to deliver good governance, its utility value and sustainability in the country are not feasible or

realistic. The same holds true at the sub-national level, where state governments and local governments operate. It has been documented that some state governments unlawfully plan the impeachment of their deputies and secretly use their monthly security votes for personal gain, thereby creating massive insecurity in the state (Muheeb, 2016). Cases are also many to validate this claim, for instance, the recurrent cases of political crisis in states like Rivers (between the former governor, Wike and the incumbent Gov. Fubara), Edo (between former Gov. Obaseki and his deputy Shuiabu), Kogi (between former Gov. Yahaya Bello and his deputy Achuba), Ondo (between former governor, late Akeredolu and the incumbent governor), Osun (between All Progressive Congress led by the former governor of the state, Mr. Oyetola and the incumbent governor, Gov. Adeleke over local creation and funding), among others, aptly validate the erosion of good governance at the state level. In all of these crises, good governance was eroded, as some of the crises were caused by flagrant disobedience to the principles of good governance. In Rivers State, the unlawful six-month replacement of the incumbent elected governor, Fubara, by the Nigerian federal government with a military administration is not only authoritarian but contradicts principles (the rule of law, transparency, participation, and others) of good governance. With that unlawful action, the people of Rivers State were denied their voices or participation in governance throughout the six months of the military administration. There was massive corruption during that period, and the military administration operated in secrecy during that period.

From the foregoing, it is clear that principles of good governance are hardly adhered to by Nigerian political leaders in elective and appointive positions. It is also clear that political crises between leaders at the national and sub-national levels often erode good governance, ultimately harming the people. Despite understanding the utility value of good governance, Nigerian political leaders often fail to adhere to its core principles while in office. Evidence has shown that they often allow their selfish interest to override good governance, hence the unsustainability of the principles of good governance in Nigeria.

Theoretical Underpinning of Intra-Executive Crises and Good Governance in Nigeria

The principal-agent theory was adopted to explain how intra-executive crisis undermines good governance at the sub-national level. The theory has its origins in economic and management disciplines, with foundational contributions from Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling in their seminal 1976 work, "Theory of the Firm: Managerial Behaviour, Agency Costs, and Ownership Structure." This theory espoused the dynamics of agency relationships, wherein one party (the principal) delegates responsibilities to another (the agent). Central to this relationship is the presence of asymmetric information, where the agent often holds more information about the tasks or environment than the principal, leading to potential conflicts of interest and agency problems (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Agency problems manifest primarily as moral hazard and adverse selection, particularly in governance contexts where agents, such as elected officials or administrative leaders, may exploit their positions for personal gain rather than pursuing the objectives set by their principals, who are typically the electorate or citizens. This is often exacerbated by limited oversight or weak accountability mechanisms, which create environments where informational asymmetries can flourish and policy goals may be undermined. Moral hazard arises when agents act in self-interest rather than pursuing the principal's goals, leveraging their informational advantage or operational discretion. Adverse selection, on the other hand,

reflects the difficulty principals face in accurately selecting agents whose interests align with their own (Eisenhardt, 1989). These issues necessitate mechanisms such as incentive alignment, monitoring, and contractual safeguards to mitigate agency costs and enhance the congruence of objectives (Ross, 1973).

Over time, the theory has been extensively adopted in political science and public administration to analyse governance structures. The people who vote for the elected politicians are regarded as principals, while the elected politicians serve as agents entrusted with governance (Laffont & Martimort, 2002). The theory has also been applied to explore decentralised governance, where agency problems often surface in the interactions between the national governments and sub-national authorities. Studies highlight its utility in diagnosing inefficiencies in public service delivery, identifying corruption, and optimising resource allocation (Mueller, 2003). For instance, in Kenya, studies on local governance demonstrated that aligning incentives for officials significantly enhanced resource allocation efficiency (Buntaine et al., 2020).

At the sub-national level, as the theory stipulates, the principals are the people who have voted the elected governors and their deputies into power. The Nigerian electorate, who hold the real political power through their votes, can vote out their agents (elected governors and their deputies) from office due to issues of corruption, poor performance, and lack of access to effective service delivery. However, the reverse is the case in Nigeria, as the agents often failed to be responsive to the expectations of their principals. Today, immediately after the agents (governors and their deputies ascend power, they act as principals, while those (the electorates) who hold the real political power act as agents. As they govern the state, they tend to engage in unlawful activities that undermine good governance, which is the expectation of their principals (the people). The claim by Nigerian politicians that they are going into power to serve and act as servants to Nigerians is a mere promise that is often not fulfilled. The inability of elected governors and their deputies to serve the people who voted them into power is the leading cause of bad governance in Nigeria. Today, governors and their deputies are hardly accountable to the people; their administration is shrouded in secrecy, with no respect for the rule of law, and the people are excluded from the state's decision-making process. In addition, crises between governors and their deputies have not only led to unlawful practices but also to the total erosion of good governance.

Spotting the Problematic Issues in the Governance Crisis at the Sub-National Level in Nigeria

Executive state governors and their deputies, after being duly elected by the people, are expected to provide the people with good governance rooted in accountability, transparency, effective service delivery, and the rule of law, among other principles (Agunyai, 2018; Agunyai & Ojatorotu, 2021). However, the reality in some Nigerian states indicates that intra-executive conflict, which is mainly between governors and their deputies, seems to be shifting the focus of the state government from the important business of enforcing good governance to unnecessary and wasteful excessive politicking for relevance, survival, and political ambition (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018). Compared to excessive politicking, typified by hate, inordinate political ambition, and a focus on survival, this approach causes more harm to the people and the state in general. It has had a more ravaging impact on citizens' welfare and well-being in the selected states.

Although incessant political disputes between governors and their deputies have prompted various studies, whose findings have primarily focused on mitigation strategies against the drivers of intra-executive conflict, research has hardly examined how these disputes hinder good governance at the state level in Nigeria. Dispute between governors and their deputies often has governance implications. One of such implications is state fragility (Agunyai, 2024; Esther et al., 2020). For example, as governors and their deputies battle for political relevance or superiority, they tend to lose focus on the effective control of their state against internal aggression (Agunyai, 2024). In addition, while most state governors (Edo, Kogi, and a few other affected states) orchestrate the unlawful ouster of their deputies through the instrumentality of their State House of Assembly, their deputy governors often resort to court to prevent or stop their impeachment. These actions tend to destabilise their state and undermine good governance. This is because the attention of both elected executive leaders is shifted to the battlefield, known as the court, whereas good governance that benefits the citizens is abandoned. Why governors and their deputies abandon the people that voted them into power for political survival and succession battle, and the effect of such inordinate action on good governance is hardly examined, thus making this study very timely and relevant, as it departs from the usual ones that merely investigate causes and how to ameliorate intra-executive crisis. Research in this direction is likely to educate state governors and their deputies on how to remain focused on delivering effective governance, a critical determinant of their performance in office.

Methodology

This article largely relies on the secondary method, which was sourced through desktop analysis and reviews of documents retrieved from empirical studies, journal articles, books, national dailies, the Nigerian Constitution, and government reports, as well as court reports and proceedings. The inclusion criteria for the documents used include DHET-accredited journals, those that discuss issues related to sub-national intra-executive crises, and those that promote good governance. Also included are authoritative documents, such as the Nigerian Constitution, court decisions and judgments, and official government reports on governance at the state level. Documents that do not cover sub-national intra-executive crisis and good governance were excluded. The data retrieved from the secondary sources were thematically content analysed, using themes that align with research objectives.

Findings

Causes of Sub-national Intra-Executive Crisis in Nigeria

- *Conflict of Interests between governors and their deputies*

Available evidence suggests that conflict between state governors and their deputies is sometimes inevitable, as governors and their deputies are human beings. Sub-national intra-executive crisis is a dispute or conflict between elected governors and their deputies. This is because both occupy the top echelon of power at the sub-national level. In Nigeria, sub-national governments comprise the state and local governments; however, this paper focuses on the crisis between state governors and their deputies. Indeed, state governors and their deputies do quarrel or fight over issues such as lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities, political survival or relevance, succession, overbearing influence or hard-heartedness of governors, delegation of power or duties, state's finance or resources,

appointment of political appointees, and general administration of the state in Nigeria (The Guardian, 2023)

- ***Lack of Clearly Defined Constitutional Roles of Deputy-Governors***

A significant cause of sub-national intra-executive crisis is the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities between governors and their deputies, often resulting in power struggles. The Nigerian constitution does not clearly define the responsibilities of the state governors; this makes the majority of them feel sidelined or underutilised (see the Nigerian Constitution, 1999). For example, the Nigerian constitution only recognises the powers of governors as section 176(1)(2) provides that, in each state of the federation, there shall be a Governor, who shall be the Chief Executive of that state (Nigerian Constitution, 1999). Although section 186 of the same constitution states that each state must have a deputy governor, it fails to clearly define their roles. The lack of clearly defined roles of deputy governors by the constitution often pushes them to act independently or oppose the governor's agenda, while governors may view their deputies as political rivals. These tensions are further exacerbated by partisan politics, where loyalty to political factions heightens mistrust and rivalry. For example, the protracted crisis in Edo State between Governor Godwin Obaseki and Deputy Governor Philip Shaibu demonstrated how political disagreements and personal ambitions could disrupt governance processes (Ezeani, 2019).

- ***Succession Battle between Governors and Deputy-Governors***

A succession battle over who will succeed the incumbent state governor in control of the government is also a critical contributor to the intra-executive crisis, which has intensified a series of court cases, reports, and judgements (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2024; Law Suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/478/2024). Studies and investigative reports have shown that most deputy governors nurse the ambition to succeed their principal after their tenure (Ubanyionwu, 2024; FHC/ABJ/CS/914/2024). However, such a move has often led to animosity between the governors and their deputies, especially when such governors have preferred a candidate other than their deputies. In Kogi State, the 2019 impeachment of Deputy Governor Simon Achuba exemplifies how perceived suspicions of the political ambitions of deputy governors can escalate tensions. Similarly, the relationship between Governor Rotimi Akeredolu and his deputy, Lucky Aiyedatiwa, in Ondo State underscores how perceived marginalisation and political distrust can destabilise governance structures (Transparency International, 2020). These incidents reflect systemic governance flaws that necessitate institutional reforms to clarify executive roles, enhance collaboration, and mitigate the risks of executive conflicts.

- ***Weak Institutional Framework of Political Parties***

A significant contributing factor is the weak institutional frameworks within ruling political parties, which hinder the prompt resolution of issues that cause intra-executive crises. Reconciliatory committees in most political parties, especially ruling ones, are often unable to resolve political rifts between governors and their deputies. This inability leads to prolonged uncertainty and negatively impacts governance in the state (Ofikhenua, 2019a, 2019b). In Edo State, for example, the reconciliation committee within the People's Democratic Party (PDP), tasked with settling the crisis between Governor Obaseki and Deputy Shuiabu, repeatedly failed to resolve the intra-executive conflict. The committee's failure is partly due to polarized and self-interested positions among its members (Akohile, 2023). Some members support the governor, while others align with the deputy governor. These interests among committee

members contribute to the persistence of intra-executive crises in Nigeria (Rufus, 2023). Such institutional weaknesses intensify conflicts and erode public confidence in democratic processes and governance structures.

- ***Unlawful Impeachment of Deputy-Governors from the Office***

Unlawful impeachment of deputy governors by some Nigerian state governors is a major cause of intra-executive crises (Musa, 2024; ICIR, 2024). Many governors influence State House of Assembly members to remove their deputies, as seen in states like Edo, Oyo, Abia, and Adamawa (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018). These impeachments breach democratic principles, undermine governance, and often occur in secrecy, with some deputies learning of their removal from the media. For instance, Gov. Obaseki impeached his deputy despite a stated lack of conflict (See Punch, 2024).

Table 1: Intra-Executive Conflict and impeachments across selected Nigerian states, 1999- 2024.

S/N	States	No of cases	Causes of intra-executive crisis	Actions leading to the crisis	Legislative Decision
1	Abia	3	Irreconcilable political differences & Running battle with the Governor	The deputy governors confronted the governor for the mismanagement of state funds. Antagonising the governor's style of ruling	Unlawful impeachment proceeding that only lasted for 19 days.
2	Adamawa	1	Undue interference by the national government	An attempt by the deputy to question the political manoeuvrings of the governor	The speaker was enthroned as the governor, and the impeachment was reversed.
3	Akwa Ibom	2	Irreconcilable political differences & Running battle with the Governor. Power politics and political intrigues	The deputy governors pursued their political ambition to succeed the governor wrongfully	The first deputy governor was impeached. The second hurriedly resigned to avoid impeachment
4	Anambra	2	Intra-party crisis that consumed the governor	The ascension of power by the deputy governor. As the governor was unlawfully removed for alleged misconduct	The governor was reinstated by the court, while his deputy returned her position. The deputy was later impeached for wanting to become the governor unlawfully.
5	Bauchi	1	Political differences & Running battle with the Governor.	The deputy governor was unlawfully impeached for financial misconduct	Deputy governor was later reinstated through the court
6	Bayelsa	1	Undue interference in the state's affairs by the national government	Providence/Impeachment	The governor was replaced by his deputy through the federal government-backed impeachment

7	Ebonyi	1	A fight over who succeeds the governor between the governor and his deputy. While the governor has a preferred candidate, his deputy wants to succeed him	The deputy governor was threatened with impeachment to leave his ambition for an anointed godson of the governor	The deputy governor still ruled the state in 2015 as a governor, as he won the 2015 election, despite the threat.
8	Edo	3	Crisis was caused by the political ambition of the deputy governor to succeed the governor, but the governor has anointed candidate	Initial cooperation and peace, which later turned to witch-hunting of the deputy governor and a threat of impeachment	Unlawful removal of the deputy from his position through planned impeachment.

Table 1 Continues: Intra-Executive Conflict and Impeachments across Selected Nigerian States, 1999-2024.

9	Ekiti	1	Crisis within the ruling party where the governor and his deputy fights for control of the party	The deputy governor was guilty of the offences, and the impeachment process was established	Impeached.
10	Enugu	1	Dispute between the governor and his deputy over issues bothering on the leadership of their ruling party at the state level	Deputy governor never escaped an impeachment for running a private agricultural business that contradicts his public office duties	Impeached
11	Imo	1	Governor-Deputy political rifts	The deputy was caught in a web of massive corrupt practices, and an impeachment process was established	Impeached
12	Lagos	2	Animosity and political difference between the governor and the deputies	Both deputy governors were impeached on the grounds of corruption and gross misconduct.	Both were Impeached.
13	Ondo	1	Recurrent political battle between the governor and his deputy	The replacement of the deputy governor by a serving commissioner through a very brief impeachment process	Impeached
14	Osun	1	Hostile relationship between the governor and the deputy, anti-party activities	The deputy was initially threatened with impeachment, but continued with the bad conduct against the governor	Impeached
15	Oyo	1	The national government's interference in the state's affairs. Federal support for the removal of the governor	It led to the removal of the governor over corruption and gross financial misconduct.	The deputy government briefly ascended the power, but was later sacked by the court, paving the way for the governor's reinstatement.

16	Plateau	1	An antagonistic relationship between the governor and his deputy	The governor was initially impeached and reinstated almost to the end of his tenure	Reversed impeachment.
17	Taraba	1	Unending political crisis between the governor and the deputy	It led to the impeachment of the deputy governor, which was later reversed	The deputy governor was later reinstated by the court.

Source: Adapted from (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018)

Table 1 shows that relationships between governors and their deputies are often marked by distrust, suspicion, loyalty, resentment, and personal ambition. Succession crises frequently occur, as governors rarely want their deputies to succeed them. Although deputies are constitutionally positioned to take over in case of unforeseen circumstances, many governors between 1999 and 2015 resented their deputies. Only one deputy governor, in Zamfara State, succeeded his principal with the latter's consent during this period (Abdulazeez, 2014).

The effects of sub-national intra-executive crisis on good governance in Nigeria

- *The shifting of the focus of the conflicting governors and their deputies from the core delivery of good governance*

Studies have highlighted the implications of intra-executive conflicts for good governance at the sub-national level (Abdulazeez, 2014; Muheeb, 2016; Goldsmith, 2015; Akinkuotu & Oladimeji, 2015; Anyichie, 2015; Adibe, 2016; Marie-Therese, 2015; Muheeb, 2017). Results of these studies showed that conflicts between governors and their deputies undermine the achievement of the key principles of good governance. With good governance, executive governors and their deputies are expected to provide social services such as water, health, education, waste management, security, road, electricity, and other welfare services (Agunyai, 2018; Muheeb, 2016). However, evidence indicated that intra-executive conflict at the state level often shifts the focus of the two key executive leaders from achieving key indicators of good governance to unending litigation (The Guardian, 2023).

- *Undermining of the rule of law*

The rule of law is often discarded and not respected by the two conflicting executive heads at the sub-national level amid a crisis (Muheeb, 2016). Notably, both conflicting executive heads are expected to be law-abiding amid their disputes; however, evidence shows that most conflicting executive leaders at the state level often undermine the state's law, as most governors don't follow legal means to impeach their deputies; they often conspire with members of the State House of Assembly to remove their deputies from power (Banjo, 2013; Muheeb & Jibola, 2018; Agunyai & Olawoyin, 2019). The fact that the law court reinstated former Edo State Deputy Governor Shuaibu shows that the governor abused the law to impeach his deputy.

- *Lack of accountability*

The result is the same on accountability, as most sub-national executive heads (governors and deputy governors) are not accountable to the people, amid a political crisis (Muheeb, 2017).

The fight for superiority or survival between governors and their deputies often erodes accountability, as most governors use the state's coercion to suppress any opposing views against their administration. Amid conflict, they hardly perform or serve the people; rather, they use state resources to sponsor the intra-executive crisis, and when the public demands full accountability, such a request is often met with state coercion (Banjo, 2013; Agunyai & Ojakrotu, 2021). Sub-national executive heads are rarely held accountable or responsible for their role while in office, even on most panels of inquiry set up after their tenure to investigate how the state's resources are managed, which often yield no positive outcome.

- ***Secrecy and lack of transparency in government***

Transparency is also eroded amid intra-executive crisis between governors and their deputies, as they run the affairs of the state in secret. The fight, which is sometimes caused by the secrecy-governing style of most governors, is heightened when governors perceive that their deputies or other government functionaries are being exposed to the public about their administration (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018; Muheeb, 2016; Agunyai & Olawoyin, 2019). This aptly buttressed the removal of Achuba, the then Deputy Governor of Kogi State, by Governor Yahaya Bello, over advice that the governor should allocate more of the state's resources to improving citizens' welfare. The governor, who felt exposed by his deputy to the public, unlawfully impeached him.

- ***Poor and ineffective social services delivery***

Another effect of sub-national intra-executive crisis is the abandonment of delivering effective and efficient services for witch-hunting and politicking (Agunyai & Ojakrotu, 2021b). The already precarious service delivery functions of the state government are further likely to be worsened by the payment of litigation fees to lawyers. Governors and their deputies, amid conflict, often waste the state's resources on litigation at the expense of social service delivery (Agunyai & Ojakrotu, 2021). Access to services like health, education, and the availability of infrastructure, water, and electricity, and others, which are already in a precarious state, are worsened by the intra-executive crisis.

- ***Irresponsiveness of the government at the sub-national level***

Responsiveness is another key indicator of good governance. It refers to the government's ability at any level to effectively respond to citizens' expectations or demands (Ologbenla, 2007; Akhakpe, 2014). Evidence shows that intra-executive crisis kills the responsiveness of conflicting governors and their deputies (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018). They hardly respond or address the challenges facing their citizens amid the crisis. This invariably affects good governance at the sub-national level.

- ***Corruption, political exclusion, and low performance***

Key indicators, such as corruption-free governance, participation, consensus-building, and ultimate performance, suffer more significantly during intra-executive crises at the state level (Omede et al., 2018). Effective performance by conflicting executives is often very low, and citizens' participation in the political process is frequently suppressed amid intra-executive crises (Muheeb, 2016). In addition, consensus voices that allow the people to have a voice in

their own affairs and be fully represented in the government are often denied or relegated. Evidence also indicated that most conflicting state executive leaders often engaged in corrupt practices in the form of looting of resources of state resources, mismanagement of public funds, and non-remittance of local government allocation (Omoede et al., 2018; Agunyai, 2018;

A critical analysis of the findings above reveals that intra-executive crisis hinders all key indicators of good governance at the sub-national level. It partly contributes to why some affected states are underperforming in terms of effective service delivery. It is also responsible for lawlessness, instability, insecurity, and protests, as well as violence in some of the affected states.

Mitigating sub-national intra-executive crisis for good governance in Nigeria

- ***Periodic Constitutional Review to clearly define the roles of deputy-governors***

Constitutional review or amendment to clearly define the roles and duties of deputy governors is likely to go a long way in addressing and reducing intra-executive crisis at the state government level. With this, the governors' perception or claim that their deputies are competing with them over their statutory duties will be reduced, and mutual understanding is likely to be enhanced between governors and their deputies (Muheeb & Jibola, 2018). Mutual understanding between governors and their deputies is likely to foster a peaceful atmosphere and promote effective governance.

- ***Conflict Resolution Mechanism***

Strong conflict resolution mechanisms by the ruling political party at the state level are also likely to go a long way in resolving intra-executive crisis (Awofeso et al., 2017; Ibrahim, 2014). Members of the reconciliation committee should strictly adhere to party regulations when reconciling conflicting governors and their deputies. This will not only resolve the conflict amicably but also help in rechanneling their attention to the plight of the people, who need government intervention, thus satisfying the responsive indicator of good governance.

- ***Prompt disciplinary action against anti-party activities***

Anti-party activities by any governor or deputy governor should be punished in accordance with party rules and regulations to set a good example for other party members (Jinadu, 2014; Ikelegbe, 2014). With this, there is likely to be a control on the powers of the governors and their deputies. This will bring checks and balances on the powers of the executive leaders at the sub-national level. This tends to promote the accountability indicator of good governance.

- ***Promoting strong internal democracy in political parties***

Strong intra-party democracy, which enables the popular participation of members in primary elections rather than the imposition of candidates, is crucial for resolving intra-executive crises (Egwu, 2014). Similarly, deputy governors, who have an interest in succeeding their governors, should adhere to established rules and regulations and refrain from engaging in anti-party activities that could cause tension between them and their governors (Egwu & Ibrahim, 2014). This will go a long way in promoting the participation indicator of good governance.

- *Prosecution and punishment for corrupt practices*

Effective control of corrupt practices and prompt prosecution of corrupt executive heads at the state level will help achieve a corruption-free indicator of good governance and improve government spending on the provision of social services (Agunyai, 2018; Agunyai & Ojatorotu, 2021b). The more sub-national governments are corruption-free, the better for the provision of social services in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that, beyond the widely acknowledged structural and institutional drivers of weak governance in Nigeria's sub-national units, intra-executive conflict between governors and their deputies constitutes a significant and previously under-examined constraint on good governance. The analysis shows that these crises, rooted in political mistrust, divergent ambitions, and principal-agent tensions, routinely destabilise the executive arm of state governments. Such instability diminishes the attention and capacity of executive leaders to fulfil core indicators of good governance, including effective service delivery, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equity, and inclusiveness.

The findings further illustrate that prolonged disputes divert administrative focus from public service obligations, weaken collective executive decision-making, and create opportunities for opaque resource utilisation and personalistic governance practices. In doing so, intra-executive crises not only erode public confidence but also undermine the institutional integrity necessary for achieving developmental outcomes.

To mitigate these challenges, the article recommends establishing structured mechanisms to clarify the roles, expectations, and lines of accountability between governors and their deputies; strengthening internal governance within political parties; and institutionalising conflict-resolution frameworks within state executive councils. Such measures, complemented by a renewed commitment to the principles of good governance, can reduce the incidence of intra-executive disputes and enhance the ability of sub-national governments in Nigeria to meet governance standards.

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