

REBUILDING PUBLIC TRUST IN THE NIGERIAN JUSTICE SYSTEM:

Responsibilities Of The Bar, The Bench, And The Society



SURVEY REPORT

Detailed report on the survey conducted by the law firm on SPA Ajibade & Co. as part of its 2025 Annual Business Luncheon held in December 2025.

PREPARED BY



FOR SPA AJIBADE & CO.

Executive Summary



PREPARED BY



PREPARED FOR



The survey received 446 responses from across the Nigerian justice sector, including lawyers, judges, academics, civil society actors and members of the public, with participation from all six geopolitical zones.

The report reveals perspectives from seven distinct professional groups: private practice lawyers (65.7%), private citizens (9.9%), in-house/corporate lawyers (9.4%), government legal officers (7.2%), academics (3.1%), civil society representatives (2.7%), and judicial officers (2.0%). This diversity strengthens the findings' credibility and demonstrates that the crisis of trust transcends professional boundaries.

The survey responses reveal a justice system in crisis, with public trust at critically low levels.

The data paints a sobering picture: 73.1% of respondents rate public trust as poor to very poor (ratings 1-2), and 69.6% believe trust has declined over the past five years. The findings demand urgent, comprehensive reform.

The responses are attached as annexure 2.

Executive Summary

(Cont'd)



Despite these findings, the survey reflects a strong belief in the possibility of reform. Over 75% of respondents agreed that meaningful improvements in case management, judicial appointments, discipline, and the use of technology would significantly restore public trust. A clear majority also supported increased transparency in judicial appointments, automated case allocation, and stronger monitoring of arrests and detention through digital tools.

Taken together, the figures show a justice system facing a serious trust deficit, but also a public that remains willing to engage and support reform if change is visible, consistent, and sustained.



Methodology

The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. It comprised sixteen questions structured into four thematic sections covering respondent demographics, perceptions of public trust, performance assessments of the justice system, and views on reform priorities. The survey link was disseminated widely through multiple channels, including social media platforms, email distribution lists, professional networks within the Nigerian Bar Association, and selected labour unions, to encourage broad participation.

A total of 446 valid responses were received over the survey period. Respondents represented seven professional categories: private practice lawyers, in-house/corporate lawyers, government legal officers, judicial officers, law academics and researchers, civil society representatives, and private citizens. Participants were drawn from all six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, with a small number of respondents based outside the country. The survey allowed for both multiple-choice responses and open-ended narrative inputs, enabling quantitative analysis alongside qualitative insights.

Data analysis combined descriptive statistical methods with thematic analysis of narrative responses. Quantitative results were disaggregated by profession, geography, and experience level to identify patterns and divergences. Qualitative responses were reviewed and coded to extract recurring themes and illustrative examples. While the survey reflects some limitations, including a higher concentration of respondents from the South-West and a lawyer-heavy sample, the consistency of findings across diverse groups and the alignment between quantitative and qualitative data support the credibility and reliability of the conclusions.

2. Respondents' Demographics

Who Are The Respondents

Professional Composition (N=446)

Role	Count	Percentage
Legal Practitioner (Private Practice)	293	65.7%
Private Citizen	44	9.9%
Legal Practitioner (In-House/Corporate)	42	9.4%
Government Legal Officer	32	7.2%
Law Academic/Researcher	14	3.1%
Civil Society/NGO	12	2.7%
Judicial Officer	9	2.0%
Law Enforcement Officer	3	0.7%

Years of Experience

Experience Range	Count	Percentage
Over 30 years	140	31.4%
11-20 years	102	22.9%
5-10 years	69	15.5%
Not applicable (Primarily private citizens and non-lawyers)	48	10.8%
21-30 years	47	10.5%
Less than 5 years	40	9.0%

Geographic Distribution

Zone	Count	Percentage
South-West	240	53.8%
North-Central	99	22.2%
South-South	40	9.0%
North-West	26	5.8%
North-East	15	3.4%
South-East	10	2.2%
Not Applicable (Outside Nigeria)	16	3.6%

Key Insight:

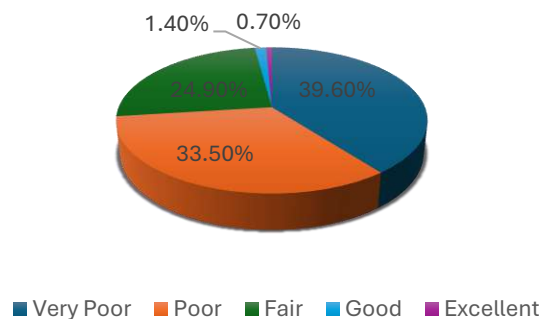
The survey captures voices from seasoned practitioners who have witnessed the system's evolution over decades, alongside fresh perspectives from private citizens and newer entrants. The 31.4% with over 30 years of experience lends particular credibility to observations about systemic decline.



3. State of Public Trust: A System in Crisis

Q1. Current Level of Public Trust

How would you rate the current level of public trust in the Nigerian justice system?



Current Trust Levels (Average: 1.90/5)

Overall Distribution:

Combined Poor/Very Poor: 73.1%

Combined Good/Excellent: 2.1%

Trust Levels by Professional Role

Private Practice Lawyers (n=293):

- Very Poor/Poor: 215 (73.4%)
- Fair: 69 (23.5%)
- Good/Excellent: 7 (2.4%)
- Average: Reflects deep insider knowledge of system failures

In-House/Corporate Lawyers (n=42):

- Very Poor/Poor: 33 (78.6%) – Highest dissatisfaction rate
- Fair: 8 (19.0%)
- Good/Excellent: 0 (0%)
- Average: Corporate lawyers show even greater pessimism

Private Citizens (n=44):

- Very Poor/Poor: 31 (70.5%)
- Fair: 12 (27.3%)
- Good/Excellent: 1 (2.3%)
- Average: General public mirrors professional assessment

Judicial Officers (n=9):

- Very Poor/Poor: 8 (88.9%) – Most critical assessment
- Fair: 0 (0%)
- Good/Excellent: 1 (11.1%)
- Average: Even insiders rate system poorly

Government Legal Officers (n=31):

- Very Poor/Poor: 21 (67.7%)
- Fair: 10 (32.3%)
- Good/Excellent: 0 (0%)

Law Academics/Researchers (n=14):

- Very Poor/Poor: 8 (57.1%)
- Fair: 5 (35.7%)
- Good/Excellent: 0 (0%)

Civil Society/NGO (n=12):

- Very Poor/Poor: 9 (75.0%)
- Fair: 3 (25.0%)
- Good/Excellent: 0 (0%)

Trust Levels by Geographic Zone

South-West (n=240):

- Very Poor/Poor: 177 (73.8%)
- Fair: 56 (23.3%)
- Good/Excellent: 6 (2.5%)

North-Central (n=99):

- Very Poor/Poor: 69 (69.7%)
- Fair: 27 (27.3%)
- Good/Excellent: 1 (1.0%)

South-South (n=40):

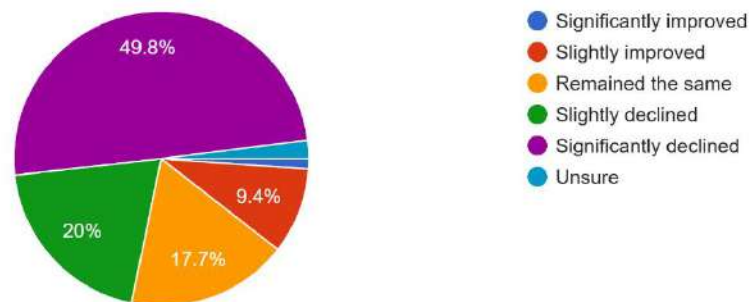
- Very Poor/Poor: 25 (62.5%)
- Fair: 14 (35.0%)
- Good/Excellent: 1 (2.5%)

Other Zones:

- Consistently show 70%+ poor/very poor ratings across North-East, North-West, and South-East

Q2. Five-Year Trust Trajectory

Compared to five (5) years ago, do you believe public trust in the Nigerian justice system has:
446 responses



Overall Assessment:

- **Significantly declined:** 222 (49.8%)
- **Slightly declined:** 89 (20.0%)
- **Combined decline:** 311 (69.8%)
- **Remained the same:** 79 (17.7%)
- **Slightly improved:** 42 (9.4%)
- **Significantly improved:** 5 (1.1%)
- **Unsure:** 9 (2.0%)

Trajectory by Professional Role:*

Private Practice Lawyers:

- Declined: 195 (66.6%)
- Remained same: 60 (20.5%)
- Improved: 31 (10.6%)

In-House/Corporate Lawyers:

- Declined: 33 (78.6%) - Highest decline perception
- Remained same: 6 (14.3%)
- Improved: 3 (7.1%)

Judicial Officers:

- Declined: 7 (77.8%)
- Improved: 2 (22.2%)

Private Citizens:

- Declined: 32 (72.7%)
- Remained same: 4 (9.1%)
- Improved: 6 (13.6%)

Geographic Variations:

- South-West: 68.8% report decline
- North-Central: 75.8% report decline (highest)
- North-East: 80.0% report decline
- All zones show majority perceiving deterioration

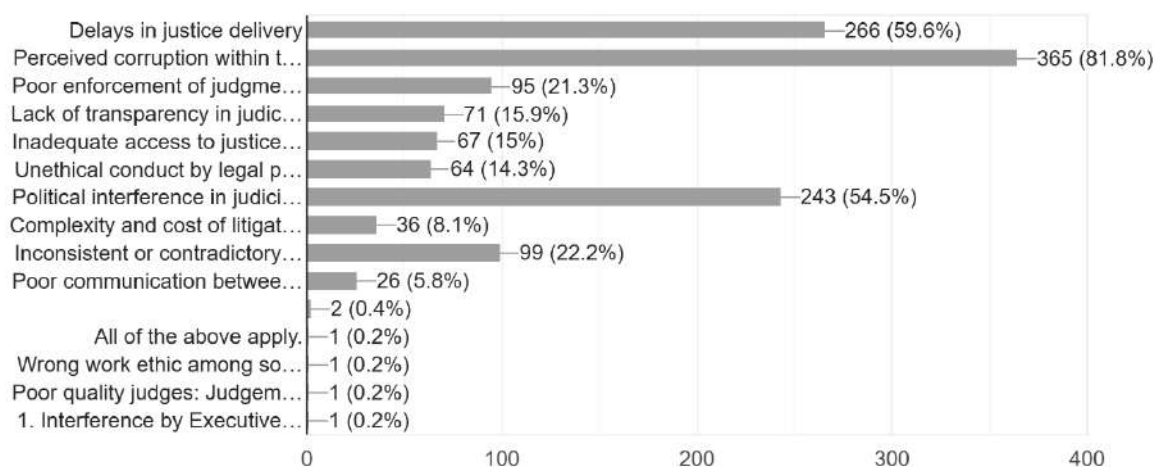
Critical Finding: Nearly seven in ten respondents observe deterioration over five years, with the strongest consensus among corporate lawyers and northern zones. This represents a systemic failure trajectory that is accelerating, not isolated incidents.

*Excludes unsure

Q3. Root Causes: The Trust Erosion Triangle

In your assessment, which THREE factors have contributed most significantly to the erosion of public trust in the Nigerian justice system?

446 responses



Top Contributing Factors (Respondents could select three)

1. Perceived Corruption: 365 (81.8%)

- Overwhelmingly the primary concern across all groups
- Manifests in judicial appointments, case outcomes, and interactions with court staff
- Creates perception of "justice for sale in the open market"

2. Delays in Justice Delivery: 266 (59.6%)

- Cases lingering for years without resolution
- "Justice delayed is justice denied" sentiment pervasive
- Multiple respondents noted matters awaiting final addresses for over a year

3. Political Interference in Judicial Decisions: 243 (54.5%)

- Executive influence over judicial appointments and decisions
- Judges perceived as "in the pocket of the executive"
- Undermines judicial independence fundamentally

Secondary Concerns:

- **Inconsistent or contradictory judgments:** 99 (22.2%)
- **Poor enforcement of judgments:** 95 (21.3%)
- **Lack of transparency in judicial processes:** 71 (15.9%)
- **Inadequate access to justice:** 67 (15.0%)
- **Unethical conduct by legal practitioners:** 64 (14.3%)
- **Complexity and cost of litigation:** 36 (8.1%)
- **Poor communication:** 26 (5.8%)

Factor Analysis by Professional Group

Private Citizens prioritise:

1. Corruption (80%)
2. Delays (61%)
3. Political Interference (52%)

Judicial Officers prioritise:

1. Delays (67%)
2. Corruption (78%)
3. Political Interference (44%)

Corporate Lawyers prioritise:

1. Corruption (86%) - Highest concern
2. Political Interference (62%)
3. Delays (55%)

Pattern Analysis: Corruption dominates across every demographic, ranging from 78-86%. This unprecedented consensus indicates the problem is observable, pervasive, and universally recognized regardless of vantage point.

4. Responsibilities of the Bench

q4. Rate the judiciary's performance in the following areas:

/ Fair / Poor / Very Poor)

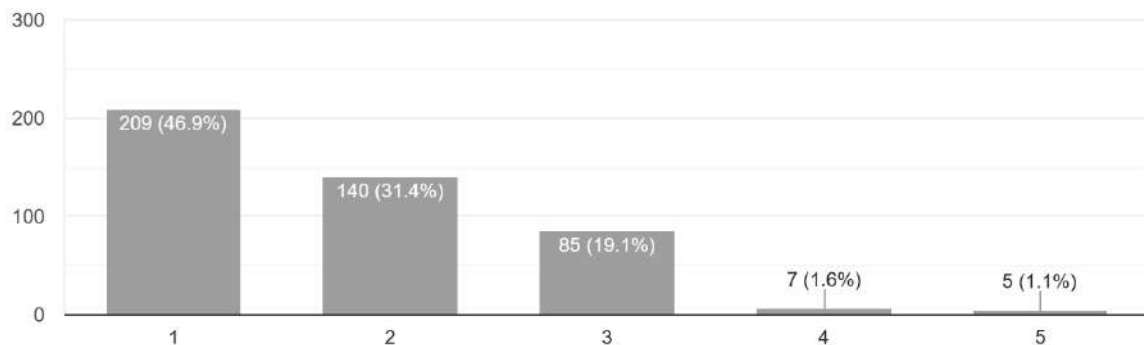
- a) Independence from political influence:
- b) Transparency in judicial processes:
- c) Timeliness in delivering judgments:
- d) Quality and consistency of judgments:
- e) Accessibility to litigants:
- f) Ethical conduct:
- g) Public communication and engagement:

All metrics rated below 3.0/5, indicating systemic underperformance

A. Political Influence: 1.79/5 (LOWEST)

Independence from political influence

446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 349 (78.3%)
- Fair: 85 (19.1%)
- Good/Excellent: 12 (2.7%)

By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 1.76/5 (79.2% poor)
- In-House/Corporate: 1.76/5 (76.2% poor)
- Judicial Officers: 1.67/5 (100% poor/fair, none good)
- Private Citizens: 1.89/5 (77.3% poor)

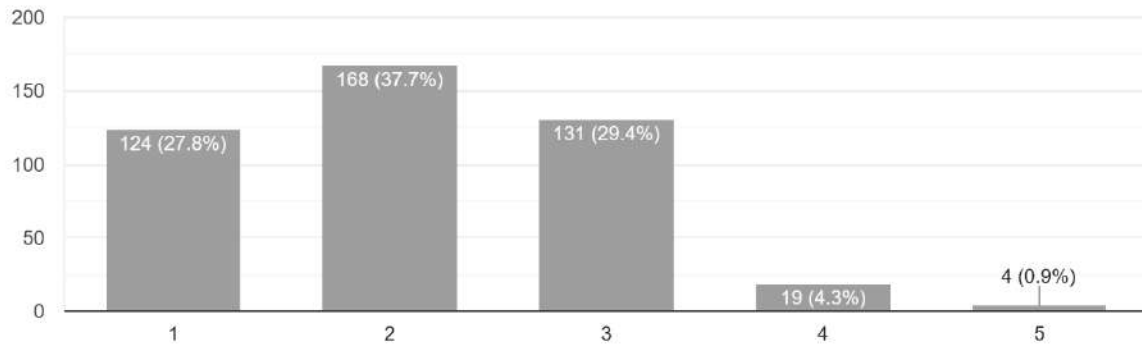
By Zone:

- South-West: 1.77/5 (79.2% poor)
- North-Central: 1.78/5 (74.7% poor)
- Highest dissatisfaction nationwide

Critical Analysis: Fundamental to judicial legitimacy, yet most compromised. The 78.3% poor rating represents a crisis of institutional independence. Even judicial officers themselves rate this poorly, indicating awareness of political capture.

B. Timeliness in Delivering Judgments: 2.13/5

Timeliness in delivering judgments
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 292 (65.5%)
- Fair: 131 (29.4%)
- Good/Excellent: 23 (5.2%)

By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.06/5 (69.3% poor)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.10/5 (69.0% poor)
- Judicial Officers: 2.33/5 (55.6% poor)
- Private Citizens: 2.27/5 (56.8% poor)

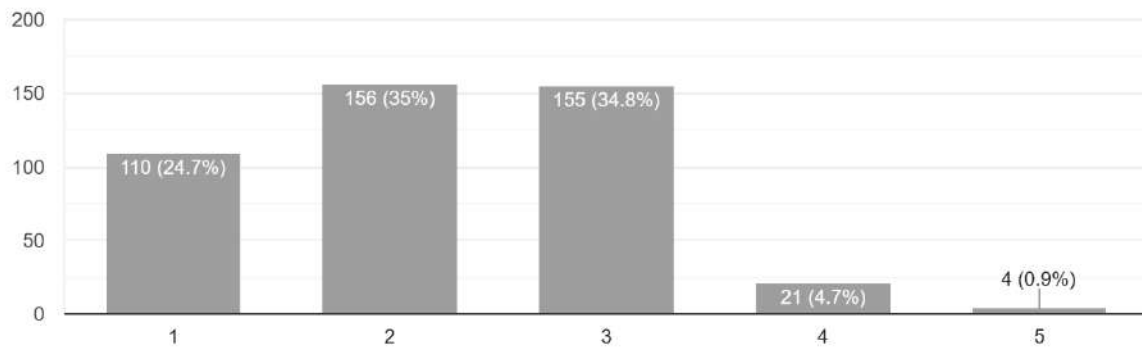
By Zone:

- South-West: 2.09/5 (59.6% poor)
- North-Central: 2.18/5 (59.6% poor)

Impact: Directly affects access to justice and creates incentive for extra-legal solutions. Multiple respondents reported cases pending 6+ years.

C. Transparency in Judicial Processes: 2.22/5

Transparency in judicial processes
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 266 (59.7%)
- Fair: 155 (34.8%)
- Good/Excellent: 25 (5.6%)

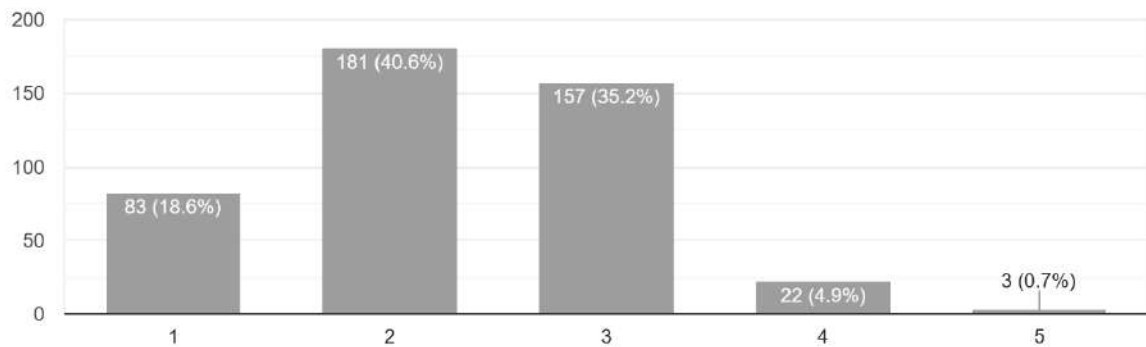
By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.15/5 (63.4% poor)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.24/5 (64.3% poor)
- Judicial Officers: 2.56/5 (33.3% poor) - More positive insider view
- Private Citizens: 2.45/5 (50.0% poor)

Analysis: Breeds suspicion and conspiracy theories. Appointment processes especially opaque. Judicial officers rate this higher, suggesting gap between insider knowledge and public perception.

D. Public Communication and Engagement: 2.28/5

Public communication and engagement
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

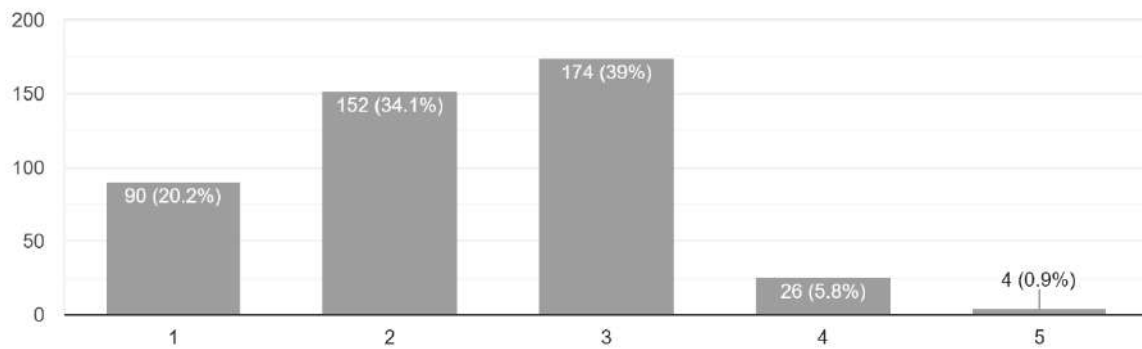
- Very Poor/Poor: 264 (59.2%)
- Fair: 157 (35.2%)
- Good/Excellent: 25 (5.6%)

By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.23/5 (60.8% poor)
- Judicial Officers: 2.78/5 (55.6% poor but 33.3% good)
- Private Citizens: 2.36/5 (52.3% poor)

E. Quality and Consistency of Judgments: 2.33/5

Quality and consistency of judgments
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 242 (54.3%)
- Fair: 174 (39.0%)
- Good/Excellent: 30 (6.7%)

By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.26/5 (56.7% poor)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.36/5 (50.0% poor)
- Judicial Officers: 2.33/5 (33.3% poor)
- Private Citizens: 2.48/5 (50.0% poor)

By Zone:

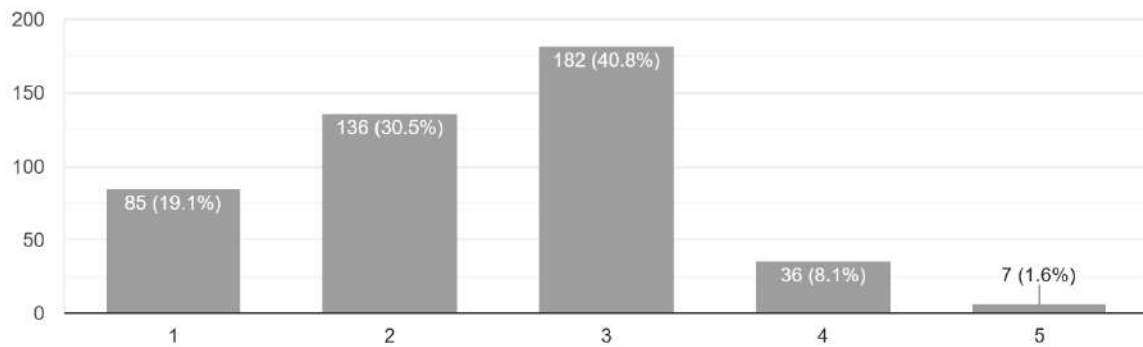
- South-West: 2.32/5 (53.8% poor)
- North-Central: 2.35/5 (49.5% poor)

Critical Issue: Frequent contradictory rulings undermine legal certainty. 39% rate as "fair" but 54.3% still poor, indicating this is a relative strength only by comparison.

F. Ethical Conduct: 2.43/5

Ethical conduct

446 responses



Overall Distribution:

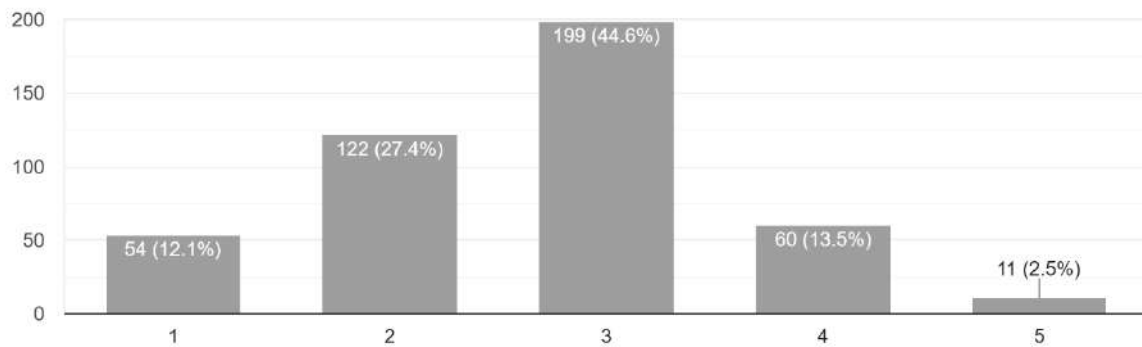
- Very Poor/Poor: 221 (49.6%)
- Fair: 182 (40.8%)
- Good/Excellent: 43 (9.7%)

By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.38/5 (49.5% poor)
- Judicial Officers: 2.44/5 (44.4% poor, 22.2% good)
- Private Citizens: 2.52/5 (43.2% poor)

G. Accessibility to Litigants: 2.67/5 (HIGHEST – Relative strength)

Accessibility to litigants
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 176 (39.5%)
- Fair: 199 (44.6%)
- Good/Excellent: 71 (16.0%)

By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.61/5 (43.7% poor, 44.4% fair)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.79/5 (38.1% poor, 45.2% fair)
- Judicial Officers: 2.44/5 (44.4% poor)
- Private Citizens: 2.86/5 (20.5% poor, 56.8% fair)

By Zone:

- South-West: 2.71/5 (35.4% poor, 47.9% fair)
- North-Central: 2.57/5 (44.4% poor, 41.4% fair)

Analysis: Physical access better than quality/integrity issues. Private citizens rate this most positively, suggesting courts are physically reachable even if they don't deliver justice effectively.

Bench Performance: Cross-Cutting Insights

Patterns Across Metrics:

1. **Universal Underperformance:** No metric exceeds 2.67/5
2. **Professional Consensus:** All groups rate most metrics below 2.5
3. **Geographic Consistency:** Little variation between zones
4. **Insider-Outer Gap:** Judicial officers sometimes rate higher, suggesting perception gap
5. **Access vs. Quality Divide:** Physical accessibility (2.67) far exceeds quality/independence metrics (1.79-2.43)

Most Critical Weaknesses (Bottom 3):

1. Independence from Political Influence: 1.79/5
2. Timeliness in Delivering Judgments: 2.13/5
3. Transparency in Judicial Processes: 2.22/5

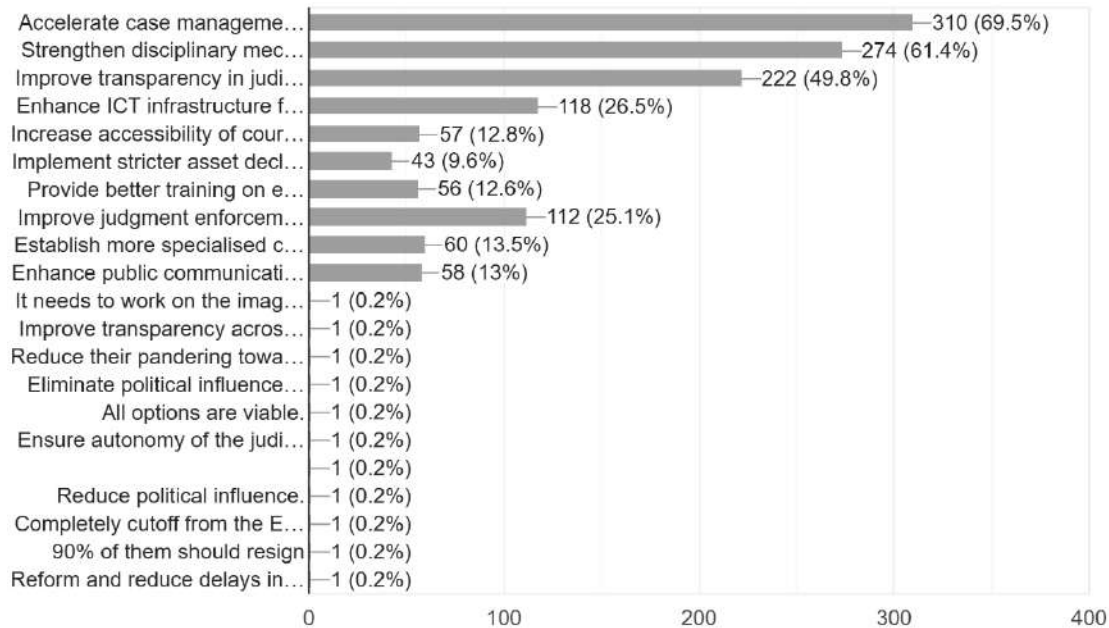
Relative Strengths (Still Poor):

1. Accessibility to Litigants: 2.67/5
2. Ethical Conduct: 2.43/5
3. Quality and Consistency: 2.33/5

5. Bench Priorities: What Must Be Done

What THREE specific actions should the Bench prioritise to restore public trust?

446 responses



Top Three Actions for the Bench (Respondents selected three)

1. Accelerate Case Management and Reduce Delays: 310 (69.5%)

- Most urgent operational priority
- Directly addresses "justice delayed" crisis
- Requires process reform and resource allocation
- Universally prioritized across all professional groups

2. Strengthen Disciplinary Mechanisms for Erring Judges: 274 (61.4%)

- Current mechanisms seen as toothless
- Corrupt/incompetent judges face minimal consequences

- Public needs to see accountability
- Second-highest priority across demographics

3. Improve Transparency in Judicial Appointments: 222 (49.8%)

- Merit-based selection over political patronage
- Public scrutiny of candidate records
- Reduce nepotism and favoritism
- Critical for addressing political interference

Other Significant Priorities:

- **Enhance ICT infrastructure for court operations:** 118 (26.5%)
- **Improve judgment enforcement mechanisms:** 112 (25.1%)
- **Increase accessibility of courts to citizens:** 57 (12.8%)
- **Provide better training for judicial officers:** 56 (12.6%)
- **Establish more specialized courts:** 60 (13.5%)
- **Enhance public communication:** 58 (13.0%)
- **Implement stricter asset declaration:** 43 (9.6%)

Priority Patterns by Demographics

Private Citizens emphasise:

1. Accelerate case management (70%)
2. Strengthen disciplinary mechanisms (64%)
3. Improve transparency in appointments (48%)

Judicial Officers emphasize:

1. Accelerate case management (78%)

2. Strengthen disciplinary mechanisms (67%)
3. Improve transparency in appointments (44%)

Corporate Lawyers emphasize:

1. Accelerate case management (74%)
2. Strengthen disciplinary mechanisms (62%)
3. Improve transparency in appointments (52%)

Insight: Remarkable consensus across all groups on top three priorities. The consistency suggests these are not partisan concerns but widely recognized necessities.

Q5 Comments by Respondents

The comments reflect deep anger, frustration, and loss of confidence in the Nigerian judiciary. Respondents see the justice system as broken at its core, with delay, perceived corruption, political interference, and lack of independence recurring across nearly all remarks. Many contributors, including young lawyers, expressed personal shame, disillusionment, and emotional fatigue. A dominant sentiment is that justice is no longer seen as a public good but as a commodity, inaccessible to the poor and vulnerable. Several comments also point to poor institutional optics, weak accountability, and the failure of key professional bodies to act as effective safeguards.

A strong theme is the belief that the judiciary has lost its independence and is viewed as an extension of the executive, especially in politically sensitive cases. Respondents repeatedly cited delays in proceedings, inconsistent decisions, and administrative inefficiency as evidence that the system no longer serves litigants. There is also a perception that self-help is replacing faith in courts, which respondents see as a dangerous sign for the rule of law. While a few comments acknowledge that public perception may not always reflect reality, they still concede that the judiciary has failed to manage trust and transparency.

The top five recurring comments or concerns are clear. First, **justice delay**, summed up by “justice delayed is justice denied,” with real examples of cases stalled for over a year. Second, **political interference and lack of independence**, with courts described as being under the control of politicians. Third, **corruption and sale of justice**, repeatedly expressed as “justice is for sale” or “justice for the highest bidder.” Fourth, **loss of public confidence**, including lawyers admitting they no longer believe in the system or practise only to survive. Fifth, **institutional failure and poor accountability**, especially the perceived failure of the NBA, the Body of Benchers, and court administration to check abuse, ensure transparency in appointments, and discipline misconduct.

5. Responsibilities of the Bar

Q6. Rate the legal profession's performance in the following areas:

(Scale: Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor / Very Poor)

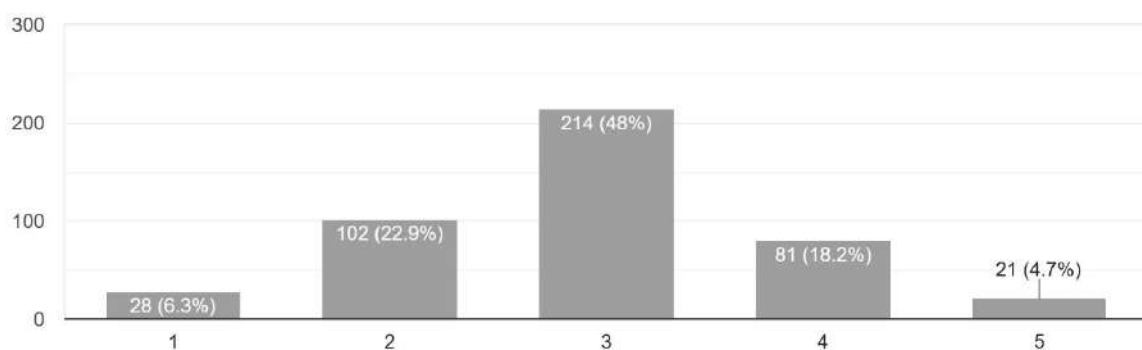
- a) Ethical conduct and professional standards:
- b) Access to legal services for ordinary citizens:
- c) Pro bono and public interest litigation:
- d) Continuing legal education and competence:
- e) Self-regulation and disciplinary enforcement:
- f) Advocacy for justice system reforms:
- g) Public education on legal rights

The Bar rates marginally better than the Bench, but still underperforms

Detailed Performance Metrics

A. Continuing Legal Education and Competence: 2.92/5 (HIGHEST)

Continuing legal education and competence
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 130 (29.2%)
- Fair: 214 (48.0%)
- Good/Excellent: 102 (22.9%)

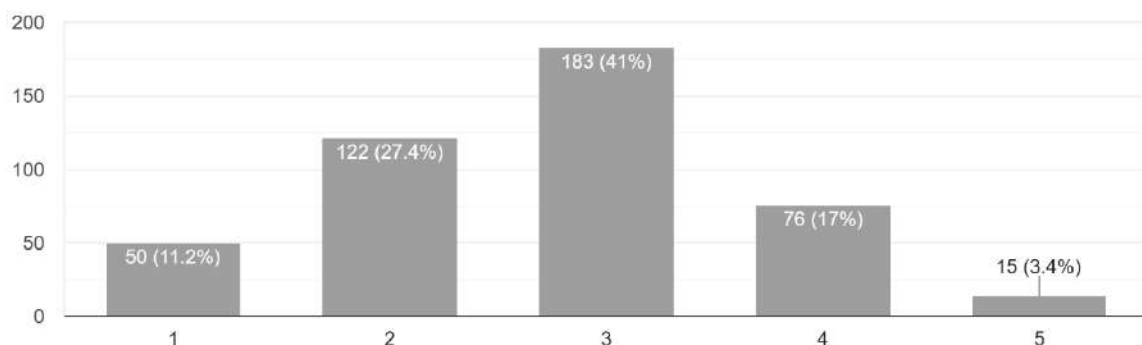
By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.91/5 (27.3% poor, 49.1% fair, 23.5% good)
- In-House/Corporate: 3.07/5 (31.0% poor, 45.2% fair, 23.8% good)
- Government: 3.06/5 (35.5% poor, 35.5% fair, 29.0% good)
- Judicial Officers: 2.78/5 (11.1% poor, 77.8% fair, 11.1% good)

Analysis: Relative strength, though still below 3.0. Nearly half (48%) rate as "fair," and almost a quarter (22.9%) view positively. This is the only metric across Bench and Bar to exceed 2.90.

B. Advocacy for Justice System Reforms: 2.74/5

Advocacy for justice system reforms
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 172 (38.6%)

- Fair: 183 (41.0%)
- Good/Excellent: 91 (20.4%)

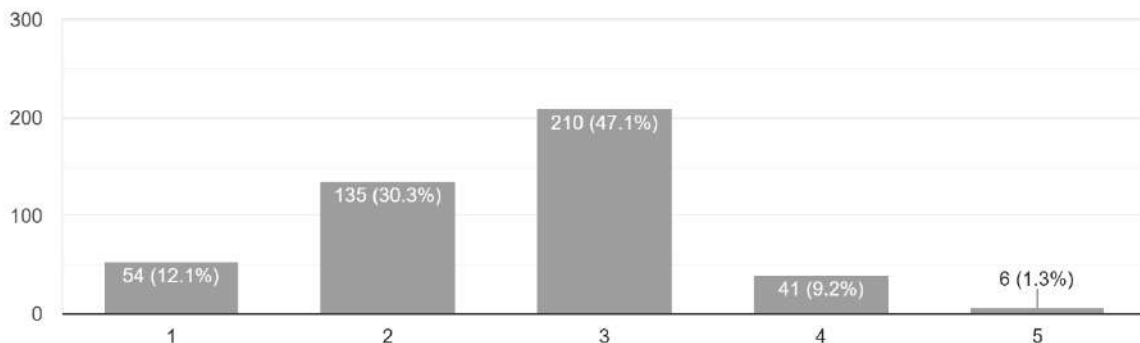
By Professional Role:

- In-House/Corporate: 2.88/5 (42.9% poor, 28.6% fair, 28.6% good)
- Private Practice: 2.72/5 (38.9% poor, 41.6% fair, 15.7% good)
- Private Citizens: 2.89/5 (29.5% poor, 38.6% fair, 31.8% good)

Note: Private citizens rate Bar advocacy higher than lawyers themselves, suggesting external perception of NBA efforts exceeds insider assessment.

C. Ethical Conduct and Professional Standards: 2.57/5

Ethical conduct and professional standards
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 189 (42.4%)
- Fair: 210 (47.1%)
- Good/Excellent: 47 (10.5%)

By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.56/5 (42.1% poor, 48.5% fair)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.52/5 (45.2% poor, 45.2% fair)
- Judicial Officers: 2.44/5 (44.4% poor, 55.6% fair)

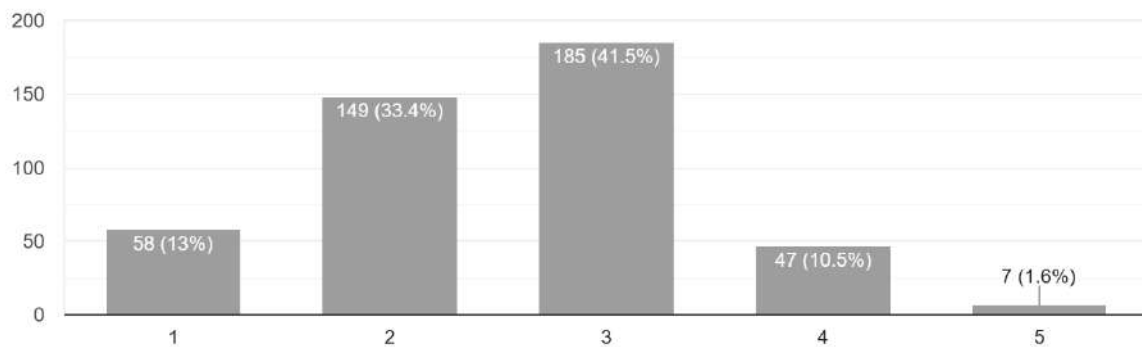
- Private Citizens: 2.73/5 (34.1% poor, 52.3% fair)

Critical Issue: Professional standards enforcement weak. Sharp practices prevalent with minimal sanctions.

D. Self-Regulation and Disciplinary Enforcement: 2.54/5

Self-regulation and disciplinary enforcement

446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 207 (46.4%)
- Fair: 185 (41.5%)
- Good/Excellent: 54 (12.1%)

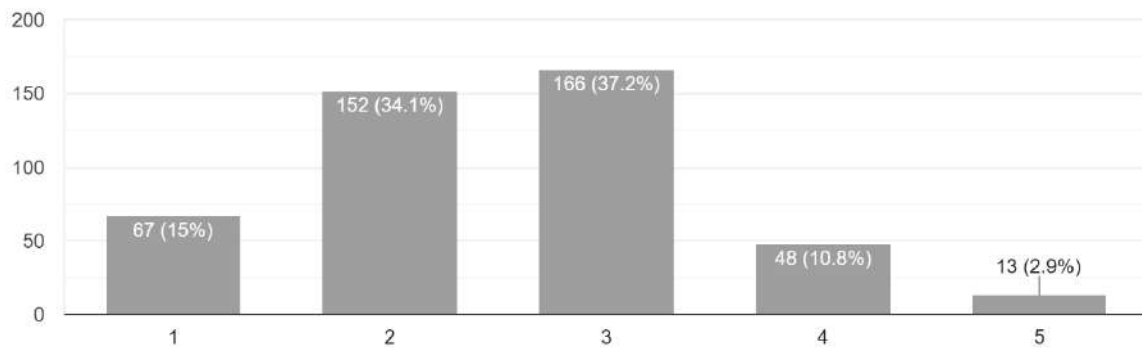
By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.52/5 (43.0% poor, 45.4% fair)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.57/5 (52.4% poor, 28.6% fair, 19.0% good)
- Private Citizens: 2.68/5 (43.2% poor, 43.2% fair)

Analysis: NBA disciplinary mechanisms seen as ineffective. Lawyers engaging in sharp practices face minimal sanctions, undermining professional credibility.

E. Access to Legal Services for Ordinary Citizens: 2.52/5

Access to legal services for ordinary citizens
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 219 (49.1%)
- Fair: 166 (37.2%)
- Good/Excellent: 61 (13.7%)

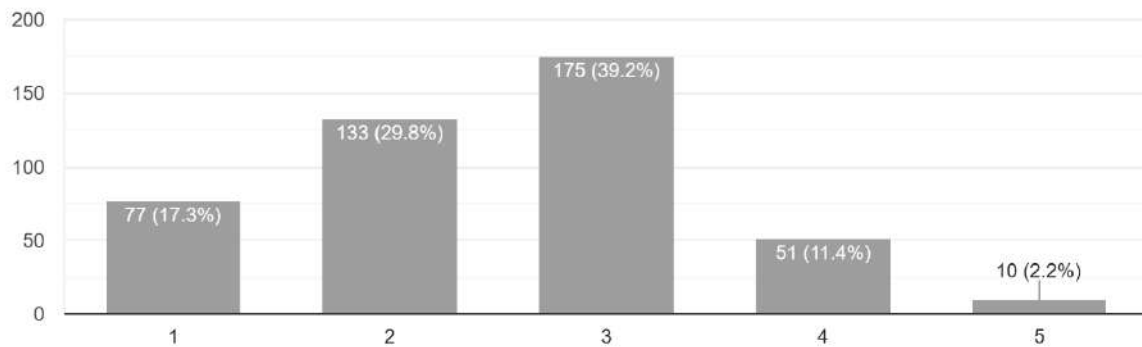
By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.48/5 (48.5% poor, 38.9% fair)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.38/5 (64.3% poor, 19.0% fair, 16.7% good)
- Private Citizens: 2.75/5 (34.1% poor, 45.5% fair)

Critical Gap: Legal services remain prohibitively expensive for ordinary Nigerians. Corporate lawyers most aware of this gap (64.3% rate poor).

F. Pro Bono and Public Interest Litigation: 2.52/5

Pro bono and public interest litigation
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 210 (47.1%)
- Fair: 175 (39.2%)
- Good/Excellent: 61 (13.6%)

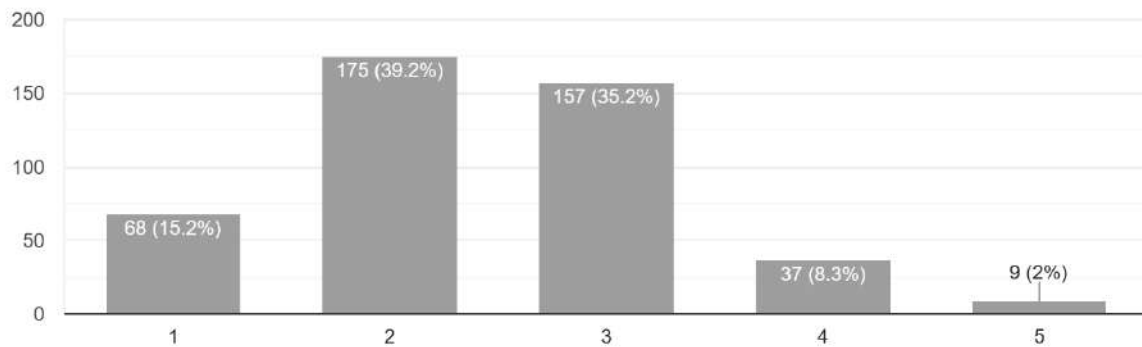
By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.48/5 (48.8% poor, 36.5% fair)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.48/5 (52.4% poor, 38.1% fair)
- Private Citizens: 2.70/5 (29.5% poor, 54.5% fair)

Analysis: Limited pro bono engagement contributes to access to justice crisis.

G. Public Education on Legal Rights: 2.43/5 (LOWEST)

Public education on legal rights
446 responses



Overall Distribution:

- Very Poor/Poor: 243 (54.4%)
- Fair: 157 (35.2%)
- Good/Excellent: 46 (10.3%)

By Professional Role:

- Private Practice: 2.39/5 (55.6% poor, 35.5% fair)
- In-House/Corporate: 2.48/5 (52.4% poor, 40.5% fair)
- Private Citizens: 2.57/5 (47.7% poor, 34.1% fair)

Critical Weakness: Failure to educate public on legal rights contributes to information asymmetry and exploitation.

Bar Performance: Cross-Cutting Insights

Strengths (Relative):

1. Continuing Legal Education: 2.92/5 (48% fair, 22.9% good)
2. Advocacy for Reforms: 2.74/5 (41% fair, 20.4% good)
3. Ethical Conduct: 2.57/5 (47.1% fair)

Weaknesses:

1. Public Education: 2.43/5 (54.4% poor)
2. Access to Legal Services: 2.52/5 (49.1% poor)
3. Pro Bono Work: 2.52/5 (47.1% poor)

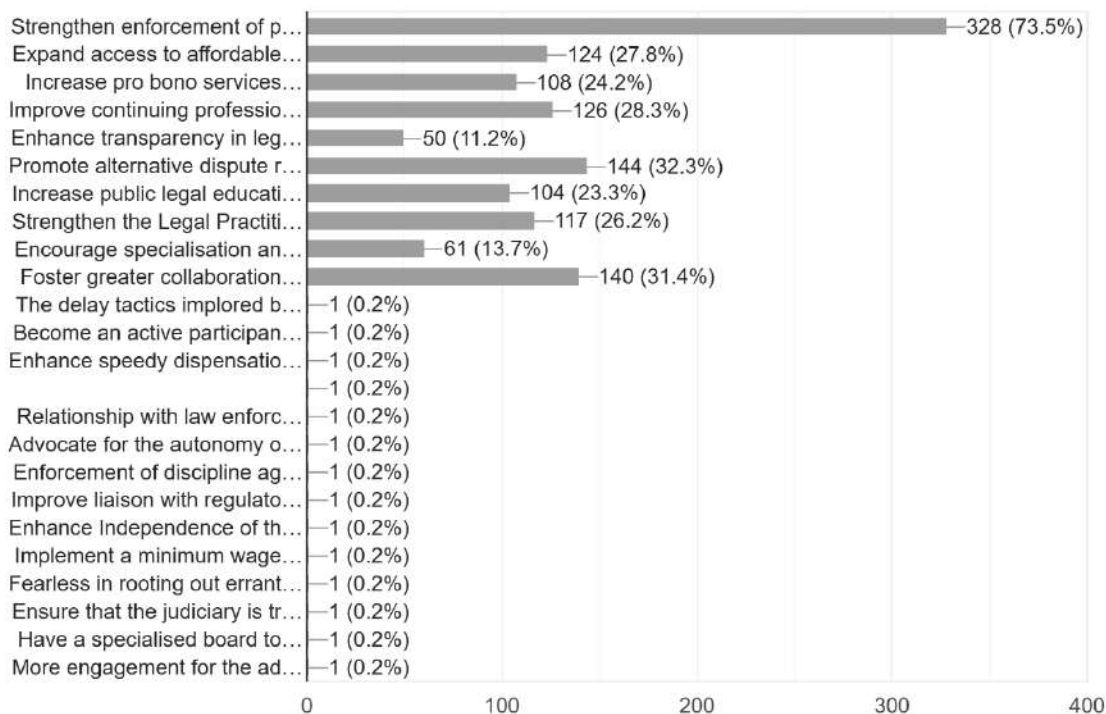
Pattern Analysis:

- **Internal vs. External:** Bar performs better on internal matters (education, self-improvement) than external obligations (public service, access to justice)
 - **Accountability Gap:** Self-regulation (2.54) rated poorly, indicating enforcement deficit
 - **Professional-Public Divide:** Private citizens consistently rate Bar slightly higher than lawyers themselves, suggesting external perception lags behind insider frustration
-

Q7. Bar Priorities: Professional Accountability

What THREE specific actions should the Bar prioritise to restore public trust?

446 responses



Top Three Actions for the Bar (Respondents selected three)

1. Strengthen Enforcement of Professional Standards and Ethics: 328 (73.5%)

- Overwhelming top priority
- Address sharp practices and unethical conduct

- Restore integrity to the profession
- Highest consensus of any priority question

2. Promote Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR): 144 (32.3%)

- Reduce court congestion
- Faster, more affordable resolution mechanisms
- Cultural shift needed toward ADR

3. Foster Greater Collaboration with Judiciary on Reforms: 140 (31.4%)

- Bar and Bench must work together
- Address systemic issues jointly
- Mutual accountability framework

Other Significant Priorities:

- **Improve continuing professional development:** 126 (28.3%)
- **Expand access to affordable legal services:** 124 (27.8%)
- **Strengthen the Legal Practitioners Committee:** 117 (26.2%)
- **Increase pro bono services and legal aid:** 108 (24.2%)
- **Increase public legal education initiatives:** 104 (23.3%)
- **Encourage specialization and certification:** 61 (13.7%)
- **Enhance transparency in NBA operations:** 50 (11.2%)

Priority Patterns by Demographics

Private Practice Lawyers prioritise:

1. Strengthen enforcement (74%)
2. Promote ADR (33%)
3. Foster collaboration with judiciary (31%)

Private Citizens prioritise:

1. Strengthen enforcement (75%)
2. Expand affordable legal services (36%)
3. Increase public legal education (34%)

Judicial Officers prioritise:

1. Strengthen enforcement (67%)
2. Foster collaboration with judiciary (44%)
3. Promote ADR (33%)

Insight: The 73.5% consensus on strengthening enforcement transcends all demographics. This represents a profession acknowledging its own accountability deficit and calling for reform from within.

Q8. Notes from Respondents Comments

The comments place a heavy share of responsibility on the Bar for the collapse of public trust in the justice system. Respondents repeatedly argue that lawyers are not neutral observers but co-owners of the system. Many see the Bar as having failed to act as a moral compass, professional regulator, and public advocate. There is strong criticism of lawyers who enable delay, file frivolous applications, collude with judges, or act as intermediaries for corruption. Several respondents explicitly link public distrust of the judiciary to the conduct of lawyers, noting that unethical advocacy, forum shopping, and manipulation of procedure weaken the credibility of justice delivery.

A second dominant theme is the failure of the Bar as an institution, particularly the NBA, to enforce discipline and speak with moral clarity. Respondents call for the Bar and Bench to “sit in a closed-door meeting and call out each other,” arguing that self-regulation has broken down. Examples include lawyers allegedly boasting that they had “seen the judge,” lawyers abusing court processes to frustrate cases, and senior counsel shielding erring judges or colleagues. Younger lawyers, in particular, expressed disillusionment, citing disrespect from courts, unequal treatment within the profession, and a lack of protection when they insist on ethical practice.

The most relevant and recurring comments on the Bar’s responsibilities focus on four areas. First, **discipline and ethics**, with repeated calls for strict sanctions against lawyers who aid corruption or abuse procedure. Second, **professional courage**, urging lawyers to resist political pressure and refuse to participate in perversion of justice, even at personal cost. Third, **procedural reform driven by the Bar**, including embracing digital filing, ADR, and case management to reduce delay, rather than exploiting inefficiencies. Fourth, **public engagement and credibility**, with examples showing that when lawyers themselves speak cynically about courts or elections, they deepen public mistrust. Overall, respondents see

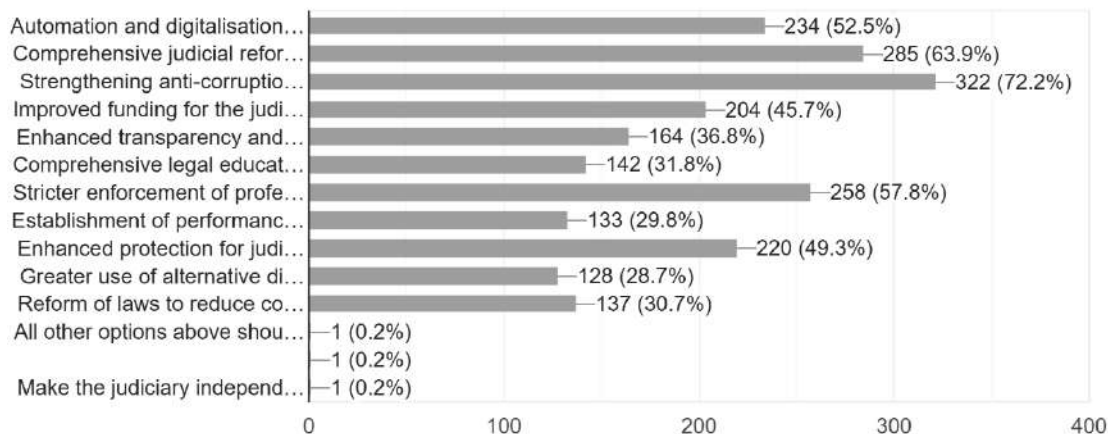
restoration of trust as impossible unless the Bar cleans its own house and reclaims its role as a principled guardian of the rule of law.

6. Pathways to Restoration

Q9. Which of the following reforms do you consider MOST CRITICAL for restoring public trust?

Which of the following reforms do you consider MOST CRITICAL for restoring public trust? (Rank your top 5)

446 responses



Top Reform Priorities (Respondents ranked top 5)

1. Strengthening Anti-Corruption Mechanisms: 322 (72.2%)

- Most critical reform across all demographics
- Must address both Bench and Bar
- Requires robust enforcement with real consequences

- Not just policy, but cultural transformation needed

2. Comprehensive Judicial Reform: 285 (63.9%)

- Structural changes needed, not cosmetic adjustments
- Appointment processes, tenure, accountability
- Cannot be piecemeal; must be systemic

3. Stricter Enforcement of Professional Conduct Rules: 258 (57.8%)

- Lawyers as gatekeepers of justice
- Sharp practices enable and perpetuate corruption
- NBA must act decisively with disciplinary teeth

4. Automation and Digitalisation of Court Processes: 234 (52.5%)

- Modernise court operations end-to-end
- Reduce corruption opportunities through transparency
- Improve efficiency and case tracking
- Paper-based system enables manipulation

5. Enhanced Protection for Judicial Independence: 220 (49.3%)

- Judges need security to resist pressure
- Financial independence from executive critical
- Protection from political retaliation
- Structural autonomy, not just rhetorical

Other Important Reforms:

- **Improved funding for the judiciary:** 204 (45.7%)
- **Enhanced transparency in appointments:** 164 (36.8%)
- **Comprehensive legal education reform:** 142 (31.8%)
- **Reform of laws to reduce complexity:** 137 (30.7%)
- **Establishment of performance metrics:** 133 (29.8%)

- **Greater use of ADR:** 128 (28.7%)

Reform Priorities by Professional Group

Private Practice Lawyers:

1. Anti-corruption mechanisms (72%)
2. Comprehensive judicial reform (64%)
3. Professional conduct enforcement (58%)
4. Automation/Digitalisation (53%)
5. Enhanced judicial protection (49%)

Private Citizens:

1. Anti-corruption mechanisms (73%)
2. Comprehensive judicial reform (64%)
3. Automation/Digitalization (55%)
4. Professional conduct enforcement (52%)
5. Enhanced transparency in appointments (48%)

Judicial Officers:

1. Anti-corruption mechanisms (78%)
2. Comprehensive judicial reform (67%)
3. Enhanced judicial protection (67%)
4. Professional conduct enforcement (56%)
5. Automation/Digitalization (44%)

In-House/Corporate Lawyers:

1. Anti-corruption mechanisms (76%)
2. Comprehensive judicial reform (69%)
3. Professional conduct enforcement (64%)
4. Automation/Digitalization (57%)
5. Enhanced judicial protection (52%)

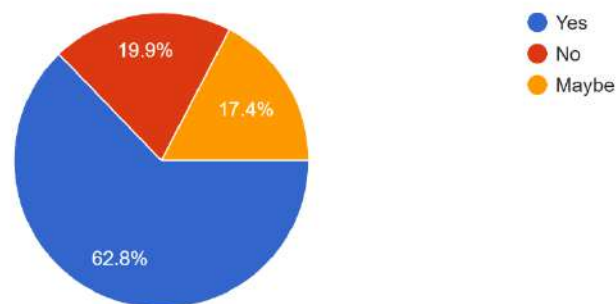
Pattern Analysis:

- **Universal Top 3:** Anti-corruption, judicial reform, and professional conduct enforcement dominate across all groups
 - **Technology Optimism:** Automation/digitalization seen as structural corruption reducer (52.5% overall)
 - **Insider Emphasis:** Judicial officers prioritize protection (67%) higher than other groups
 - **Corporate Pragmatism:** Corporate lawyers emphasize all top 5 reforms at higher rates than average
-

Q10. Personal Experiences: The Human Cost

Have you personally experienced or witnessed any incident that significantly affected your confidence in the Nigerian justice system?

438 responses



- **Yes:** 275 (62.8%)
- **No:** 87 (19.9%)
- **Maybe:** 76 (17.4%)

Over 62% have direct experience with trust-eroding incidents.

Recurring Themes from 174 Detailed Narratives

Theme 1: Corruption

- Bribes openly solicited and accepted
- "Justice for sale in the open market"
- Lawyers telling clients: "Don't worry, I've seen the judge"
- Court registrars and staff turning processes into cartels
- Judicial appointments to notary public taking 2-3 years at Supreme Court

- Files "mysteriously lost" or sent to archive

Specific Examples:

"A client briefed me and told me I should not worry that he had seen the judge"

"THE SUPREME COURT... NOTARY PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS HAS AN AVERAGE TIME SPAN THAT IS NOW NEARLY TWO-THREE PLUS YEARS... STAFF TURNING THE PROCESS TO A CARTEL RIGHT UNDER THE NOSE OF THE CJ"

"Justice is for SALE in the open market. Judiciary is in the pocket of the Executive."

Theme 2: Political Interference

- **2023 Election Petitions** widely cited as watershed moment
- Rivers State emergency rule case
- Judges socializing with politicians at campaign events
- Supreme Court Justices present at event where president's campaign song played
- Court of Appeal posting about judge's club membership with politicians

Specific Examples:

"Supreme Court Justices being present at an event where the song 'on your mandate we shall stand' which is the president's campaign song was played."

"The last Presidential Election. Also, the socializing of the Judiciary with the political class"

"2023 Election petitions result, also the court could not stop the illegal State of Emergency declared in Rivers State."

Theme 3: Delays in Justice Delivery

- Cases pending 6+ years without resolution
- Judgments delivered but not written for 2+ years
- Final written addresses awaiting adoption for over a year
- Exhibits mysteriously "missing" during trial

Specific Examples:

"I have an NICN matter that is yet to be given date for adoption of final written address for over a year when parties closed their case"

"Commerce a process, adopted final address and couldn't get judgement for about 2 years"

"A matter In court for more than 6 years"

"We had a situation in a high court matter in Lagos state where an exhibit tendered during trial was missing by the next adjourned date. We had to bring an application to recall the witness."

Theme 4: Incompetence and Poor Judgment Quality

- Poorly written judgments
- Judges contradicting settled law
- Basic procedural errors
- Descending into the arena (showing bias during proceedings)

Specific Examples:

"Poorly written judgment and judicial rascality owing to palpable bias"

"A Judge making some uncanny statements while I was cross-examining a witness... descending into the arena, making comments showing his bias"

"Incompetence on the bench, almost to the point when you begin to question if there are other external influences responsible for such Incompetence."

"Activities of a corrupt judge who delivered a very contradictory ruling. Was later disciplined by the NJSC"

Theme 5: Lower Court Crisis

- Magistrate Courts described as "free for all"
- "Jankara practices" (fraudulent dealings) brazenly occurring
- Little oversight or accountability
- Where most ordinary Nigerians interact with justice system

Specific Examples:

"The Magistrates are worse. That level of court system is a free for all. All manner of sharp practices going on there. Too many 'Jankara' practices are happening there brazenly."

"A Magistrate Court had not had significant progress in four (4) months in a transferred breach of contract case, as a court with summary jurisdiction."

"During cross examination of an accused person, a judge in an open court in rural area told the accused person that he hate criminals."

Theme 6: Enforcement Vacuum

- Government routinely ignoring court judgments
- No consequences for non-compliance
- Undermines entire judicial exercise

Specific Examples:

"I have judgements that either the Federal or state Government and other state agents neglected and/or refused to comply with orders of the court."

"I have experienced delays in delivering judgments and weak or poor enforcement. People routinely disobey court orders and there are no consequences."

"Disregard and lack of respect for court judgement by police who protected and file criminal charge over enforcement of court judgement"

Theme 7: Administrative/Registry Corruption

- Court registrars as corrupt gatekeepers
- Files deliberately disappearing
- Applications not listed on cause lists
- Cases mysteriously sent to archive

Specific Examples:

"It is the issue where the court Registrar DELIBERATELY OMMITED to call a case on the cause List and later claim that he cannot locate the case file and where the

Court Registrar DELIBERATELY OMITTED to list a cause on the cause List, only for the same Registrar to end up sending the case file to ARCHIVE."

"Administration of justice by administrative staff of courts"

Emotional Impact on Legal Professionals:

"As a young lawyer, sometimes im ashamed to say I'm a lawyer."

"In less than 5 years as a legal practitioner, I have totally lost confidence in the judicial system. The Supreme Court Justices in recent times, have really disappointed me. I no longer regard them. I do this job, merely as a means to survive. I have lost the zeal I once had for the legal profession."

"It took me time to pick myself up and continue with legal practice. I lost faith in our justice system."

"Judicial officers and lawyers needs to urgently change the perception the public holds that we are the problems of Nigeria. The public confidence is at its lowest"

Impact on Public:

"Citizens will rather sort themselves than go to court, because the court has become a toothless bulldog"

"Many citizens resort to self-help because of the above reasons."

"People has lost interest in the justice system in Nigeria"

Q12. The Single Most Important Step: Analysis of 359 Responses

Thematic Breakdown

Theme 1: Judicial Independence (Dominant - ~40% of responses)

Key Elements:

- Financial autonomy from the executive
- Remove presidential/gubernatorial appointment power
- Insulate from political pressure
- Budgetary independence

Representative Quotes:

"THE BAR AND THE BENCH MUST SIT IN A CLOSE DOOR MEETING AND CALL OUT EACH OTHER TO DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND MEMBERS OF THE BENCH MUST BE APPOINTED WITH PUBLIC SCRUTINY OF THEIR RECORDS AND NOT THEIR BIRTH"

"Let the government and its agents begin to obey court decisions, otherwise, there's no need seeking justice in the law courts. The executive arm should start to obey the decisions of its own courts."

"Total independence of the judiciary"

"The independence of the judiciary must be emphasized"

"I STRONGLY SUGGEST THAT THE APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES SHOULD NEVER AGAIN BE DONE BY THE PRESIDENT AND STATE GOVERNORS. INDEPENDENCE AND FINANCIAL AUTONOMY SHOULD BE ENSURED."

"The total independence of the judiciary from other arms of government including but not limited to: funding, appointments, promotion and disciplinary action"

"Judiciary should be clearly separated from the executive in practice not just in the books and politics should not influence the judiciary in any way whatsoever."

Theme 2: Comprehensive/Holistic Reform (~20% of responses)

Key Elements:

- Systemic overhaul needed
- Piecemeal changes insufficient
- Address root causes, not symptoms
- Total transformation required

Representative Quotes:

"Comprehensive Judicial Reforms"

"Total and holistic reform of the Judiciary"

"Total Reform of the judiciary system"

"The entire Justice system is a mess and needs a total overhauling."

"For there to be a total overhaul of the Judiciary. Eligibility should be reviewed. Ineffective staff should be sanctioned. And more Judges and Magistrates should be appointed to reduce the work load for staff."

Theme 3: Transparency and Accountability (~15% of responses)

Key Elements:

- Open appointment processes
- Consequences for erring judges
- Public access to information
- Merit-based selection

Representative Quotes:

"Transparency"

"The public needs to see consequences."

"Transparency and accountability"

"Transparency in the appointment and discipline of erring judges"

"There is need to exercise more transparency in the process of appointment of judges."

"Improving transparency in judicial appointments. Improved emoluments to discourage corruption. Improved working condition"

"The urgent need to be transparent in the appointment of judicial officers and the need to weed out corrupt judicial officers from the system."

Theme 4: Anti-Corruption Measures (~15% of responses)

Key Elements:

- Discipline corrupt officials decisively
- Improve remuneration to reduce temptation
- Zero-tolerance enforcement
- Punish both bench and bar

Representative Quotes:

"Discipline erring judges"

"To discipline erring judges"

"Judges should stop taking bribe from corrupt individuals to dish out justice"

"Erring Judges should be sacked."

"Fight corruption in the system"

"Eradicate bribery and corruption"

"Corruption in the judiciary, including at the police (magistrate court) level and the ministries of justice, must be addressed."

"Disciplinary action against erring judges and legal practitioners"

"Open prosecution of corrupt judges and justices and removal of impediments or procedural immunity for criminals on the bench"

Theme 5: Speed and Efficiency (~10% of responses)

Key Elements:

- Accelerate case management
- Reduce delays
- Timely justice delivery
- Digital transformation

Representative Quotes:

"Quick dispensation of Justice"

"Speedier and effective resolution of disputes"

"Speedy justice dispensation"

"Timely justice"

"Digitalizing the processes and creating a public platform where citizens can view court cases"

"Automation of judicial process, stricter punishment of erring judges and lawyers, and establishment of performance metrics for judicial officers"

Theme 6: Character and Integrity (~8% of responses)

Key Elements:

- Appointment of people with integrity
- Character-based selection
- Values reorientation
- Fear of God

Representative Quotes:

"People who lack integrity should not become lawyers or judges, People who are scared of doing the right thing should not be part of the justice system"

"Character"

"We should fear God"

"Competence of judicial officers and transparency in judicial proceedings"

"Honesty"

"Trustworthy"

"Values based attitudinal reorientation to build character competencies"

Theme 7: Bench-Bar Collaboration (~5% of responses)

Representative Quotes:

"THE BAR AND THE BENCH MUST SIT IN A CLOSE DOOR MEETING AND CALL OUT EACH OTHER"

"Let's work on the lawyers first."

"The relationship between the bar and bench must be cordial"

Cross-Cutting Observations:

1. **No Single Magic Bullet:** Respondents recognise complexity; many note "all options are viable"
2. **Systemic vs. Individual:** Split between those emphasising structural reform and those focusing on individual accountability
3. **Insider vs. Outsider Solutions:** Some emphasise internal reforms (appointments, discipline), others emphasise external constraints (public scrutiny, financial independence)
4. **Pessimism vs. Hope:** Some responses express despair ("You all know the outcome of this inquiry. Is this a joke?!") while others offer detailed prescriptions

7. Key Insights & Observations

Crisis Indicators

1. Multi-Stakeholder Consensus on Failure

- Rare unanimity among legal professionals that system is failing
- 73.1% poor trust rating transcends professional boundaries
- **Even judicial officers rate system poorly (88.9% poor/very poor)**
- Private citizens (70.5%) and lawyers (73.4%) closely aligned in assessment

2. Directional Decline Trajectory

- 69.8% see worsening over five years—trajectory unsustainable
- **No geographic safe haven:** All zones report 60%+ decline perception
- Decline perception strongest in North-Central (75.8%) and North-East (80%)
- Corporate lawyers most pessimistic (78.6% report decline)

3. Lost Generation of Legal Professionals

- Young lawyers entering profession already disillusioned
- Multiple testimonials of lost passion and pride
- "Ashamed to say I'm a lawyer" sentiment
- Profession losing moral authority and public legitimacy

4. Public Exodus from Formal Justice

- Citizens choosing self-help over legal recourse
- "Why go to court if orders won't be obeyed?"
- Resort to extra-judicial means
- Breakdown of social contract

5. Political Capture Near-Complete

- Independence from politics lowest metric (1.79/5)
- 78.3% rate as poor/very poor
- Executive dominance over judiciary perceived as total
- 2023 elections cited as watershed moment

6. Corruption Universally Recognised

- 81.8% identify corruption as top factor
 - Ranges from 78-86% across all professional groups
 - Not perception but observable reality
 - Permeates all levels from the Supreme Court to the Magistrates Courts
-

Structural Issues

1. Funding Dependencies Create Subservience

- Judiciary reliant on executive for resources
- Financial dependence enables political control
- Judges cannot be independent while dependent on executive budgets
- Structural solution required, not behavioral change

2. Appointment Process Enables Political Loyalty

- Presidential/gubernatorial selection
- Merit subordinated to political patronage
- Lack of public scrutiny
- "NJSC" and vetting processes seen as rubber stamps

3. Weak Accountability Mechanisms

- Both NJC (National Judicial Council) and NBA lack enforcement capacity
- Disciplinary proceedings rare and ineffective
- Culture of impunity
- "Toothless" sanctions

4. Cultural Decay and Normalization

- Acceptance of corruption as normal operating procedure
- "That's how it works" mentality
- Socialisation of new entrants into corrupt practices
- Erosion of professional ethics

5. Resource Constraints Enable Corruption

- Overburdened courts create delays
- Underpaid staff vulnerable to inducements
- Poor working conditions
- Infrastructure deficits

6. Lower Court Crisis

- Magistrate Courts: "Jankara practices" brazenly occurring
- Where most Nigerians interact with system
- Least oversight, most corruption
- Registry/administrative staff as gatekeepers and exploiters

7. Enforcement Vacuum

- Government routinely ignores judgments
- No consequences for non-compliance
- Undermines judicial authority
- "Why seek justice if orders won't be enforced?"

8. Geographic and Class Disparities

- South-West (Lagos) relatively better resourced
- Rural courts significantly worse
- Justice for the wealthy vs. the poor
- Two-tier system

Positive Signs (Despite Crisis)

1. Professional Awareness and Honesty

- Legal community recognises and articulates problems clearly
- Willingness to acknowledge internal failures
- Self-critical rather than defensive
- Rare institutional honesty

2. Reform Appetite and Consensus

- Strong consensus on needed changes

- 72% support anti-corruption mechanisms
- 64% support comprehensive judicial reform
- Clear priorities identified

3. Pockets of Integrity Acknowledged

- Respondents acknowledge some upright judges exist
- Stories of judges resisting pressure despite threats
- Recognition that corruption is not universal
- Hope in individual examples

4. Technology Optimism

- 52.5% view automation/digitalisation as critical reform
- Seen as structural corruption reducer
- Faith in transparency through technology
- Younger generation bringing digital expectations

5. Public Engagement and Participation

- 446 respondents willing to participate
- Detailed, thoughtful responses
- Willingness to share painful experiences
- Investment in reform discourse

6. Cross-Stakeholder Dialogue

- Survey creates space for multi-stakeholder conversation
- Private citizens, lawyers, judges all represented
- Shared understanding emerging
- Foundation for collaborative reform

12. Critical Gaps & Vulnerabilities

What the Survey Reveals

The Lower Court Crisis:

- Magistrate Courts as "free for all"
- "Jankara practices" (fraudulent dealings) brazenly occurring
- Little oversight or accountability
- Where most ordinary Nigerians interact with justice system
- Registry staff operating as corrupt gatekeepers
- **Gap:** Reform focus often on superior courts, ignoring where crisis is most acute

The Staff Corruption Layer:

- Court registrars and administrative staff often more problematic than judges
- Files disappearing, exhibits missing, deliberate delays
- Notary public appointments taking 2-3 years at Supreme Court
- Creates "cartel" enriching staff while undermining justice
- **Gap:** Disciplinary focus on judges overlooks administrative corruption

The NBA Effectiveness Question:

- Multiple respondents express disappointment with NBA
- "Body of Benchers are egregious failures"
- Lack of transparency in fee usage
- Unwilling to confront judicial corruption aggressively
- Seen as complicit or ineffective
- **Gap:** Bar expected to police profession but lacks will or capacity

The Enforcement Vacuum:

- Judgments routinely ignored by government
- No consequences for non-compliance
- Undermines entire judicial exercise
- "Why go to court if orders won't be obeyed?"
- **Gap:** Focus on improving judgments ignores implementation crisis

The 2023 Election Watershed:

- Repeatedly cited as trust-destroying moment

- Perception of judicial complicity in electoral fraud
- Supreme Court seen as politically captured
- Lasting damage to institutional legitimacy
- **Gap:** Political cases receive different justice than commercial/civil

The Young Lawyer Crisis:

- New entrants already disillusioned
- Exploitative working conditions
- Inadequate remuneration
- No hope for change
- **Gap:** Focus on senior practitioners ignores sustainability crisis

The Access to Justice Divide:

- Legal services prohibitively expensive (49.1% rate access as poor)
- Pro bono minimal (47.1% rate as poor)
- Public legal education inadequate (54.4% rate as poor)
- Justice for the wealthy only
- **Gap:** Elite Bar disconnected from mass justice needs

13. Demographic Insights: Who Says What

Private Practice Lawyers (293 respondents, 65.7%)

Characteristics:

- Most experienced group (many 30+ years)
- Direct daily exposure to court dysfunction
- Financial stake in system efficiency
- Most vocal in qualitative responses

Key Positions:

- Rate trust at 1.90 average (73.4% poor)
- 66.6% report trust declined over 5 years
- Prioritize: Case management (70%), disciplinary mechanisms (61%), transparency in appointments (50%)

- Most critical of: Political independence (79.2% poor), delays (69.3% poor)
- Most concerned about: Bar enforcement (74%), judicial reform (64%)

Distinctive Views:

- Most detailed narratives of corruption and dysfunction
- Strong emphasis on NBA accountability
- Professional shame and disillusionment evident
- Call for bench-bar collaboration

Private Citizens (44 respondents, 9.9%)

Characteristics:

- Outsider perspective
- Direct victims/beneficiaries of justice system
- Include students, union members, general public
- Less technical, more experiential responses

Key Positions:

- Rate trust at 2.05 average (70.5% poor) – slightly better than lawyers
- 72.7% report trust declined
- Prioritize: Enforcement (75%), affordable services (36%), public education (34%)
- Rate Bar better than lawyers do on most metrics
- More optimistic about accessibility (56.8% fair vs. lawyers' 43–48% fair)

Distinctive Views:

- Emphasize access to justice and affordability
- More forgiving of Bar, harsher on Bench
- Want practical reforms (speed, cost reduction)
- Less focused on technical/procedural issues

In-House/Corporate Lawyers (42 respondents, 9.4%)

Characteristics:

- Work in corporate environments
- Commercial litigation focus
- Comparative perspective (international standards)
- Pragmatic, efficiency-oriented

Key Positions:

- Most pessimistic on current trust (78.6% poor)
- Highest decline perception (78.6% report worsening)
- Rate all reforms higher than average
- Most concerned about access to legal services (64.3% poor)

Distinctive Views:

- Emphasize efficiency and predictability
- Compare Nigerian system unfavorably to international standards
- Strong support for automation/digitalization (57%)
- Business case for judicial reform

Judicial Officers (9 respondents, 2.0%)

Characteristics:

- Insider perspective from the bench
- Small sample but significant voice
- Defensive but realistic

Key Positions:

- Paradoxically most critical on trust (88.9% poor)
- 77.8% report decline
- Rate some metrics better than outsiders (transparency, communication)
- Emphasize judicial protection (67% vs. 49% average)

Distinctive Views:

- Acknowledge political pressure

- Emphasize need for protection and autonomy
 - More positive on internal processes
 - Defensive on public perception vs. reality
-

Government Legal Officers (32 respondents, 7.2%)

Characteristics:

- Work in ministries of justice, government agencies
- See system from regulatory/prosecutorial side
- Moderate, cautious responses

Key Positions:

- Rate trust at moderate levels (67.7% poor)
- 71.0% report decline
- Balanced view across metrics
- Support comprehensive reform (64%)

Distinctive Views:

- Institutional perspective
 - Emphasize systemic vs. individual solutions
 - Less dramatic narratives
 - Focus on structural reforms
-

Law Academics/Researchers (14 respondents, 3.1%)

Characteristics:

- Theoretical and comparative knowledge
- Research-informed perspectives
- Long-term view

Key Positions:

- Moderate trust ratings (57.1% poor)

- Strong decline perception (85.7%)
- Support comprehensive reforms
- Emphasize education and training

Distinctive Views:

- Historical and comparative analysis
 - Emphasis on legal education reform
 - Scholarly rather than emotional tone
 - Systemic diagnoses
-

Civil Society/NGO (12 respondents, 2.7%)

Characteristics:

- Public interest focus
- Advocacy orientation
- Rights-based perspective

Key Positions:

- High distrust (75% poor)
- 75% report decline
- Emphasize transparency and accountability
- Support for public interest litigation

Distinctive Views:

- Human rights framework
 - Emphasis on vulnerable populations
 - Advocacy for pro bono work
 - Democratic governance perspective
-

Geographic Patterns

South-West (Lagos-dominant, 240 respondents, 53.8%):

- Slightly better trust ratings (but still 73.8% poor)
- 68.8% report decline
- More resources, but still deeply problematic
- Urban/cosmopolitan perspectives

North-Central (99 respondents, 22.2%):

- High decline perception (75.8%)
- 69.7% current poor trust
- Strong call for reforms
- Federal Capital Territory included

North-East (15 respondents, 3.4%):

- Highest decline perception (80%)
- Lowest trust ratings
- Security concerns compound justice crisis
- Resource scarcity acute

Other Zones:

- Consistent patterns across South-South, South-East, North-West
- 60-75% poor trust universally
- No geographic safe haven
- Crisis is national, not regional

8. Conclusion: A System at Breaking Point

A System at Breaking Point

This survey documents a justice system in profound crisis. With three-quarters of respondents rating public trust as poor and seven in ten observing a decline, the situation demands urgent, comprehensive action. The convergence of corruption, political interference, and systemic delays has created a perfect storm eroding the very foundation of the rule of law.

The inclusion of private citizens, judicial officers, academics, and civil society representatives, representing over 34% of respondents, demonstrates that the crisis transcends professional insiders. When private citizens (70.5% poor trust) closely mirror lawyers' assessments (73.4% poor trust), and when judicial officers themselves are most critical (88.9% poor trust), the crisis is validated from multiple vantage points.

The Stakes

Democracy Cannot Function Without a Credible Judicial System

- Rule of law is foundational
- Without judicial independence, separation of powers collapses
- Executive dominance creates authoritarianism by default

Economic Development Requires Legal Certainty

- Contract enforcement essential for investment
- Unpredictable justice drives capital away
- Corruption premium increases cost of doing business
- Nigeria's competitiveness compromised

Social Stability Depends on Peaceful Dispute Resolution

- Self-help replaces legal recourse
- Vigilante justice fills vacuum
- Social contract breakdown
- Violence becomes alternative to courts

National Legitimacy Flows from Fair, Accessible Justice

- Citizens' faith in institutions eroded
- Youth disillusionment breeds radicalization
- Brain drain of legal talent
- National shame and international reputation damage

The Window of Opportunity

When 62.8% have personally witnessed trust-eroding incidents, the crisis is not abstract but experiential. **When young lawyers enter practice already disillusioned**, the profession faces existential threat. **When citizens choose self-help over courts**, the social fabric tears. **When 72% demand anti-corruption mechanisms** and **64% call for comprehensive judicial reform**, there is rare political consensus for change.

The legal profession's rare unanimity on systemic failure presents both crisis and opportunity. The window exists for transformative reform, but it is closing.

The Path Forward

Reform must be comprehensive, not cosmetic. Judicial independence isn't negotiable. It's foundational. Transparency cannot be optional; it's oxygen for legitimacy. Accountability must have teeth; consequences must follow misconduct. Technology should enable, not just modernise; it must reduce corruption opportunities structurally.

Most critically, as one respondent powerfully stated: **"The public needs to see consequences."** Without visible accountability, all other reforms ring hollow. The

restoration of public trust begins with demonstrating that no one (judge, lawyer, or politician) stands above the law.

The Nigerian justice system faces a choice: fundamental transformation or continued deterioration. This survey makes clear which path legal professionals believe must be taken. The question is whether the political will exists to walk it.

The Choice

The Nigerian justice system faces a choice: **fundamental transformation or continued deterioration**. This survey makes clear which path legal professionals—and the public they serve—believe must be taken. **The question is whether the political will exists to walk it. The evidence is overwhelming. The diagnosis is clear. The prescriptions are known. What remains is action.**

9. Survey Credibility Assessment

Validity: **HIGH**

Strengths:

1. **Large Sample:** 446 respondents provides statistical significance
2. **Diverse Professional Backgrounds:** Seven distinct professional categories, not just lawyers
3. **Extensive Experience:** 31.4% with 30+ years lends historical perspective
4. **Geographic Spread:** All six geopolitical zones represented, though the South-West is dominant
5. **Detailed Qualitative Feedback:** 174 personal narratives provide depth
6. **Internal Consistency:** Cross-validation across quantitative and qualitative data
7. **Multi-Stakeholder:** Insiders (lawyers, judges) and outsiders (citizens) align
8. **Honest Self-Criticism:** Legal profession acknowledges own failures

Limitations:

1. **South-West Overrepresentation:** 53.8% from one zone may skew results
2. **Lawyer-Heavy:** 75.1% are legal practitioners
3. **Self-Selection Bias:** Those with strong views more likely to respond
4. **Small Judicial Officer Sample:** Only 9 judges (2.0%)
5. **Urban Bias:** Likely overrepresents urban, educated, connected respondents

Overall Assessment: Despite limitations, the convergence of evidence from multiple sources (quantitative ratings, personal narratives, cross-demographic validation) and the consistency of findings support high confidence in core conclusions. The crisis documented is real, widespread, and worsening.

End of Report

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Survey Period: November–December 2025

Analysis Date: January 2026

Total Respondents: 446

10. Annexure

1. Survey questions
2. Survey responses (CSV)
3. Survey summary (Downloaded from Google)