

## **Social Institutions and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Study of the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

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**T**his study is on Social Institutions and Democratic Consolidation: A Study of the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria. The study examined the impact of social institutions to foster public trust and confidence in Nigeria. The study adopted the historical research method. It is qualitative in approach. Data was gathered through secondary sources like journals, documentary information, newspapers etc. The analysis of this study was carried out using content analysis. The theory adopted for this study is the institutionalization theory. The study revealed that as a social institution, political party performs the function of recruiting the masses from where leaders with ability are identified and presented for the selection of the electorate through the voting lot. Also, the study showed civil society organizing are relevant in a democracy to safeguard citizens' rights. The civil society organization must be a check on the government. Therefore, the study recommended that, there should be need to form political parties based on shared values to promote effective leadership for the country. Also, there is need for a well-structured institutional arrangement for partnership between CSOs and government organizations.

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, INEC, Institution, State, Social Organization.*

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### **Background to the Study**

Since Independence in 1960, the administration of the country has been in a daunting situation. The adoption of democracy as the best system of choosing leaders to run or pilot the process of governance has come to stay. Despite periods of military administration which was completely rejected by the people and international organizations as well as the community of Nations. The practice of democracy irrespective of its undermining circumstances has shown that it is the system of governance that promotes human dignity and development. This goes to justify the assertion that democratic governance is key to national development, hence the need for the entrenchment of democratic values into the system (Hassan and Solomon, 2016). This is because democratic government focuses on the people's welfare and the improvement of the citizens of the country. In this direction, for democracy to thrive to consolidation, social institutions must be active and effective in all round the sectors.

The process of deepening democracy must take into full consideration the electoral process. The management of election for gaining public trust and confidence has to ensure there is free fair election procedure. The democratic process in Nigeria posed a threat to the people. Bad governance, electoral malpractice, political exclusion, a tendency towards dictatorship, human rights violations, political assassinations, over bearing influence of ruling party, insecurity, poverty and unemployment, negligence to the rule of law and corruption witnessed in all areas of political life. Looking at these issues, it is very evident that instead of consolidating, democracy is at threat (Obiajuluadu, 2016). This is attributed to non-functionality of social institutions of democracy.

Hassan and Solomon (2016) advanced that in the developed democracies, social institutions have shown to be channels and vehicles for real and authentic Socio-Political change and transformation in their societies. Pointing that being in control of the administrative machinery of government, these institutions are actively involved in making policies and decisions that the government pursues on behalf of the entire country. Social institutions are institutionalized or established structures or organizations in society that organize behavior, attitude and ensure stability. Some of the social institutions are:

- i). Political Party: Parties mobilize support, shape policy and compete for power.
- ii). INEC: They conduct elections, register parties, and maintain electoral lists. They are key to democracy practice in Nigeria.
- iii). Judiciary: They interpret laws, settle disputes, and ensure justice in the country.
- iv). Civic Organizations: NGOs or groups advocating rights, education, health, etc.

Thus, Hassan and Solomon (2016) were of the views that social institutions are the initiators and executors of ideas that make the attainment of the desired development in consolidation of Nigeria's democracy. These institutions are fundamental pillars to strengthening election. They are vital components of constitutional democracy. The Social institution strives to promote improved welfare of the people, they uphold democratic values of popular participation, respect for the rules of law, free and fair elections and independence of the judiciary. They maintain social order and guide interactions. The institutions shape norms and behaviours in the society.

This study therefore is to establish the impact of these social institutions to foster public trust and confidence in democratic Practice in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Social institutions are social groups formed with structures, which promote social growth. Such groups include family, educational institutions as well as governmental groups. Social institutions which promote democratic consolidation are groups which socialize their offspring to learn among others; civic engagement that is participation, balance government authority, transparency, and teaching of democratic values.

Social institutions in a bid to carry out the expected values to the society are faced with myriads of challenges, for instance, corruption is very harmful to the activities of any group, it reduces trust in institutions in the discharge of duty, i.e. the judiciary, INEC during election, etc. weak accountability in service, social institutions like judiciary, INEC faces pressure or manipulation performing their duties.

The lack in civic engagement invariably limits the level of participation in processes like voting or advocacy by civil society organizations. Also, internal democracy issues leading to imposition, poor primaries of political party, vote buying, and no clear ideological foundation are impediment to public trust and confidence. Therefore, the pertinent question is how has lack of civil engagement and ineffective party foundation affected democratic consolidation?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main goal of this study is to investigate the impact of social institutions on democratic consolidation in Imo State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the following objectives are adopted;

- i). To identify the functions of political parties in promoting public trust and confidence during the 2019 and 2023 presidential election in Imo State, Nigeria.
- ii). To examine the relationship between civil society organizations and free and fair election in the 2019 and 2023 presidential election in Imo State, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

- i). What are the functions of political parties in promoting public trust and confidence during the 2019 and 2023 presidential election in Imo State, Nigeria?
- ii). What is the relationship between civil society organizations and free and fair election in the 2019 and 2023 presidential election in Imo State, Nigeria?

### **Conceptual Explication:**

#### **Democracy:**

Democracy as a system of governance has been recognized as acceptable means of reaching to people's expectations. Democratic rule is anchored on the power of the people to determine those who rule over them through the process of election. It simply entails rule by the people. Anam (2018) defines democracy as government by the people either directly by the people or

through their elected representatives. In democracy, the highest authority lies with the citizens and exercised through their elected representatives in a free and fair context. Election in this direction, assumes a necessary component of contemporary democratic practice. Anam (2018) states that it gives an institutional direction to electorates in a country to elect their representatives to various office of governance, and provides different civil society organizations in the country to stake and settle their claims to power through peaceful Process.

Democracy is aimed at ensuring equality and fundamental freedom, empower citizens, handle quarrels through dialogue, promote diversity, advocate Political and social change without economic and social failure.

### **Democratic Consolidation**

Democratic consolidation has been defined as the problem of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against threats of authoritarian regression or "building dam against reverse waves" (Schedler, 1998:91). Contemporarily, the word consolidation is associated with wider range of issues that has become hard for a definite definition. Democratic consolidation, however currently is thus:

Popular legitimization, the diffusion of democratic values, the neutralization of anti-system actors, civilian supremacy over the military, the elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, Judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty, an economic stabilization. (Schedler, 1998:91).

In another sense, Aluaigba (2016), opines that democratic consolidation is construed as a stage in a country's democratic process where democracy acquires some characteristics of stability. It is the process of realizing consent thus that all stakeholders know that democracy is an acceptable system of governance.

### **Social Institutions**

Social institutions are defined as enduring patterns of social organization that fulfill fundamental functions within society. In this study, there are several social institutions but we focus on Political or government institutions. These institutions impose social institutions through Laws and regulations, shaping values through public policies and initiatives. It serves the people of a nation in form of government in their traditional and modern forms, which exist at the local state and national levels.

A system of political organization is designed within which the philosophy and methodology of Governance and Selection of active Participants in the Political process evolve. In a democracy, participation of the masses, equality, justice, accountability, free and fair elections are emphasized.

**Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation.**

Political party is an organization concerned with the expression of preferences regarding the seizure, consolidation and use of state power, and contesting control of the chief policy making offices of government. Political Parties mobilize human beings from all sections of the polity. It is an inclusive organization that does not reject entrants. A Political Party normally has a logo or label for easy identification and most importantly, the primary objective is to try to win elections and to control and use state power. Power here implies the ability and capability to influence or coerce citizens to do the bidding of the holder. Power is possessed for policy making, and policy implementation.

A political party is a social group defined by Herbert Simon as a system of interdependent activities characterized by a high degree of rational direction of behavior towards end that are objects of common acknowledgement and expectation (Simon, 1962:1130). It is different from other social groups, such as labour union and other associations because of the unique functions a political party perform for the system such as organizing for public opinion, communicating demands to the center of government decision-making and political recruitment.

Political Parties have been an instrument in the democratization process since the dawn of this fourth republic. Parties have renewed activities as a critical institution of democracy. Nwanegbo (2011) opines that political parties serve as complex tool of modern politics, as a structure bringing together a large group of officials and citizen provides a channel through which one part may control or communicate with another or help to organize public opinions, facilitate communication between the government and the governed, articulate the feelings of community and help in political recruitment. Political parties are engine room of democratic consolidation, and ignoring them, there will be no genuine democratic Practice.

Weissenbach (2020) vehemently said that the major issues for democratic consolidation lies on political Parties, for the involvement of the people both directly or through their elected representatives which present the most important part of governance and very essential to its sustenance of democratic values. Nwanegbo (2011) asserts that political parties provide the citizens with platform for interaction in the political space individually, and may not be liable to hold for account of stewardship to the voters, and accountability thrives in political representation, which parties provide.

**The Nexus between Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation**

Civil society organizations have age-long relations with struggle for democratization in Nigeria. The flourishing and vibrancy of civil society in the 80s and 90s was exponential, comparable only to the days of nationalist movements. Coalition of civil society organizations initiated the struggle or campaign for democracy. This was later given impetus by the external influence and assistance. Their antecedence can be traced back in time to the colonial and nationalist eras. Several associational groups in the colonial era sought to restrain the colonial administration from enforcing unpopular laws like the imposition of taxes on some products. The Agbekoya revolt and the Aba Women riot in the western and

southern regions or the country respectively were some of the activities of civil society. Thus, Ekeh (1994) persuasively argued that:

The structures and processes that are currently labeled civil society are not historians and social scientists in the pre-1985 period used other concepts and terms to designate phenomena that this fresh construct of civil society now claims for its domain.

Given the ambiguous nature of the term "civil society," we must bridge its traditional and modern definitions if it is to be effectively used for analytical purposes. It can be argued that civil society is not conceptually homogenous, structurally and procedurally. For example, it could be said to be "the arena where contradictory forces contend for domination" (Osaghe, 1998). But of importance for the country's democratization project, is how civil society can help the people and even the state realizes the universal goals of freedom, liberty, egalitarian society and material upliftment of the people. In Nigeria and in the context of democratic consolidation, this selfreflectivity of civil society is just emerging and is yet to take firm root, this leaves the sector vulnerable to state manipulation of its internal processes, organizational structures, and functions.

The initial goal of civil society organization was to push the military out of government and return the country to civil rule. The military in government had over-stayed its welcome having failed to act as corrective regimes. It actually became neck-deep in the vices of the civil politician. Following a long and difficult campaign for democracy, pro-democracy movements successfully forced the military out of power. Though the pact that brought civil rule did not quite give the people control of their government, for example, the military constitution of 1999, which is still in use, is clearly flawed with so much concentration of power and resources at the center. In fact, since the first republic, the status quo has remained largely unchanged.

The CSOs in Nigeria have been in the forefront in the fight for the non-inclusive manner these constitutions were drafted, and imposed on the people by administrative fiat of the ministry. A constitution should act as the guiding compass for the state. but in Africa, it has actually become epi-phenomenon because of the failure to allow it mediate the conduct of political office holders.

The 1999 constitution of the country for example was hurriedly put together by General Abubakar's regime and imposed on the people on the eve of the military disengagement from power in May 1999. The process of its formulation was elite driven and was not subject to popular debates. This explains the numerous inconsistencies and complexities within the present constitution. The constitutional log-jam that characterized the handover of power to President Goodluck Jonathan after the death of Yar' Adua, is an apt example.

The structural and economical pre-conditions necessary for its effective functioning are not readily available in Africa. For example, while in the West, the modern bourgeoisie with their

commercial interest established the rule of law through the market philosophy and practice, the petit-bourgeoisie in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general are getting their wealth and its accumulation through the control and prebendal use of the state apparatus (Joseph, 1987).

This underscores the imperative of strong independent associations to stand between the individual, society and the state. Civil society in the process of democratization should aim at maintaining the boundaries between state and society to prevent, among other things, encroachment upon matters outside state purview and statist centralizing and conformist development.

Popular view in Nigeria is harped on the belief that civil society cannot pursue consistently and persistently certain course of action either because they lack ideological and pragmatic bases or their leaderships are more concerned with their personal gains. Perhaps, civil society is without the necessary structural pre-conditioning especially in terms of functional separation of state and society. Presently, such relationship in Africa is unlike in tendencies of the state in Africa, poor financial base, among others.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Institutionalization Theory:**

This study focuses on the institutionalization theory to explain social institutions and their impact on democratic consolidation. Scholars of institutionalization includes Linz (1999) and O'Donnell (1988). They share the conception that consolidated has to do with the establishment and sustenance of social institutions of the democratic order. Linz (1999) assesses that democracy is consolidated when the institutions align with the institutions and rule of law agreements to democratic values. In his Part, O'Donnell (1988) is of the view that consolidation occurs when stakeholders in the political process obey the law that is institutionalized. This theory of consolidation, with reference to attitudinal and behavioral features of stakeholders is simultaneously intuitive and constituting a barrier. Conversely, when a democracy gets routinized, institutionalized and normalized, acting in violation of democratic values is both unappealing and not to the advantage of politicians and other stakeholders. Consolidation exists when the right of actors is consequential. It affords the existence of a functional state and five reinforcing areas: free civil society, an autonomous political entity, the rule of law, a bureaucracy and an economic entity.

In relation to this study, the inability of Nigeria to come to terms with the challenge of rising desires in the state and non-accountability, as well as inactive citizenship, have affected democratic practice in the country. The viable practice of democracy is less about electoral competition but deals more on public trust and effective governance. Invariably, the study is of the assertion that Nigeria's democratic consolidation is the problem of the stakeholders to follow the principles of democratic governance. Therefore, social institutions must uphold the principles of accountability, transparency, rule of Law among others toward democratic consolidation.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted the historical method. It is a qualitative approach. This involved data collection and evaluation. It deals with the determination, evaluation and explanation of past events for the purpose of gaining a better and clearer understanding of the present and future. As a qualitative approach, data collection was through secondary sources which involves journals, newspapers, textbooks, etc. the data analysis was done through evaluation method which describes as well evaluates the data gathered.

## **Evaluation of the Research Questions**

Many Social institutions play critical roles toward the process of deepening democratic ethos in the society. Their contributions help in ensuring reforms in the elected process, and serve to guide in promoting inclusive participation and free and fair election. In this study, effort is made to discuss some of these institutions. Among them include: "Independent National Electoral Commission, Political Parties, Judiciary and Civil society Organizations (CSOs).

## **Research Questions 1**

What are the functions of political parties in promoting public trust and confidence during the 2019 and 2023 presidential election in Imo State, Nigeria?

Political Parties as quintessential institutions of democracies are saddled with a number of responsibilities rather than just the simple purpose of fielding candidates for elections and winning elections. Among the functions performed by political parties in democratic system are:

- i). Political parties develop policies and programmes.
- ii). Political parties pick up demands from society and bundle them into packages, which form a great part of their programme and manifesto.
- iii). (iii) Political Parties are the main vehicles for recruiting and selecting people for government and legislative offices.
- iv). (iv) Political parties either oversee or control government depending on whether they are in government of opposition, when in government, they control government, while in opposition, they oversee and make sure government is on their toes to do the right of the people.

Again, political parties ensure stability in a democratic state. The opposition parties play this function and provide the Service by acting as a watchdog for the people on government activities. They expose the ills of the ruling party, criticize policies of government that does not serve to promote inclusion and reduce poverty among the citizens, hence, strengthen the democratic governance.

## **Research Questions 2**

What is the relationship between civil society organizations and free and fair election in the 2019 and 2023 presidential election in Imo State, Nigeria?

### **Civil Society Organization (CSOs)**

Civil Society Organization is the pillar that constitutes the engine of all civilized entity. In a nutshell, Civil Society Organization is defined as organizations that spring out of voluntary association within the State, founded between the extended family and the society. Civil Society as a political or social institution is a medium used by the people in expressing the control of their states' political affairs. They are important instruments used for monitoring and stopping the excessive political power melted out by the state officials towards the People.

Civil society organization to a large extent is an addendum to the role of Political Parties in encouraging political participation, increase political efficacy and skill of democratic citizens, and promoting an appreciation of the obligation, as well as the rights of democratic citizenship. The Civil Society organizations have made tremendous strides and mobilizations towards electoral reforms, election monitoring, all aimed at pushing the democratic practice to accommodate the will of the people. The contribution to stop tenure elongation clause, efforts at having the 2022 electoral act (as amended).

### **Conclusion/Findings**

Democracy is a form of government and an entrenched form of life that grants popular participation of all, accountability and responsiveness by officials of government, either elected or appointed. This brings about a legitimate rulership that is rooted in rule of law that ensures the citizens fundamental rights, comprising civil, political, to economic, social and cultural rights.

Democratic consolidation entails a status of democratic maturity such that it can no longer be truncated by reactionary forces whether internal or external. In actualizing the above, it requires institutions of the state to be actively involved, especially the social institutions of the state. This study has shown that these social institutions have played roles towards consolidating the democratic experiment, but overall, have failed. The effectiveness of Nigeria's democracy rests on the observance of the principles of democracy by the institutions. The values of social institutions toward democracy cannot be deemphasized. Therefore, the workability and sustainability of effective governance is hinged on the improvement and genuine function of democratic institutions. Hence, the country's democracy will be consolidated when the institutions perform their obligations optimally, ensuring institutionalization of the law, accountability, transparency and mobilization of citizenship to political participation and consciousness.

The study has revealed that as a social institution, political party performs the function of recruiting the masses from where leaders with ability are identified and presented for the selection of the electorate through the voting lot. Also, the study showed civil society organizing are relevant in a democracy to safeguard citizens' rights. The civil society organization must be a check on the government.

## Recommendations

Arising from the abysmal contributions of the social institution, this study makes the following recommendations.

- i). There should be need to form political parties based on shared values to promote effective leadership for the country.
- ii). There is need for a well-structured institutional arrangement for partnership between CSOs and government organizations.

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