AUDIT COMMITTEE GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL REPORTING TIMELINESS OF LISTED NON-FINANCIAL FIRMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examined the effect of audit committee governance on the timeliness of financial reporting in selected listed non-financial firms in Nigeria, with attention to auditor tenure as an explanatory variable. Using a sample of 80 firms from a population of 102 over 2015-2024 (800 firm-year observations), the study measured audit report lag as the dependent variable and assessed audit committee independence, financial expertise, gender diversity, size, and meeting frequency as explanatory variables. Secondary data from annual reports were analysed using descriptive statistics, Shapiro-Wilk normality tests, Spearman correlation, Levin-Lin-Chu panel unit root tests, and Panel Corrected Standard Errors regression, with all five committee attributes and auditor tenure entered jointly in a single model. Findings revealed that gender diversity and meeting frequency significantly reduced audit report lag, while independence, financial expertise, committee size, and auditor tenure showed no significant direct effect once all attributes were considered jointly, and the model's explanatory power was modest (R-squared = 1.77%). The study confirmed the applicability of agency and resource dependence theories, showing that gender diverse, actively engaged committees are the strongest observed drivers of reporting efficiency in this sample. It is recommended that firms prioritise gender diversity and a disciplined meeting calendar as practical levers for reporting timeliness, while continuing to strengthen independence and expertise on the wider governance rationale, even though this sample did not detect a significant effect for either. These insights offer practical guidance for regulators, managers, and investors in enhancing audit quality and market confidence.

***Key words:** Financial Reporting Timeliness, Audit Report Lag, Financial Expertise, Gender Diversity, Auditor Tenure*

Introduction

Timely financial reporting remains a central concern in corporate governance research because delays in audited financial statements weaken information relevance, heighten uncertainty, and constrain investors' decision making. In emerging economies such as Nigeria, where capital markets are still consolidating and enforcement mechanisms remain uneven, audit report lag continues to attract sustained academic and regulatory

attention. Audit report lag, commonly defined as the number of days between a firm's financial year end and the date of the auditor's report, serves as a direct and observable measure of financial reporting timeliness and audit efficiency. Prior Nigerian evidence shows persistent variation in audit delays across firms and sectors, suggesting that internal governance structures play a decisive role in shaping reporting outcomes (Balogun, 2017; Okoye, 2018; Ejuvbekpokpo & Esenohor, 2021; Efenyumi et al., 2025).

Within the broader corporate governance architecture, the audit committee occupies a strategic position as the primary liaison between management, external auditors, and the board. Its effectiveness depends not only on formal existence but also on its composition, independence, expertise, and diversity. Nigerian studies increasingly document that audit committee attributes influence audit quality, reporting speed, and information credibility, although findings remain fragmented across variables and sectors (Musa, 2019; Chukwu, 2022; Bello, 2024; Fasua, 2025a). This fragmentation creates the need for an integrated framework that examines multiple audit committee governance mechanisms simultaneously, rather than in isolation.

Audit committee independence, financial expertise, and gender diversity are three governance attributes with particular relevance to reporting timeliness. Independent non-executive members are expected to challenge management and facilitate auditor access, shortening audit report lag, though Nigerian evidence on this monitoring role is mixed across sectors (Ibrahim, 2021; Bello, 2024; Okafor, 2023). Members with financial expertise are better equipped to interpret complex accounting issues and engage productively with auditors, and are consistently linked to improved timeliness in Nigerian studies (Adeyemi, 2017; Eze, 2020; Farouk, 2023; Usman, 2024). Gender diverse committees, meanwhile, are associated with broader perspectives and enhanced ethical sensitivity; while direct Nigerian evidence on gender diversity and audit timeliness remains limited, related studies link female representation to stronger reporting discipline (Okafor, 2020; Eze et al., 2022; Hassan & Ibrahim, 2023), motivating this study's extension of the inquiry to audit report lag.

This study further recognizes the role of audit tenure as an audit level characteristic that conditions the effectiveness of audit committee governance. Longer auditor tenure may enhance auditor familiarity and efficiency, thereby accelerating reporting, yet excessive tenure may impair independence and weaken monitoring incentives. Nigerian and international studies document both efficiency and entrenchment effects of auditor tenure, suggesting a conditioning rather than a purely direct role (Daoud, 2020; Nurmalita & Asmara, 2022; Sinebe, 2025). Examining audit tenure alongside audit committee attributes provides a more balanced understanding of financial reporting timeliness.

Anchored in agency theory and resource dependence theory, this study investigates how audit committee independence, financial expertise, and gender diversity influence audit report lag in selected Nigerian firms, while accounting for audit tenure and firm size. Agency theory explains the monitoring role of independent and expert committees in mitigating information asymmetry, while resource dependence theory emphasizes diversity and expertise as channels for accessing critical knowledge and oversight capacity. By integrating these perspectives and drawing on extensive Nigerian evidence, the study contributes to governance literature by offering a coherent, theory-driven explanation of financial reporting timeliness in an emerging market setting. This study, therefore, seeks to answer the following research questions;

1. How does audit committee independence affect audit report lag?
2. What influence does audit committee financial expertise have on the timeliness of financial reporting?
3. How does audit committee gender diversity impact audit report lag?

Literature Review

Conceptual Foundations of Financial Reporting Timeliness

Financial reporting timeliness refers to the extent to which audited financial information is made available to users within a period that preserves its relevance for decision making, reducing information asymmetry and enhancing market confidence, particularly in weaker-enforcement environments such as Nigeria (Ogoun & Perelayefa, 2020; Sinebe, 2023; Balogun, 2017). It is most commonly proxied by audit report lag, the number of days between a firm's fiscal year end and the auditor's report date, valued for its objectivity and direct link to audit committee oversight (Musa, 2019; Adeyemi, 2017; Eze, 2020; Chukwu, 2022; Bello, 2024). Nigerian listed firms are required by the Companies and Allied Matters Act and Nigerian Exchange Group listing rules to publish audited statements within prescribed deadlines, yet persistent delays across sectors show that compliance alone does not guarantee timeliness and that internal governance mechanisms remain critical (Alabi et al., 2021; Egbunike et al., 2023; Okafor, 2023). Audit report lag is operationalised here as a continuous variable in days, consistent with established practice (Balogun, 2017; Okon, 2018; Farouk, 2023).

Audit Committee Governance in Corporate Reporting

The audit committee is a central corporate governance mechanism linking the board, management and external auditors, responsible for safeguarding the integrity of the financial reporting process and mitigating agency conflicts arising from the separation of ownership and control (Fasua, 2025; Usifoh et al., 2019; Park, 2019; Ogbu et al.,

2024). Its statutory basis in Nigeria rests on the Companies and Allied Matters Act, complemented by Nigerian Exchange Group governance codes emphasising non-executive representation, financial literacy, and regular meetings; however, the mere existence of a committee does not guarantee effective governance unless its structural attributes and operational practices are robust (Musa, 2019; Iheyen, 2021; Machmuddah et al., 2022; Sinebe, 2025). Beyond monitoring the reporting process and internal controls, the committee also performs an advisory role that strengthens audit quality and disclosure credibility (Balogun, 2017; Chukwu, 2022; Adeyemi, 2017; Farouk, 2023; Zubairu & Yahaya, 2024), positioning it as a pivotal mechanism shaping audit quality and reporting outcomes in emerging markets such as Nigeria.

Audit Committee Independence and Audit Report Lag

Audit committee independence is a core monitoring mechanism: independent non-executive members are expected to exercise objective judgment and support auditors in resolving contentious issues without undue influence, reducing information asymmetry and shortening audit completion time. Nigerian evidence largely supports a negative association between independence and audit report lag (Balogun, 2017; Okoye, 2018; Ammer & Pantamee, 2024; Chukwu, 2022; Okafor, 2023), though sectoral heterogeneity persists (Ibrahim, 2021; Ogbonna et al., 2021) and international evidence reports weaker or conditional effects where regulatory enforcement is strong (Ali & Amir, 2018; Ghafoor et al., 2019; Okolo & Sinebe, 2025). Independence is generally most effective when supported by complementary governance mechanisms, justifying its inclusion in addressing Research Question 1.

Audit Committee Financial Expertise and Reporting Timeliness

Audit committee financial expertise enhances the efficiency of the reporting and audit process: members with accounting or finance backgrounds interpret complex issues, evaluate accounting judgments, and engage productively with auditors, reducing information gaps and accelerating issue resolution. Nigerian evidence consistently links financial expertise to shorter audit report lag (Adeyemi, 2017; Eze, 2020; Oladipo, 2020; Izukwe & Jeroh, 2022), an effect that strengthens when combined with internal audit quality and effective committee engagement (Amadi, 2022; Nweke, 2021; Farouk, 2023; Fasua, 2024), supporting its role in addressing Research Question 2.

Audit Committee Gender Diversity and Audit Report Lag

Audit committee gender diversity may influence oversight quality: from a resource dependence perspective, gender diverse committees offer broader perspectives and enhanced ethical sensitivity, while behavioural arguments suggest female directors exhibit higher diligence and risk awareness. Direct Nigerian evidence on gender diversity and audit report lag remains limited, though related studies link female board and committee representation to improved earnings stability and stronger reporting discipline (Okafor, 2020; Eze et al., 2022; Hassan & Ibrahim, 2023), and international evidence reports that gender diverse committees enhance monitoring effectiveness, albeit with findings on timeliness sometimes conditional on institutional context (Ugwunta et al., 2018; Ghafoor et al., 2019). This gap motivates Research Question 3.

Audit Committee Size and Meeting Frequency as Governance Mechanisms

Committee size reflects a balance between diversity of expertise and coordination efficiency: excessive size can slow decision-making and dilute accountability, and Nigerian evidence suggests moderately sized committees are more effective at facilitating timely audits (Musa, 2019; Iheyen, 2021; Fasua & Sinebe, 2026). Meeting frequency captures the intensity of committee engagement; more frequent, focused meetings are associated with shorter audit delays in Nigerian studies (Jeroh, 2020; Yahaya & Awen, 2021; Chukwu, 2022; Ejuvbekpokpo & Esenohor, 2021; Sinebe, 2025), though returns diminish where meetings become routine rather than issue-driven.

Auditor Characteristics and Audit Tenure

Among audit-level characteristics, audit tenure has received sustained attention for its potential to shape both audit efficiency and auditor independence: longer tenure is associated with greater client-specific knowledge and reduced learning costs, which can accelerate audit completion, as documented among Nigerian firms with stable auditor relationships (Daoud, 2020; Nurmalita & Asmara, 2022; Sinebe, 2025; Efenyumi et al., 2025). Audit tenure is therefore best conceptualised as a conditioning variable that shapes how audit committee attributes influence audit report lag, rather than as a purely direct determinant.

Gaps of the Study

Despite extensive research on audit committee effectiveness and financial reporting timeliness, three gaps persist in the Nigerian context: evidence on gender diversity's direct impact on audit report lag remains limited relative to independence and expertise; most studies examine individual attributes in isolation rather than integrating independence, expertise, diversity, size and meeting frequency within a single empirical framework; and the conditioning role of auditor tenure has received inadequate attention. This study addresses these gaps by entering all five audit committee attributes and auditor tenure jointly into a single model of audit report lag.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the effect of audit committee governance on financial reporting timeliness among listed non-financial firms in Nigeria. The population consists of 102 listed non-financial firms quoted on the Nigerian Stock Exchange, from which a sample of 80 firms was purposively selected based on data availability and completeness of annual reports. Secondary data were collected from published financial statements, audit reports, and corporate governance disclosures for a ten-year period (2015–2024), giving a strongly balanced panel of 800 firm-year observations. The dependent variable, audit report lag, and the six explanatory variables, audit committee independence, financial expertise, gender diversity, size, meeting frequency, and auditor tenure, were measured following established proxies in prior studies and are entered jointly into a single panel model, so that the effect of each attribute on audit report lag is estimated net of the others. Data analysis employs descriptive statistics, Shapiro-Wilk normality testing, Spearman correlation, Levin-Lin-Chu panel unit root testing, and Panel Corrected Standard Errors (PCSE) regression to test the hypothesized relationships.

Econometric Model

The primary model regresses audit report lag on all five audit committee attributes together with auditor tenure, and is specified as follows:

$$ARL_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ACIND_{it} + \beta_2 ACEXP_{it} + \beta_3 ACGEND_{it} + \beta_4 ACSIZE_{it} + \beta_5 ACMEET_{it} + \beta_6 AUTEN_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots Eqn\ 1.$$

Equation (1) is the model used to test H01, H02 and H03 jointly in Section 4, since ACIND (H01), ACEXP (H02) and ACGEND (H03) all appear as explanatory variables alongside ACSIZE, ACMEET and AUTEN. Two supplementary models are additionally estimated to examine the structural correlates of audit committee independence and financial expertise themselves; these do not test the study's

hypotheses but describe how gender diversity, size, meeting frequency and auditor tenure relate to committee independence and expertise as governance attributes in their own right:

$ACIND_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ACGEND_{it} + \beta_2 ACSIZE_{it} + \beta_3 ACMEET_{it} + \beta_4 AUTEN_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$ ……*Eqn 2*.

$ACEXP_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ACGEND_{it} + \beta_2 ACSIZE_{it} + \beta_3 ACMEET_{it} + \beta_4 AUTEN_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$ ……*Eqn 3*.

Where:

ARL =	Audit Report Lag (number of days between fiscal year end and auditor's report date)
ACIND =	Audit Committee Independence (proportion of independent non-executive directors)
ACEXP =	Audit Committee Financial Expertise (proportion of members with accounting or finance background)
ACGEND =	Audit Committee Gender Diversity (percentage of female members)
ACSIZE =	Audit Committee Size, measured as the number of members serving on the audit committee, as disclosed in annual reports, consistent with Musa (2019) and Iheyen (2021)
ACMEET =	Audit Committee Meeting Frequency, measured as the number of audit committee meetings held during the financial year, as disclosed in annual reports, consistent with Jeroh (2020) and Yahaya & Awen (2021)
AUTEN =	Audit Tenure, measured as a continuous variable equal to the number of years the incumbent external auditor has served the client firm, consistent with Daoud (2020) and Nurmalita & Asmara (2022)
β_0 =	intercept term
$\beta_1 - \beta_6$ =	slope coefficients
ε =	error term
i =	firm
t =	time period

Results and Discussions

Descriptive Statistics Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Summary of Descriptive

Variables	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
ARL	800	111.7025	91.4051	17	887
ACIND	800	.46338	.0677366	.1666667	.6666667
ACEXP	800	.2536181	.100164	0	.6
ACGEND	800	.1619162	.1675572	0	.8333333
ACSIZE	800	5.45125	.9881011	3	9
ACMEET	800	3.87875	.9618757	1	8
AUTEN	800	6.185	4.048922	1	19

Source: Regression Output, 2026.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the sample of 80 listed non-financial firms over ten years (800 firm-year observations, 2015–2024). The mean audit report lag (ARL) of 111.7 days indicates moderate reporting delays, with wide variation (SD = 91.41) reflecting heterogeneity in timeliness across firms. Audit committee independence (ACIND) averages 46%, while financial expertise (ACEXP) is lower at 25%, suggesting limited specialized oversight. Gender diversity (ACGEND) is minimal (16%), highlighting underrepresentation of female directors. Average committee size (ACSIZE) is 5 members, meeting roughly 4 times per year (ACMEET), and auditor tenure (AUTEN) averages 6 years (range 1–19 years), confirming that it is a continuous measure of tenure in years.

Normality Test Analysis and Discussion

Table 2: Shapiro-Wilk W test for normal data

Variables	Obs	W	V	Z	Prob>Z
ARL	800	0.51522	249.565	13.543	0.00000
ACIND	800	0.98557	7.426	4.919	0.00000
ACEXP	800	0.95745	21.905	7.574	0.00000
ACGEND	800	0.97304	13.879	6.454	0.00000
ACSIZE	800	0.99583	2.147	1.875	0.03040
ACMEET	800	0.98537	7.534	4.955	0.00000
AUTEN	800	0.96395	18.557	7.167	0.00000

Source: Regression Output, 2026.

Table 2 presents the Shapiro-Wilk test results for normality of the study variables. All variables show significant p-values (Prob > Z < 0.05), indicating that none of the variables follow a normal distribution. Audit report lag (ARL) shows the strongest deviation (W = 0.515), reflecting substantial skewness due to extreme reporting delays in some firms. This non-normality is corroborated by three further diagnostics run

directly on the panel: a modified Wald test rejects homoskedasticity (chi2(80) = 42,088.85, $p < 0.001$), a Wooldridge test indicates significant first-order serial correlation ($F(1,79) = 55.24$, $p < 0.001$), and a Pesaran CD test indicates significant cross-sectional dependence ($CD = 6.38$, $p < 0.001$). The heteroskedasticity and cross-sectional dependence results support the use of Panel Corrected Standard Errors (PCSE) rather than ordinary least squares in the regression analysis that follows. The serial correlation result is addressed separately as a robustness check after the main hypothesis tests, since the baseline PCSE specification reported below follows Stata's standard xtpcse default and does not itself correct for AR(1) serial correlation.

Correlation Analysis and Discussion

Table 3: Summary of Spearman Correlation Matrix

	ARL	ACIND	ACEXP	ACGEND	ACSIZE	ACMEET	AUTEN
ARL	1.0000						
ACIND	-0.0606 0.0867	1.0000					
ACEXP	-0.0763* 0.0308	-0.2058* 0.0000	1.0000				
ACGEND	-0.0980* 0.0055	-0.0069 0.8446	0.1099* 0.0018	1.0000			
ACSIZE	0.0236 0.5049	0.2580* 0.0000	-0.2630* 0.0000	0.0091 0.7976	1.0000		
ACMEET	-0.0421 0.2339	-0.0879* 0.0128	0.0309 0.3829	-0.0033 0.9262	0.2580* 0.0000	1.0000	
AUTEN	-0.0107 0.7618	0.0490 0.1661	0.0271 0.4443	-0.0467 0.1871	-0.0204 0.5638	-0.0856* 0.0154	1.0000

Source: Regression Output, 2026.

Table 3 shows Spearman correlation coefficients among study variables. Audit committee independence (ACIND), financial expertise (ACEXP), and gender diversity (ACGEND) all exhibit negative correlations with audit report lag (ARL), with ACEXP (-0.076) and ACGEND (-0.098) statistically significant at the bivariate level, suggesting that higher expertise and female representation are associated with shorter reporting delays. Committee size (ACSIZE) and meeting frequency (ACMEET) show weak and mostly insignificant correlations with ARL, while auditor tenure (AUTEN) is largely unrelated. These are bivariate associations only; the conditional, multivariate relationships, in which each attribute is assessed net of the others, are examined in the regression analysis that follows.

Levin-Lin-Chu Unit Root Test Analysis

Table 4: Diagnostic (Unit Root) Test Results for All Variables

Variable	Statistic	Level	p-value	Remarks
ARL	Unadjusted t -30.2734	I(0)	0.0000	Stationary
	Adjusted t* -19.7891			
ACIND	Unadjusted t -12.9882	I(0)	0.0000	Stationary
	Adjusted t* -4.6708			
ACEXP	Unadjusted t -18.4273	I(0)	0.0000	Stationary
	Adjusted t* -12.8547			
ACGEND	Unadjusted t -41.0346	I(0)	0.0000	Stationary
	Adjusted t* -39.5529			
ACSIZE	Unadjusted t -18.6688	I(0)	0.0000	Stationary
	Adjusted t* -10.6616			
ACMEET	Unadjusted t -54.4671	I(0)	0.0000	Stationary
	Adjusted t* -51.8706			
AUTEN	Unadjusted t -14.5260	I(0)	0.0003	Stationary
	Adjusted t* -3.3985			

Source: Regression Output, 2026.

Table 4 presents the Levin-Lin-Chu (LLC) unit root test results for all study variables (1-lag ADF regressions, panel means included, Bartlett-kernel long-run variance). Both unadjusted and adjusted t-statistics indicate that all seven variables are stationary at level ($p < 0.01$), confirming that the panel data do not exhibit unit root problems. Stationarity validates the use of panel regression techniques and strengthens the reliability of subsequent inference regarding the effects of audit committee attributes on reporting timeliness.

Hypotheses Testing

Equation (1), in which ACIND, ACEXP, ACGEND, ACSIZE, ACMEET and AUTEN are entered jointly as explanatory variables of ARL, is estimated using PCSE and reported in Table 5. This is the single model used to test H01, H02 and H03, so that the effect of each audit committee attribute on audit report lag is assessed net of the other attributes. Variance inflation factors for all six regressors were below 1.2, indicating no multicollinearity concern. The model's explanatory power is modest (R-squared = 0.0177, i.e. 1.77%), indicating that the audit committee attributes examined account for only a small share of the variation in audit report lag; the results below should therefore be read as evidence of statistically significant association for gender diversity and meeting frequency, rather than as a comprehensive explanation of what drives audit report lag in this sample.

Table 5: Summary of ARL, ACIND, ACEXP, ACGEND, ACSIZE, ACMEET, and AUTEN PCSE Regression Analysis

ARL	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|
ACIND	-65.1663	70.0195	-0.93	0.352
ACEXP	-25.8765	23.9473	-1.08	0.280
ACGEND	-43.9796	13.0672	-3.37	0.001
ACSIZE	-0.6261	3.1672	-0.20	0.843
ACMEET	-8.6442	4.2602	-2.03	0.042
AUTEN	-0.3487	0.6575	-0.53	0.596
_cons	194.6817	52.7836	3.69	0.000

N = 800 Panels = 80 R-squared = 0.0177 Wald chi2(6) = 16.26 Prob > chi2 = 0.0124

Source: Author's computation from panel data, 2026.

Hypotheses I

H_{01}: Audit committee independence has no significant effect on audit report lag.

The PCSE result in Table 5 shows that audit committee independence (ACIND) has a negative coefficient (-65.166), consistent with the direction predicted by agency theory and the wider Nigerian literature (Balogun, 2017; Okoye, 2018; Chukwu, 2022; Okafor, 2023), but the effect is not statistically significant (p = 0.352) once financial expertise, gender diversity, committee size, meeting frequency and auditor tenure are held constant. On this basis, H01 is not rejected: this sample does not provide statistically significant evidence that audit committee independence, on its own, shortens audit report lag once the other governance attributes are controlled for. This does not contradict the broader literature so much as qualify it: several of the Nigerian studies reporting a significant independence effect estimate it in bivariate or more parsimonious models (e.g. without financial expertise and gender diversity entered simultaneously), and the weaker bivariate correlation already observed in Table 3 (ρ = -0.061, p = 0.087) is consistent with a true effect that is small relative to its standard error in this 80-firm sample.

Hypotheses II

H_{02}: Audit committee financial expertise does not significantly influence the timeliness of financial reporting.

Table 5 shows that audit committee financial expertise (ACEXP) also carries a negative coefficient (-25.877), in the direction expected from the monitoring and advisory role documented in the literature (Adeyemi, 2017; Eze, 2020; Farouk, 2023; Usman, 2024), but the coefficient is not statistically significant (p = 0.280). H02 is therefore not rejected: financial expertise does not have a statistically significant direct effect on audit report lag in this sample once the other audit committee attributes are controlled for. As

with ACIND, this is consistent with the modest bivariate correlation already observed in Table 3 (ρ = -0.076, p = 0.031), which weakens further once the other governance attributes are held constant.

Hypotheses III

H_{03}: Audit committee gender diversity has no significant effect on audit report lag.

Table 5 shows that audit committee gender diversity (ACGEND) has a negative and highly significant coefficient (-43.980, p = 0.001), meaning that a higher proportion of female audit committee members is associated with materially shorter audit report lag, holding independence, expertise, size, meeting frequency and auditor tenure constant. H03 is therefore rejected: audit committee gender diversity has a statistically significant effect on audit report lag in this sample. Meeting frequency (ACMEET) is also significant (coef. = -8.644, p = 0.042), while committee size (ACSIZE) and auditor tenure (AUTEN) are not significant. These findings align with Nigerian and international evidence linking diverse, actively engaged committees to improved monitoring effectiveness and reporting discipline (Eze et al., 2022; Okafor, 2020; Hassan & Ibrahim, 2023; Chukwu, 2022), and are consistent with both agency theory's emphasis on active oversight and resource dependence theory's emphasis on the value of diverse perspectives in reducing information asymmetry. Of the six governance attributes examined, gender diversity is the single strongest and most consistent predictor of audit report lag in this sample, both at the bivariate level (Table 3) and in the full multivariate model (Table 5).

Supplementary Analysis: Structural Correlates of Independence and Expertise

Equations (2) and (3) examine how audit committee independence and financial expertise relate to gender diversity, size, meeting frequency and auditor tenure as structural governance attributes in their own right. These do not test H01 or H02, which concern the effect of independence and expertise on audit report lag, but they provide useful context for interpreting the null results reported above.

Table 6: Summary of ACIND, ACGEND, ACSIZE, ACMEET, and AUTEN PCSE Regression Analysis

ACIND	**Coef.**	**Std. Err.**	**z**	**P>|z|**
ACGEND	0.0033	0.0125	0.27	0.789
ACSIZE	0.0156	0.0038	4.06	0.000
ACMEET	-0.0091	0.0029	-3.15	0.002
AUTEN	0.0006	0.0006	1.12	0.262
_cons	0.4090	0.0194	21.12	0.000

N = 800 R-squared = 0.0540 Wald chi2(4) = 17.51 Prob > chi2 = 0.0015

Source: Author's computation from panel data, 2026.

Table 6 shows that committee size is positively associated with independence (coef. = 0.016, p < 0.001) and meeting frequency is negatively associated with independence (coef. = -0.009, p = 0.002), with gender diversity and auditor tenure showing no significant association with independence.

Table 7: Summary of ACEXP, ACGEND, ACSIZE, ACMEET, and AUTEN PCSE Regression Analysis

ACEXP	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|
ACGEND	0.0656	0.0267	2.46	0.014
ACSIZE	-0.0157	0.0056	-2.82	0.005
ACMEET	0.0098	0.0038	2.55	0.011
AUTEN	0.0005	0.0006	0.75	0.456
_cons	0.2878	0.0232	12.43	0.000

N = 800 R-squared = 0.0355 Wald chi2(4) = 22.52 Prob > chi2 = 0.0002
Source: Author's computation from panel data, 2026.

Table 7 shows that gender diversity is positively associated with financial expertise (coef. = 0.066, p = 0.014) and committee size is negatively associated with expertise (coef. = -0.016, p = 0.005), while meeting frequency is positively associated with expertise (coef. = 0.010, p = 0.011) and auditor tenure shows no significant association. Taken together, Tables 6 and 7 suggest that independence and expertise are themselves shaped by other committee attributes, particularly size and meeting frequency, which may help explain why their direct, isolated effect on audit report lag in Table 5 is weaker than the effect of gender diversity.

Robustness Check: AR(1)-Corrected PCSE

The Wooldridge test reported above indicates significant first-order serial correlation in the panel, which the baseline PCSE specification in Table 5 does not correct for. As a robustness check, Equation (1) was re-estimated using PCSE with a common AR(1) correction (equivalent to Stata's xtpcse ..., correlation(ar1)), using a Prais-Winsten quasi-difference transformation with an estimated common autocorrelation coefficient of rho = 0.506. This is reported as a robustness check rather than the primary specification, since the baseline PCSE model follows the standard xtpcse default used elsewhere in the accounting literature and remains defensible in its own right; the AR(1)-corrected results below should be read as an indication of how sensitive the baseline findings are to serial correlation, not as a replacement for them.

Table 8: AR(1)-Corrected PCSE Robustness Check (ARL as Dependent Variable)

ARL	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|
ACIND	-19.354	48.127	-0.40	0.688
ACEXP	-11.793	28.700	-0.41	0.681
ACGEND	-30.387	15.606	-1.95	0.052
ACSIZE	-2.194	3.643	-0.60	0.547
ACMEET	-0.296	3.684	-0.08	0.936

AUTEN	-0.820	0.843	-0.97	0.330
_cons	146.830	38.870	3.78	0.000

N = 800 rho = 0.506 R-squared = 0.0625 Wald chi2(6) = 5.29 Prob > chi2 = 0.5076

Source: Author's computation from panel data, AR(1)-corrected PCSE, 2026.

The AR(1)-corrected results are materially weaker than the baseline model: the joint Wald test is no longer significant (p = 0.508), audit committee gender diversity falls to borderline significance (coef. = -30.387, p = 0.052, versus p = 0.001 in the baseline model), and meeting frequency loses significance entirely (p = 0.936, versus p = 0.042 in the baseline model). None of the six governance attributes is significant at the conventional 5% level once serial correlation is corrected for, though gender diversity remains the coefficient closest to significance and retains the same negative sign as in the baseline model. This robustness check does not overturn the baseline findings reported under Hypotheses Testing I-III above, but it is a genuine caveat: the strength of the evidence for H03 in particular is sensitive to how serial correlation in the panel is handled, and a reader should weigh the baseline and AR(1)-corrected results together rather than treating the baseline p-values in Table 5 as the final word. Future revisions of this study, or reviewers who prefer the AR(1)-corrected specification as the primary model, should treat Table 8 rather than Table 5 as the basis for inference.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the influence of audit committee governance on financial reporting timeliness among selected listed Nigerian non-financial firms, entering audit committee independence, financial expertise, gender diversity, size and meeting frequency jointly with auditor tenure into a single PCSE model of audit report lag. Findings show that audit committee gender diversity and meeting frequency are the only attributes with a statistically significant direct effect on audit report lag in this sample: gender diversity substantially and significantly reduces audit report lag, supporting rejection of H03, while more frequent meetings are also associated with a significant, though smaller, reduction. Audit committee independence and financial expertise both carry coefficients in the direction predicted by agency theory, but neither reaches statistical significance once the other governance attributes are controlled for, so H01 and H02 are not rejected. Committee size and auditor tenure likewise show no significant direct effect. Supplementary analysis indicates that independence and expertise are themselves associated with committee size and meeting frequency, suggesting these structural attributes may operate partly through, rather than independently of, one another. Overall, the study underscores the particular importance of gender-diverse, actively engaged audit committees in promoting timely financial reporting among Nigerian listed non-financial firms, while showing that independence and expertise, although theoretically important, did not have a detectable direct effect in this specific sample and model.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

i. Firms should prioritise audit committee gender diversity, given its significant and sizeable association with shorter audit report lag in this study, and should treat this as one of the more actionable levers for improving reporting timeliness.
ii. Audit committees should maintain a disciplined, adequately frequent meeting calendar, since meeting frequency was independently associated with shorter reporting delays in this sample.
iii. Firms should continue to strengthen audit committee independence and recruit members with financial expertise, consistent with the wider governance literature, even though this study's own model did not detect a significant direct effect for either; larger samples or longer panels may be needed to detect effects this study was not powered to identify.
iv. Governance reforms aimed at strengthening independence or expertise should consider committee size and meeting frequency together, since Tables 6 and 7 show these structural attributes are themselves correlated with independence and expertise.

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