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Public policy and governance in Nigeria: The challenges of policy agenda setting		Vol. 3, No. 2, 2026 (Pp. 1-12) https://journal.upy.ac.id/index.php/qrobss https://doi.org/10.31316/qrobss.v3i2.8935
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Received: November 2025 Revised: January 2025 Accepted: January 2025 Online: May 2026	ABSTRACT	
Keywords: Ethnoreligious, Governance, Institutional challenges, Policy agenda setting, Public policy.	Policy agenda setting is a crucial component of the policy-making process, as it determines which public issues are brought to the forefront of government attention and how they are prioritized. In a nation as ethnically diverse and politically intricate as Nigeria, this stage is frequently influenced by competing regional interests, fragile institutional structures, and fluctuating political commitment. This study explores the relationship between public policy agenda setting and ethnoreligious consciousness in Nigeria. Using the Multiple Streams Framework as its analytical lens, the study demonstrates how political, social, and institutional forces impede the development of a unified national agenda, resulting in disjointed policies and slow responses to societal challenges. Employing a qualitative research design, the study analyzed collected data using thematic content analysis. The findings reveal that the interplay of power, perception, influence, and proximity in political mobilization and policy development significantly affects how ethnicity and religion intersect, frequently reducing broader historical and geopolitical issues to ethnic confrontation. The study concludes that the intentional use of ethnic consciousness by political actors, who invoke shared group identities during national debates, lies at the core of many instances of ineffective policymaking in present-day Nigeria. It further underscores the need for stronger institutions, inclusive governance practices, and improved civic participation to ensure that policy agendas reflect the broader national interest.	

1. Introduction

Public policy and governance in Nigeria function within a highly intricate socio-political landscape characterized by ethnic plurality, structural weaknesses, and competing stakeholder interests. This complexity makes policy agenda setting, the foundational stage in the policymaking process where societal issues are identified, ranked, and brought forward for governmental attention, particularly difficult to achieve effectively. In most developing democracies, the process of determining what becomes a public priority is shaped by a range of influences, including political office holders, pressure groups, citizens' preferences, media narratives, and broader economic conditions (Anderson, 2018; Howlett et al., 2020). However, in Nigeria, these influences interact with additional layers of complexity, such as entrenched ethnic loyalties, religious jingoism, elite capture of the political space, and inconsistent political commitment, all of which significantly determine which issues gain prominence on the national policy agenda.

Furthermore, the Nigerian governance system is hindered by longstanding institutional barriers. These include a public bureaucracy that often lacks the professional capacity to respond to emerging challenges, widespread corruption that distorts policy priorities, and fragmented decision-making mechanisms that impede coordinated action. Such institutional limitations limit policymakers' ability to objectively identify pressing public needs and rank them in ways that align with national development goals rather than narrow political

calculations (Anderson, 2018). As a result, policy agendas frequently mirror the interests of influential political actors instead of reflecting the genuine concerns of the broader population. This misalignment creates a significant gap between citizen expectations and government decisions, thereby weakening public confidence, reducing the legitimacy of government institutions, and contributing to slow or uneven development outcomes (Agbazuere, 2020).

Recognizing and analyzing the obstacles to policy agenda-setting is therefore vital for institutional strengthening and governance in Nigeria. A deeper understanding of how political rivalries, socio-cultural dynamics, institutional inefficiencies, and power imbalances influence agenda formation provides valuable insights into the factors constraining responsive policymaking. Such an analysis highlights the pressing need for institutional reforms that strengthen accountability, broaden opportunities for meaningful citizen engagement, and improve transparency within government operations. These measures are crucial for ensuring that public policies genuinely reflect the priorities and expectations of Nigeria's diverse populace, thereby supporting more effective governance and fostering long-term national development.

2. Method

The study adopted an approach informed by constructivist philosophy, which emphasizes inductive inquiry and provides a systematic, practical framework for analyzing qualitative data, thereby generating reliable and valid findings. The qualitative data for this research were primarily drawn from secondary sources, including academic journals, media publications, and other relevant documented materials. The use of pre-existing data has become increasingly valuable in contemporary research, given the vast volumes of information collected and archived by scholars globally. In addition to accelerating the research process, employing secondary data mitigates the challenges associated with primary data collection, such as costs, time constraints, and measurement complexities. The collected data were carefully analyzed through thematic content analysis, allowing the identification of key patterns, themes, and relationships relevant to the study's objectives. This method was particularly suitable given the impracticality of conducting direct, empirical observation of the phenomenon under investigation. Consequently, the study's findings and conclusions are drawn from an integration of conceptual insights and theoretical contributions, providing a robust foundation for understanding the challenges of policy agenda setting in Nigeria.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Public Policy

Public policy is a multifaceted concept that has been defined and interpreted in diverse ways, depending on the theoretical lens and contextual setting under consideration. Public policy encompasses all actions a government decides to undertake, or consciously chooses to avoid, thus reflecting both the proactive and non-action dimensions of governance. Public policy is a tool through which governments strategically mobilize resources to tackle societal challenges (Sabatier & Weible, 2019). Public policy is a deliberate framework guiding actions aimed at achieving specific objectives. Collectively, these perspectives highlight that public policy extends beyond mere statements of intent, representing a structured and systematic approach to decision-making and governance (Peters, 2021).

A central feature of public policy is that it involves deliberate choices made by individuals, groups, or institutions vested with authority and accountability within the public sphere. This necessitates the systemic and objective evaluation of multiple policy options before identifying the most suitable course of action (Birkland, 2020). Additionally, policies are inherently prospective, outlining anticipated measures or projected outcomes designed to address social, economic, or political issues (Howlett et al., 2020). In this sense, public policies function as both decisions and commitments, guiding governmental interventions while communicating expectations regarding future societal developments. It also provides a mechanism for self-evaluation, harvesting, and responding to public opinion and concerns within the public policy continuum (Gignac et al., 2021). Contemporary research further emphasizes the dynamic and evolving nature of public policy in modern governance. Current studies indicate that policy formulation increasingly reflects complex interactions among state and non-state actors, technological advancements, and broader global governance trends (Sabatier & Weible, 2019; Peters, 2021). This evolving understanding positions public policy not only as an instrument for managing public affairs but also as a vital mechanism for fostering accountability, enhancing responsiveness, and promoting sustainable development, particularly in diverse and multi-ethnic contexts such as Nigeria.

3.1.1. Governance

The concept of governance has been in use since the early thirteenth century, initially emerging in France, where it denoted the seat of government. Over time, its meaning has evolved, ranging from being synonymous with the act or manner of governing, referring to the exercise of authority or power, to encompassing qualities of moral uprightness or intelligence in conduct. Governance can be understood as the lawful exercise of authority to manage the affairs of a people within a specific territory, typically a state (Kjaer, 2023). It essentially represents the mechanisms through which a society or legal framework administers state affairs. Moreover, the legitimacy of governance is often linked to the welfare and interests of the populace, reflecting a democratic orientation in which government is of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Historically, the term “governance” was used interchangeably with “government”; however, this narrow interpretation is insufficient for contemporary understanding, which recognizes governance as encompassing far more than merely upholding the law. Modern governance implies a participatory system in which those entrusted with leadership work to serve the public, address everyday challenges, and improve citizens’ quality of life. It involves the utilization of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a nation’s affairs, encompassing all methods, both formal and informal, by which societies allocate power and manage resources (Frey, 2023). Governance is the process by which citizens’ goals and interests are articulated and pursued to advance society’s collective social and economic development. Similarly, the World Bank initially defined governance as the manner in which government exercises authority over the management of a country’s social and economic resources (Elfert & Ydesen, 2023).

Governance can be understood through several interconnected dimensions. One critical aspect is the nature of the political system in place, which may take various forms, such as

presidential, parliamentary, civilian, military, authoritarian, or democratic. The type of political system shapes how power is distributed, how decisions are made, and how accountability is maintained within the state. Another important dimension concerns the methods and mechanisms employed to manage a nation's financial, social, and human resources. This includes the processes by which governments allocate resources, mobilize public funds, and ensure the equitable provision of services to meet society's needs. Equally significant is the capacity of governments to develop, implement, and enforce policies effectively while discharging their administrative duties. The effectiveness of governance, therefore, depends not only on the design of political institutions but also on the competence, transparency, and responsiveness of those in positions of authority (Cerutti, 2017). In essence, governance represents a comprehensive political process that engages all members of society. It is not merely about exercising authority but also about fostering active citizen participation, promoting social cohesion and inclusion, and nurturing a shared commitment to the social contract that underpins the state's functioning. By integrating institutional capacity, resource management, and inclusive participation, governance ensures that public authority is exercised in ways that are accountable, transparent, and responsive to the collective needs and aspirations of the population.

3.1.2. Agenda Setting in Public Policy

An agenda can be defined as the compilation of societal issues, perceptions regarding their causes, symbolic representations, potential solutions, and other matters of public concern that attract the attention of both citizens and government authorities (Su & Borah, 2019). Agendas extend beyond formal legislative proposals to include collective views on what constitutes a problem, the seriousness of the issue, the parties responsible for addressing it, and the appropriate approaches for resolution. Agenda setting thus refers to the process through which particular issues and potential policy responses gain or lose prominence among policymakers and the public. Throughout this process, topics move through various stages of prioritization before they are formally adopted or advanced within the policy-making cycle (McCombs, 2021).

Researchers have identified several types of agendas that reflect the progression of issues through the policy process. Systemic agendas comprise all issues recognized by policymakers as meriting attention and within their scope of authority. Institutional agendas are drawn from the systemic agenda and represent problems and proposed solutions that are formally analyzed and deliberated upon by policymakers within a specific timeframe. Discretionary agendas encompass issues that legislators or decision-makers select independently, even if these matters have not been included on broader systemic agendas. Decision agendas, on the other hand, consist of the final set of issues approved for action in the subsequent stages of the policy cycle (Lorenz, 2020; Zahariadis, 2021).

Agenda setting is the initial and pivotal phase of the policy cycle, enabling policymakers to prioritize issues based on considerations such as national interest and the government's political will. In the Nigerian context, however, weak national consciousness and the dominance of ethnoregional politics often complicate the objective assessment of public problems in terms of collective national priorities. Political competition frequently takes on a

zero-sum character, with actions that benefit one region perceived as detrimental to others. For instance, media reports suggest that federal government efforts to reform Almajiri schools in northern Nigeria are not widely regarded as national priorities by citizens in the south (Teke et al., 2022). Similarly, infrastructure projects such as the construction of the Second Niger Bridge during the Buhari administration faced criticism from some northern groups for allegedly favoring the southern region (Chilaka, 2023). Such regionalized perceptions and rivalries significantly impede the development of a coherent national agenda, resulting in policy fragmentation and delays in addressing pressing societal issues. Recent research highlights that effective agenda setting requires inclusive stakeholder engagement and the capacity to reconcile competing interests among diverse socio-political groups (Birkland, 2020; Jones & Baumgartner, 2022). In multi-ethnic societies such as Nigeria, achieving this balance is essential for enhancing legitimacy, fostering public trust, and ensuring that policy agendas reflect shared national priorities rather than sectional or regional interests.

3.2. Challenges of Policy Agenda Setting in Nigeria

The formulation of policy agendas in Nigeria is hindered by significant structural and political constraints. Central to these challenges are weaknesses within governmental institutions. Public agencies often operate in a fragmented manner, with overlapping responsibilities and inadequate coordination, undermining their capacity to execute coherent and effective policy initiatives. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, including complex procedures, slow decision-making processes, and frequent leadership turnover, further limit institutions' ability to identify, prioritize, and respond to pressing national issues (Agbazuere, 2020; Zahariadis, 2025). These structural limitations make it difficult to maintain a consistent policy agenda across successive governments, thereby affecting policy continuity and effectiveness.

Corruption and elite domination compound these structural weaknesses. Decision-making processes and public resources are frequently exploited to serve the interests of powerful individuals or groups rather than the broader public (Okolie & Egbon, 2025). Patronage networks entrenched at federal, state, and local levels often determine which issues are prioritized and which are neglected, reflecting power dynamics rather than objective assessments of national priorities (Carnegie Endowment, 2022). This situation undermines fairness, reduces equitable representation, and erodes public trust in governance institutions. In addition, limited civic engagement and low public awareness constrain citizens' ability to influence the policy agenda. Policy-making in Nigeria is often dominated by political elites and bureaucrats, with civil society actors, particularly marginalized groups, frequently excluded from meaningful participation (TheCable, 2025). As a result, national policy agendas often fail to align with the needs and priorities of the wider population, exacerbating social inequalities and fostering societal fragmentation. Ethnic and regional considerations further complicate agenda setting. In Nigeria's multi-ethnic and politically diverse context, sectional interests frequently overshadow collective national concerns. Regional rivalry and elite-led patronage often dictate resource allocation and policy focus, resulting in a national agenda that favors certain groups or areas over others (Carnegie Endowment, 2022; TheCable, 2025).

The combined impact of these structural and political challenges is significant. Fragmentation of policy, implementation delays, and reactive rather than proactive policy

responses are common. Consequently, critical societal problems, including deficiencies in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and security, remain inadequately addressed or persistently underperforming. Moreover, weak agenda-setting mechanisms undermine long-term development. Policies lacking broad-based legitimacy or public ownership are often discontinuous, especially during administrative transitions (Agbazuere, 2020). Strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing transparency, promoting civic engagement, and instituting accountability mechanisms are therefore essential for transforming agenda-setting into a democratic, inclusive, and effective process that reflects national priorities.

3.3. Principal Factors Influencing Policy Agenda Setting in Nigeria

The interplay of four variables, power, perception, potency, and proximity, plays a central role in shaping policy agenda setting in Nigeria. Within this framework, power denotes the capacity to influence and motivate action; perception pertains to the way issues are represented or understood; potency reflects the perceived importance or intensity of a policy's effects; and proximity refers to the immediacy or closeness of these effects to the populations concerned (Birkland, 2020; Meutia et al., 2021; Zahariadis, 2025). It is suggested that potency and proximity primarily affect agenda setting indirectly, functioning through the mediating roles of power and perception.

Power is central to agenda formation. Meutia et al. (2021) identified three dimensions of power in public policy, highlighting that a group's influence and effectiveness are shaped by multiple factors. The first dimension conceptualizes power as a relational dynamic in which one individual or group can compel others to comply, often through overt authority. In Nigeria, this is exemplified by government decisions, such as legislation, being binding on the public, while allowing for consultation and debate within formal structures (Howlett et al., 2020). The second dimension addresses the capacity to shape decisions by controlling the environment in which they are made. Decisions taken "behind closed doors," in what are often termed the "corridors of power," illustrate how individuals with financial or intellectual resources can influence policy agendas without public awareness. Such "invisible" power affects who is elected, which issues are prioritized, and which policies are implemented (Howlett et al., 2020). The third dimension concerns the control of perception through psychological and ideological influence. In Nigeria, political actors often manipulate ethno-religious sentiments to shape public understanding of issues, creating biases that affect citizens' acceptance of policies. This manipulation, often achieved through propaganda or selective framing, can profoundly shape public perception and influence which issues gain traction on the policy agenda.

Perception plays a critical role in how individuals and groups evaluate the importance of policy issues. Citizens' attitudes, ranging from support to opposition, are influenced by their interpretations of power relationships and social context. In Nigeria, ethnic rivalries and struggles for political dominance frequently distort perceptions of national priorities, with groups such as the Igbo and Hausa communities often disagreeing over policies concerning political restructuring, electoral reform, or revenue allocation. Such divergent perceptions affect the perceived potency of policies, determining whether their consequences are considered significant enough to demand attention.

Potency refers to the perceived severity or impact of a policy's outcomes. It reflects how citizens feel about specific social and political issues and influences the degree of mobilization around a policy agenda. For instance, many citizens in southern Nigeria initially perceived the Boko Haram insurgency as a primarily northern issue, demonstrating how perceived potency shapes public concern and engagement (Muhammad, 2023).

Proximity concerns the closeness or immediacy of policy impacts, encompassing geographical, religious, and ethnic dimensions. Issues that are perceived to directly affect individuals or communities are more likely to capture attention and elicit action. In Nigeria, proximity amplifies urgency and contributes to the politicization of policy, particularly where ethno-religious divisions intersect with resource allocation and national decision-making.

The interplay of these four variables, power, perception, potency, and proximity, has significantly influenced the formulation of Nigeria's national policy agenda. Ethno-religious politics, patronage networks, and historical grievances have shaped both the content and prioritization of policies, often at the expense of national cohesion and inclusive governance (Okeke & Idike, 2016; Oni & Adebisi, 2020). Consequently, the legitimacy of government policies is frequently undermined, as they are interpreted through the lens of ethnicity or religion rather than collective national interest (Muhammad, 2023).

Furthermore, the persistence of corruption, mismanagement, and political opportunism has weakened institutional capacity and eroded public trust. Nigerian leaders have often exploited ethnic loyalties and religious affiliations to secure political advantage, resulting in inequitable policy outcomes, underdeveloped infrastructure, and economic stagnation (Oni & Adebisi, 2020). The combination of these factors illustrates the complex dynamics that shape agenda-setting processes in Nigeria, highlighting the challenges of reconciling diverse ethnic and religious interests with the broader national interest. This analysis underscores the need for policy approaches that account for the interrelated effects of power, perception, potency, and proximity, particularly in multi-ethnic societies where political mobilization and policymaking are heavily influenced by social cleavages and historical legacies. In pursuit of this objective, the study highlighted and analyzed the following issues:

Election Administration: Electoral processes offer another example of how agenda-setting is shaped by ethnicity and religion, determining who occupies political office. Politics in Nigeria has long been influenced by such factors, and the 2023 presidential election was no exception. Prior to the election, disputes emerged over the ethnic and religious identities of vice-presidential and presidential candidates. While ethnic concerns appeared to be partially resolved, religious affiliations remained contentious, particularly for the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). The APC ultimately adopted a Muslim-Muslim ticket, pairing Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Yoruba Muslim from the South-West, with Kashim Shettima, a Muslim from the North-East. This decision sparked public outcry and calls for legislative intervention to mandate diversity in political candidacy. Electoral outcomes revealed a clear pattern of ethno-religious voting: the APC secured victories in regions aligned with their candidates' religious and ethnic identities, while other regions rejected the ticket, favoring alternative parties such as the Labor Party (LP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). This

demonstrates the enduring influence of ethnic and religious identity on political behavior in Nigeria, shaping both party strategies and voter choices.

Decline in Social Cohesion: Nigeria's struggle with social cohesion stems not from citizens' unwillingness to comply with authority, but from loyalty to competing ethnic and religious identities. Efforts to foster national integration and civic patriotism are undermined by entrenched provincial allegiances and identity-based politics (Yakubu, 2017). Research shows that political socialization within families heavily influences youth political engagement, often more than formal education. Religious leaders and societal narratives further shape perceptions, sometimes fostering distrust in government and reinforcing ethnic and religious divides. Consequently, despite formal education and national symbols, many young Nigerians internalize conflicting messages, resulting in a populace whose political attitudes are heavily mediated by ethnic and religious identities rather than civic consciousness (Adamu & Etila, 2019).

Revenue Allocation: The politics surrounding revenue allocation represent a critical arena in which ethnicity significantly shapes agenda-setting and policy formulation in Nigeria. Despite the incorporation of the federal character principle into the constitution, intended to ensure equitable representation of all ethnic groups, disputes over revenue allocation have persisted. This issue continues to fuel political agitation and has complicated Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Historically, at least five revenue allocation formulas have been adopted both before and after independence, yet none have achieved widespread satisfaction, often prompting calls for revision, particularly from minority groups who perceive themselves as marginalized (Ogu, 2023). The complexity of the system, shaped by ethnicity, religion, and regionalism, has necessitated numerous revenue allocation principles, many of which were eventually abandoned due to flaws. This tension between revenue generation and distribution underscores the ongoing dilemma of Nigerian federalism. Between 1948 and 2012, Nigeria relied on nine commissions, six military decrees, one parliamentary act, and two Supreme Court rulings to redefine and regulate fiscal relationships among the federating units (Vande, 2021).

Constitutionalism: Constitutional amendments further illustrate the influence of ethnoreligious politics on public policy and agenda-setting. The 2006 attempt to amend the 1999 constitution exemplifies this, as regional self-interest, particularly the longstanding north-south rivalry, dominated discourse under the guise of democratic reform. Traditional rulers often became instruments in mobilizing public opinion along ethnic and religious lines, reinforcing identity politics (Bakare & Akinyetun, 2026). During the Fourth Northern Senators Forum in Kaduna, opposition to the constitutional review was largely concentrated in the North, reflecting ambitions to reclaim presidential power in 2007. Public perceptions of constitutional proposals were strongly mediated by ethnicity and religion, influencing acceptance or resistance. Measures intended to balance religious and ethnic representation, such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), federal character principles, and equal recognition of religious holidays, have largely failed to achieve their intended outcomes, sometimes exacerbating intergroup tensions (Muhammad, 2023).

3.4. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) a widely adopted model for understanding how certain issues gain prominence on the policy agenda within complex political systems. The framework posits that agenda setting occurs when three largely independent streams, problems, policies, and politics, converge at critical moments, creating a “policy window” that allows specific issues to attract the attention of policymakers. The problem stream involves recognizing issues as public concerns that warrant government intervention. In the Nigerian context, persistent structural deficiencies, socio-economic disparities, and recurrent crises in sectors such as education, healthcare, and security illustrate ongoing national challenges. The manner in which these issues are framed and perceived by both the public and policymakers plays a decisive role in determining their inclusion on the policy agenda (Birkland, 2020).

The policy stream refers to the development and assessment of potential solutions by experts, bureaucrats, and interest groups. Effective policy alternatives must satisfy the criteria of technical feasibility, political acceptability, and financial viability. In Nigeria, the capacity to formulate robust policy options is often limited by weak institutional structures, insufficient research-based inputs, and elite capture, which constrain evidence-informed policymaking (Agbazuere, 2020; Okolie & Egbon, 2025). The politics stream encompasses broader political factors, including government changes, shifts in public opinion, pressures from interest groups, and partisan dynamics. In Nigeria, ethnic politics, regional rivalries, and entrenched patronage networks heavily influence which issues are prioritized or sidelined (Carnegie Endowment, 2022; TheCable, 2025).

The MSF thus provides a lens to explain why some policy issues, such as infrastructure development or educational reform, receive attention at specific times, while other critical issues remain neglected. When the three streams, problem recognition, viable policy solutions, and political support, align, a policy window opens, allowing issues to enter the agenda. Conversely, misalignment among streams contributes to fragmented, reactive, and delayed policy responses. Applying Kingdon’s MSF in the Nigerian context highlights the interplay between institutional weaknesses, socio-political dynamics, and policy alternatives in shaping agenda-setting processes. It underscores the necessity of strengthening all three streams: effectively identifying and framing national problems, developing technically and politically feasible solutions, and fostering a political environment conducive to inclusive and equitable decision-making.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from this study is that the deliberate mobilization of ethnic consciousness by political actors, appealing to the shared identity of particular groups when national issues are debated, lies at the heart of many ineffective policies in contemporary Nigeria. Even when leaders have genuine intentions to harness politics for national development, their efforts to design and implement policies to foster sustainable economic growth are often thwarted by ethnic and religious barriers that inhibit sound decision-making.

Given the socioeconomic and political rivalries among Nigeria’s diverse communities, symbolic ethnic pluralism inevitably shapes contentious intergroup relations. The prevailing

political culture means that many Nigerians view the political arena with limited interest or engagement, as social and political actions are profoundly shaped by ethno-religious consciousness, which in turn influences the direction and nature of state policy. In a context where policymaking is characterized by struggles over subordination, resistance, and dominance, often framed as battles for autonomy and freedom from exploitation, ethnic diversity has become a significant constraint, impeding the realization of equity and socio-economic and political development.

This study does not claim that its recommendations can resolve all of Nigeria's policy and governance challenges. The issues are complex and deeply entrenched, requiring multifaceted interventions. The concentration of resources and decision-making power at the center is a major obstacle to effective agenda-setting. The presidency, as the custodian of national authority, inevitably engages in disputes with ethno-religious groups seeking influence. In the short term, genuine federalism and greater resource control by federating units could redirect energies towards productive resource generation and ease tensions arising from ethnic competition and a highly centralized state. Long-term solutions demand cultivating a sociopolitical environment that nurtures an African governance ethos, free from Eurocentric models and underpinned by a strong presidential institution. Structural reforms should move beyond symbolic recognition of ethnicity, such as the Federal Character Principle, and focus on a comprehensive national integration policy to dismantle discriminatory practices and ethno-religious rivalries. This policy should prioritize intercultural engagement and mutual acceptance among all ethnic groups. Two principal strategies are proposed: firstly, a cultural component to support and promote the development of all cultural identities; and secondly, a social component to enable equitable cultural exchange and full participation in societal life, thereby fostering cohesion and inclusivity.

Despite its contributions to understanding public policy and governance in Nigeria, this study on the challenges of policy agenda setting is subject to certain limitations. First, the complexity of Nigeria's political system, which involves multiple actors at the federal, state, and local levels, makes it difficult to capture all the dynamics influencing agenda-setting within a single study. As a result, some informal processes, backstage negotiations, and elite bargaining that significantly shape policy priorities may not be fully examined. Second, the study may be limited by the availability and reliability of data. Policy agenda-setting processes in Nigeria are often undocumented or poorly recorded, particularly at the subnational level. This lack of transparent records can constrain access to accurate information on how issues emerge, gain attention, or are excluded from the policy agenda. Third, the study's analytical scope may be constrained by its reliance on specific theoretical frameworks or qualitative interpretations, which may not fully account for emerging factors such as digital activism, social media influence, and non-state actors in contemporary agenda setting. Consequently, some evolving trends in policy influence may receive limited attention. Finally, contextual factors such as political instability, changes in government, and shifting policy priorities can affect the generalisability of the findings over time. What applies to one political administration or period may not necessarily reflect agenda-setting practices under different leadership or political conditions.

Future studies should adopt mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of policy agenda-setting in Nigeria. Comparative studies across different states or policy sectors (such as health, education, or security) would also help to reveal variations and best practices within the Nigerian governance system. Furthermore, researchers should explore the growing role of digital media, social movements, and grassroots advocacy in shaping policy agendas, particularly among youths and marginalized groups. Longitudinal studies examining agenda-setting processes across multiple political administrations would also be valuable in identifying patterns of continuity and change in Nigeria's public policy environment.

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