CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE LEGITIMATION OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

One of the most popular discourses on Nigeria's political process today is about the need to deepen democratic governance in the country. Unfortunately, the quest to have democracy entrenched in the country is being seriously threatened by the crisis of legitimacy arising from both the processes and the content of democratic governance in the country. The enthusiasm that heralded the enthronement of democracy in the nation in 1999 has considerably waned and there is obvious despondence about the ongoing political process among the masses of the Nigerian people. Thus, there is a need to reinvent the nation's democratic process to enhance its legitimacy. Using the four basic functional dimensions (values) that define the relationship between civil society and the democratic state as a framework, the paper discusses, how civil society through its activities, in the public space can facilitate government commitment to policies, programs and practices that would promote peoples' confidence and trust in the nation's democratic governance system. The paper concludes that the credibility of the political process and the quality of service delivery of government institutions and agencies are key to the progress and stability of the ongoing democratic governance in Nigeria.

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Introduction:

Legitimacy has multiple formal and informal sources. But there is general agreement that it will be greater where there are high levels of political inclusion, participation, representation and achievement (Clements, K. P. 2014:13). On the 29th of May, 1999, Nigeria joined the comity of nations practising democratic governance system when the nation transited from military rule to constitutional government. The enthronement of democratic rule in the country was a product of both external and internal factors. The external factor was largely driven by the development in the Soviet Union following the introduction of glasnost and perestroika policies of the Gorbachev administration which weakened the push for a socialist governance model across the globe and terminated the bi-polar nature of global politics. The point is that with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War between the East and the West, on the one hand, and the triumph of liberal democracy over the communist/socialist governance model, on the other, several nations across the globe, including Nigeria, began the journey to democracy. This development was captured by Amuwo, (1992: 9) when he posits that the first strand is the one offered by the East European experience…. the second strand is that provided by international capitalism that is becoming more and more triumphant and triumphalist".

The external factor that triggered the clamour for a democratic form of government in Africa was supported by factors within. This refers to forces within Africa and mounted by Africans themselves, which to a large extent was driven by the precarious socioeconomic conditions of the generality of the African people. The point is that the demand by the mass of the African people for a democratic governance system was largely a response to the inability of most African governments to better the lot of their citizenry. Writing about the impact of the precarious socioeconomic conditions of the mass of African

people on the quest for democracy in Africa, Eghosa,(2022: 13) states that:

The impetus for democratisation and democracy in Africa does not lie as much in the global democratic revolution as it does in the popular uprisings against the failings and hopelessness of the independence that saw the rise of authoritarian regimes that failed to liberate citizens from hunger, disease, and poverty and had only replaced the revolution of rising frustrations.

From Abuja in Nigeria to Kinshasha in the Republic of Congo, a large number of people are dying daily of starvation and disease. The independence that was expected to herald a new lease of life gave birth to deep frustration as the leaders who took over from the colonialists became self-centred and nepotistic in their approach to governance. The military takeover of government in many African states, on account of bad governance, corruption of the politicians and the deplorable socioeconomic conditions of the mass of the people, was welcomed by the generality of the people, on the belief that the military would change the narrative turned out to be a disaster. Military rule in many African States, including Nigeria, was characterised by gross human rights violations and pauperisation of the masses of the people. Irele (1993) succinctly presented the situation in many nations in Africa when he writes:

There is the total collapse of our system and the continent is wracked with problems of enormous magnitude. The situation is bleak and our history which has always been marked with misery is now deeply embedded in frustration and this has led to disillusionment.

The trajectory of the democratic governance system in Nigeria mimics what is obtained in other African countries. In other words, both the external factors and the internal factors that culminated in the enthronement of democracy in other African countries underlined the

forces that eventually gave birth to the installation of democratic rule in the country in 1999.

The installation of democratic governance in Nigeria in May 1999 was greeted with much optimism. The masses of the people believed that democratic rule would herald a new lease and better living conditions. Unfortunately, the hope of the generality of the people for improved socioeconomic well-being was dashed as things became so bad that Nigeria became the poverty capital of the world (World Bank, 2016). In addition to the failure of the nation's democratic governance system to meet the aspirations and yearnings of the people in terms of improved socioeconomic conditions, the electoral process that is expected to facilitate the enthronement of leadership truly elected by the people became so compromised that the mass of the people lost interest in the nation's electoral democracy. Electoral processes were not only characterised by violence, leading to killing and wanton destruction of property, election outcomes hardly reflected the wishes of the people. The Late President Yara Adua confirmed this when he openly admitted that the election that brought him to office was seriously flawed. (Daily Trust, 30 May, 2007).

Following the widespread condemnation of the 2007 general elections, the Late President Yar Adua inaugurated the Uwais Committee to reform the nation's electoral process. With the coming to power of President Mohammed Buhari, the nation's electoral process, once again, was revisited. The Electoral Act 2022 which was targeted at achieving tremendous improvement in the nation's electoral processes came into being. Despite all these attempts at promoting free, fair and credible elections in the country, the 2023 presidential election of February 25, has been globally condemned as a mockery of the democratic process. Kareem in a report on the February 25, 2023 elections wrote that:

International observer groups believe that the just concluded presidential and National Assembly elections held on February 25 were flawed. According to a statement issued by the European Union Election Observation Mission in Nigeria (EUEOM) the elections were not free, fair, and transparent (Dataphyte, 1 March, 2023).

Flowing from the above is the obvious fact that Nigeria's democratic governance system has a legitimacy deficit in its entity. This crisis has manifested clearly in the very unimpressive turnout of voters at the February 25, 2023 elections. Even with the unusual participation and interest shown by the Nigerian youth in the elections, voter turnout in the exercise was the worst in the democratic history of the nation. A report by Kabir Yusuf in the Premium Times acknowledged this:

. …..the voter turnout was abysmal, the lowest since Nigeria's independence. In 36 states, less than half of the population turned out, and no state had a turnout above 40 per cent…….Overall, the national turnout was 29 per cent; no election had a lower participation rate in the six decades of Nigeria's independence. Out of the 93.4 million registered voters this year, 87.2 million people collected their Permanent Voters Card and the total number of actual voters on election day was only 24.9 million. Barely 9 million people voted for President-elect Bola Tinubu who will now govern 220 million Nigerians (Premium Times, March 8, 2023).

The legitimacy of the nation's democratic governance has seriously been eroded over time and needs to be reinvented to restore it on the path of growth and stability. Osaghae (2022: 7) writing about the nature of democracy and its proclivity to grow and to regress argues: Once installed, democracy is expected to grow and become deepened, or else, it can stagnate or regress into authoritarian and non-democratic forms. The legitimacy of the democratic process in Nigeria is rapidly declining. A cursory look at the performance and ranking in the UNDP's Human Development Index establishes that democratic governance in the country has not had the expected positive impact on the socioeconomic conditions of the people. In 2003, Nigeria ranked 147 of over 180 countries, 152 in 2006, 158 in 2014, 161 in 2019, 163 in 2021 and low for 2022 (Osaghae, 2019: 20).

The point that is being established is that current Nigeria's democratic governance has a legitimacy deficit. Consequently, the question that looms large is: How can we restore the legitimacy of democratic governance in Nigeria? This issue is being interrogated because of the recognition of the possibility of reversal to authoritarianism of the nation's democratic process. More importantly, the ongoing democratic governance in Nigeria is losing the requisite popular participation of the people, which characteristically defines the essence of democracy. Thus, there is a need to re-calibrate the nation's democratic process for the promotion of both the popular participation of the citizenry and leadership responsiveness and accountability. The truth of the matter is that the political class has shown clearly that it cannot reinvent itself and rejig the entire political process for the acquisition of the needed legitimacy-procedural and performance- for the progress and stability of the nation's democratic governance system. As it were, the onus of redeeming the nation's democracy lies with the civil society.

Against this background, this paper discusses the role that civil society can play in promoting the values, principles and praxis that can facilitate the promotion of the legitimation of the nation's democratic process. Guided by this objective, the paper is segmented into five complementary parts. The paper begins with conceptual moorings on democracy, legitimacy and civil society. The second section attempts a review of Nigeria's democratic experiments. The third segment interrogates the key issues undermining the legitimacy of the ongoing democratic process in Nigeria. The fourth section discusses the strategic role that the civil society can play to promote democratic legitimisation in the country and finally, the fifth part amplifies the conclusions of the paper.

Conceptual Clarification

Some concepts used in this essay are clarified in this section, these concepts include democratic governance, legitimacy, and civil society.

Democratic Governance

To begin a conceptual clarification of democratic governance, it is important to establish the meaning of the concept, of democracy. Having said that, it must be emphasised that democracy is an essentially contested concept and so defining it has generated diverse opinions and interpretations. The point is that the problem of democracy as an idea begins at the level of conceptualisation (Owolabi,1999.4). This position was reiterated when Osaghae (2022.5) submitted that democracy is an essentially variable concept. The contention over the meaning of democracy has manifested both at the level of theory and practice. Scholars have defined the concept from their ideological and intellectual prisms while politicians with diverse conceptions of the idea have routinely claimed to be practising democracy. However, the contention over the meaning of the idea of democracy has considerably whittled down following the triumph of liberal democracy over other variants of democracy. Osaghae (2022) expresses this when he argues that "the convergence on meaning that has dominated literature since liberal democracy emerged as the standard-bearer of democratic theory and practice makes it fairly easy to arrive at an agreeable though not uncontested definition."

Etymologically speaking, the concept of democracy is a combination of two Greek words, namely, 'demos' and 'kratia', which simply translates to rule of the people or power in the hands of the people. Abraham Lincoln succinctly expresses this when he defines democracy as "the government of the people, by the people and for the people." In a nutshell, democracy describes political systems and arrangements in which sovereign power resides in the citizens and people. To substantiate the centrality of the people to this governance model, two cardinal principles and several institutional frameworks and safeguards characteristically underline its processes. The two cardinal principles are the principles of popular participation of the

citizenry in governance processes and leadership accountability to the citizenry, on the one hand, and the institutional framework and safeguards which include, namely, the rule of law; respect for fundamental human rights; free press; free, fair and regular elections; independent judiciary and virile civil society, on the other hand. Having provided the basic ingredients that characterise democracy, let me at this point state that democratic governance is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens acting indirectly through their elected representatives (cited in Olowu, Williams & Soremekun 1999. 241).

Legitimacy

The concept of legitimacy is one of the popular concepts often used to assess a political system. It is an idea that is discussed in the context of interrogating the concept of power about the belief of the people over whom power is exercised. "It is the stated or unstated acceptance of unequal political relationships where some are given, assume, or inherit power over others" (Clements, 2014: 13). Weber, M. (1968), a leading proponent of the concept of legitimacy, establishes this when he defines legitimacy "as the belief in legitimacy on the part of the relevant social agents and power relations as legitimate where those involved in them, subordinate as well as dominant, believe them to be".

Legitimacy is a regime assessment tool in that it confers on the people in power and authority both legal and moral rights to exercise power over the rest of the people in a polity. Merelman (1966:548) captures this succinctly when he calls legitimacy "a quality attributed to a regime by a population: that quality is the outcome of the government's capacity to engender legitimacy.

Having established that legitimacy is a political concept that has to do with the quality of power relations between the government and the people, the question that looms large now is: why is political power in need of legitimisation? Or put differently, what is the significance of legitimacy to power relationship in a polity? First and foremost, we need to acknowledge the fact that the importance of legitimacy in power relationships cannot be over-emphasised. It is legitimacy that confers

on power the ability or capacity to generate the necessary support that is required to realise the essence of political power. Beetham (1991.39) colourfully reiterates this when he posits that "legitimacy is not the icing on the cake of power, which is applied after baking is complete, and leaves the cake itself essentially unchanged. It is more like the yeast that permeates the dough, and makes the bread what it is." The point is that legitimacy helps to generate in the subordinate within a power relation the appropriate behaviour that is required for the realisation of order and stability in a polity. Put in another way, legitimacy provides the people with the moral grounds for cooperation and obedience to the holders of state power. Little wonder, it is seen as the basis of political obligation.

Civil Society

The problem of
civil society as an idea begins at the level of conceptualisation. Different thinkers have stressed different aspects of the concept. Thus, the idea of civil society has come to mean one set of principles and practices to thinkers in the liberal tradition and another to their more conservative variant. Those with the socialist cum Marxist intellectual perspective also express different conceptions of the idea of civil society. The reason for the lack of consensus among scholars on what the idea of civil society connotes is largely a function of the conception of the state that underlines their ideological and intellectual orientations.

Civil society is conceived as "the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests" (CIVICUS 2012. 8). It is seen as "a web of autonomous associations independent of the state, which bind citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence or actions could affect public policy (Taylor, 1995. 204). Diamonds captures this when he posits that

civil society is the realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules. Essentially, the idea of civil society is understood as a body of individuals or citizens acting collectively in a public space to express their interests and preferences on issues of mutual interests and concerns with the ultimate objective of committing the state to the promotion of the common good. It represents a multitude of individuals and groups that occupy a segment of the political space to project and promote the socio-political needs of their members and serve as a check on the excesses of the state.

Having said that, it is necessary to point out the fact that civil society has always been classified as a major player in the public space which, characteristically is the arena of the state. Thus, as a player in the public space along with the state, the role of civil society is to check the way and manner power is exercised by the state and ensure it is deployed to guarantee the promotion of general well-being and individual freedoms. Ekeh (1992. 188) establishes the importance of civil society as a tool for the promotion of individual freedoms and its relationship to the state when he states that "civil society emerged as a key construct of Western political thought at a point in time in the nineteenth century when individual freedoms were threatened by mass totalitarian regimes".

Democratic Experiments and the Nigerian State

The Nigerian state, right from its recognition as a sovereign independent state, was initiated into the comity of nations practising a democratic governance system. Nigeria's colonial rulers, the British, departed leaving behind a parliamentary democratic governance system. In other words, on the 1st of October, 1960, when Nigeria became an independent nation, democratically elected leaders the person of the Late Tafawa Balewa as the prime minister and the Late Dr Nnamdi Azikwe as the president were in place. In the regions, there were premiers. So, at both the federal and the regional levels of government, there were elected leaders in charge of the machinery of governance. Indeed, before the formal declaration of independence for

the Nigerian state in October 1960, those running the affairs of the state were elected representatives of the people. In the Western region of Nigeria, the Late Obafemi Awolowo was premier between 1954 and 1959. In the Eastern region, the Late Dr. Nnamidi Azikwe was premier in the same period, while in the Northern region of the country, the Late Sir. Ahmadu Bello served as the premier. Let me at this point state that the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 which recommended the adoption of federalism as the nation's political cum administrative system paved the way for the emergence of these leaders as premiers of their region. The Constitution laid the foundation for the adoption of the federal system of government in Nigeria.

The Nigerian state experienced its first democratic reversal to authoritarianism on the 15th of January 1966, when the military overthrew the democratically elected governments across the nation. Thus, the military coup of January 1966, brought to an end what has come to be referred to as the First Republic (1960- 1966). It is instructive to point out that the reasons adduced by the coup plotters for the military take-over of the reins of power range from corruption, ineptitude, electoral violence election rigging and nepotism to mention but a few. The spokesman of the January 1966 Coupists, Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, in his address to the nation, articulated the reasons for the coup in the following words:

Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places who seek bribes and demand 10 per cent; those who seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers and VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those who make the country look big for nothing before international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigeria political calendar back by their words and deeds.

Following the military take-over of the reign of power on the 15th of January, 1966, the democratic governance system was terminated as all democratic structures and institutions were dismantled for the newly constituted Supreme Military Council (SMC). Thus, for thirteen years (1966-1979) the nation witnessed several military regimes, namely, Aguyi Ironsi (1966); Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975); Murtala Muhammed (1975-1976); Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979). The Obasanjo government initiated the process for the return to democratic rule which was consummated with the transfer of power to democratically elected rulers at both the federal and state levels. At the federal level, Alhaji Sheu Usman Shagari emerged as the president of the nation (1979-1983). The Shagari government that came into being on the 1st of October, 1999, marked the beginning of what has come to be known in the politics of the Nigerian state as the "Second Republic". On the 31st December 1983, the Shagari government was overthrown and thus the "Second Republic'' or what otherwise could be referred to as the nation's second democratic experiment came to an end.

It is instructive to note that the reason(s) given by the coupists for the termination of the Second Republic was similar to the reasons given by Kaduna Nzeogwu for the overthrow of the First Republic. General Sani Abacha, the spokesperson of the coupists in his address to the nation says:

You are all living witness to the great economic predicament and uncertainty, which an inept and corrupt leadership has imposed on our beloved nation for the past four years. I am referring to the harsh, intolerable conditions under which we are now living. Our economy has been hopelessly mismanaged. We have become a debtor and beggar nations…… Yet our leaders revel in squander mania, corruption and indiscipline, and continue to proliferate public appointments in complete disregard of our stark economic realities….

Following the December 1983 coup, the Buhari-Idiagbon-led military regime was put in place. This regime later gave way to the Babangida administration which came on board in August 1985, following a palace coup that ousted the Buhari-Idiagbon administration. The Babangida administration after much pressure,

from both within and without, to return the nation to democratic rule, put in place a political transition programme. This process culminated in the inauguration of democratically elected rulers at both the legislative and executive arms of government in all the states of the federation and at the legislative arm (National Assembly) at the federal level. Thus, remaining the executive arm of government to have a democratically elected president. Interestingly, the June 12 presidential election, presumably won by the candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Chief M. K. O. Abiola, which was expected to complete the process for the full take-off of the "Third Republic", was annulled by the Babangida-led military government. Predictably, the annulment of the June 12 election, adjudged globally, to be free, fair and credible, led to a series of events that ultimately plunged the nation into serious political crises, including the collapse of the nation's third experiment at democratic rule.

The Nigerian state started another journey to a democratic governance system on October 1st, 1999 when the Olusegun Obasanjo democratically elected government came into being. And since then, the nation has been struggling with a democratic governance system. Having provided an insight into Nigeria's experiments at democratic rule. It is important at this juncture to state clearly that the major challenge to efforts at establishing democratic governance in the nation before the ongoing democratic rule which commenced in 1999 has been the legitimacy deficit of the various civilian administrations. Aside from the Third Republic which was aborted mid-way following the annulment of the June 12 presidential election, both the First and Second Republics were overthrown by the military due, largely, to the legitimacy crisis suffered by both Republics. Indeed, by the time the Republics were aborted, the political class had lost the confidence of the people in all its entities. Diamond (1988. 288) writing about the

squander mania fall of Nigeria's First Republic reiterates this when he posits that:

> the First Republic was overthrown because the people lost faith in it- not because some disaffected colonels were worried about their careers, not even because a disaffected ethnic group was worried about its position in the Federation. The former worry may have existed, and certainly the latter did. But they explain neither the success of the coup attempts nor the outpouring of joy and relief that greeted it across the country. The First Republic's loss of popular legitimacy was a remarkably deep and broadly based- and, by the end of 1965, thorough- phenomenon.

The level of political corruption in the country had become a serious challenge to governance processes and efforts at effecting a change, via democratic process, in the leadership of the country were made impossible as the 1964 general elections were blatantly rigged by the ruling party to retain power. The Second Republic followed the trajectory of the First Republic. Corruption became the defining principle of governance. The well-being and interest of the masses of the people became of no concern to the political class as they were preoccupied with looting public funds to their private accounts within and without the country. An account provided by History Ville in its July, 2022 edition attests to this:

> Shagari's government provided a conducive atmosphere for fund mismanagement even in the face of economic recession…Forgery, fraud and embezzlement were the other of the day. The State Governors of Nigeria's Second Republic were culpable as well, as funds fraudulently left the country's coffers into private purses. The politicians were oblivious to the masses and were only interested in their aggrandizement.

Flowing from the above is the fact that the democratically elected governments of both the First and Second Republics collapsed due to the crisis of legitimacy that characterised their processes and contents. The 1964 general elections that were expected to bring about leadership change for the enthronement of a new government did not see the light of the day as the elections were massively rigged in favour of the then-ruling party. Similarly, the 1983 general elections in Nigeria that could have brought an end to the corrupt Shagari government, were compromised and thus the Shagari-led government of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) returned to power on the 1st October, 1983. Little wonder, the government was overthrown by the Buhari-led military junta on the 31st of December, 1983.

Legitimacy Crisis and Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Interrogating the Key Issues

The ongoing democratic rule in Nigeria, which has been labelled the Fourth Republic, is beginning to show signs of distress arising from the plague- legitimacy crisis- that accounted for the collapse of the previous democratic experiments in the country. Agbakoba, a former President of the Nigerian Bar Association, expresses this when he argues:

> It's correct to describe Nigeria's democracy as fragile. We are a long way from being a democratic nation. So, we're very fragile, it can go either way, and it can collapse any day……Politicians have taken us for a big ride. They have lied to us for so long, and we are now in this very sorry state that we are the poverty capital of the world, the country is broke and people are having a very hard time…

Thus, there is a need to reinvent the nation's democratic governance system to prevent it from going the way of the previous democratic

experiments- collapse. But before discussing our intervention towards preventing the collapse of the ongoing democratic process in Nigeria, we need to interrogate the key issues that are responsible for the declining legitimacy of the current democratic governance process in the country. Some of these issues are:

Political Corruption: One of the strongest factors threatening the stability and undermining the legitimacy of the ongoing democratic experience and the Fourth Republic in Nigeria is the problem of political corruption. This challenge has become one of the defining features of the Nigerian state. Indeed, it is often said by political analysts and commentators that corruption is the the principle that underlines governance in Nigeria. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index underline the categorisation of Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations on earth in its 2022 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) when it ranks Nigeria as the 150 least corrupt nations out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2022). Expectedly, the high level of corruption in Nigeria has had a serious adverse effect on governance and ultimately on the stocks of legitimacy of governance in the country. It is on record that the $15 billion meant for purchasing arms for the security forces to strengthen their capacity to fight the Boko Haram Insurgency during the Jonathan administration was looted by the leadership of the then-ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). This development affected the capacity of the government to secure the lives and property of its citizens and, ultimately, citizens lost confidence in the government.

Bad Governance: Another factor responsible for the very low stocks of the legitimacy of the ongoing democratic governance in Nigeria is the perennial problem of bad governance. Governance in Nigeria has been characterised by nepotism, self-seeking-oriented public policies and institutional decay. Public policies are often not targeted at promoting public good but are usually framed to serve class, ethnic, religious and political interests. The point is that public policies are hardly well thought out before their implementation. Coupled with this is the reality of institutional weakness and poor oversight on the part of the legislative body and regulatory authorities. Indeed, public

policies are rarely well-thought and this has manifested in the deterioration of the living standard of the mass of the Nigerian people. A very good example is the recent push by the Emefiele-led Central Bank of Nigeria to replace some denominations of the old notes with new ones. The whole idea of replacing some old notes with new ones allegedly meant to curb inflation and improve the economy has ended in a fiasco and serious dislocation of the economy. "The push to replace the old banknotes with new ones has left very limited cash in circulation, causing frustration and anger for many people who spend hours at the bank attempting to withdraw their money" (Africa News, 2023). The debacle of the currency change has had a profound negative effect on the people's perception of the Buhari government in particular and the legitimacy of the ongoing democratic governance system in the country in general.

Jaundiced Political Processes and Fraudulent Elections: The nature and character of a nation's political processes and elections are critical to the legitimacy of both the political system and the government in power. Indeed, the importance of the political processes and elections to the legitimacy of a democratic governance system cannot be over-emphasised as these elements provide and strengthen the opportunity for citizens to participate both in electing their representatives and in demanding accountability from those managing the affairs of the state. Unfortunately, Political processes in general and elections in particular in Nigeria are defined by values that are at variance from the principles that promote the legitimacy of a democratic governance system. The people, which democracy gives the pride of place in its governance variant, has been relegated to the background such that democracy has been popularly defined as the government of the people by the people and for the people, in practical terms, has come to mean the government of the political class by the political class and for the political class. Political party primaries are routinely won by the highest bidder and

elections are massively rigged to circumvent the choice of the people. Predictably, these untoward realities are having profound negative effects on the legitimacy of the ongoing democratic governance system in Nigeria.

A report by Hassan and Obe (2023), commissioned by the Chatham House, on Nigeria's 2023 elections in particular and the political process in general, attests to the waning legitimacy of the ongoing democratic process in the country. According to the report:

Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and its technology are not solely responsible for the crisis of confidence in the electoral process. Political parties were guilty of engaging in vote buying which tarnishes the legitimacy of their wins. Others were able to use their control of state governments to engage in targeted voter suppression and intimidation, with incidents of violence against people coming out to vote reported almost nationwide…….But of the 93.5 million registered voters, only 87.3 had collected permanent voter cards on the election date, and less than a third of them ultimately cast a ballot. Turnout overall was just 27 per cent, a record low. Combined with the unprecedented division of votes between four leading candidates, this means that, if confirmed by the courts, President-elect Tinubu's mandate would flow from less than 10 per cent of Nigeria's electorates.

The point is that the ongoing democratic governance process in Nigeria is progressively losing its legitimacy and this calls for the concern of all the stakeholders in the nation's democratic governance project. Hassan and Obe (2023) reiterate this when they posit: "This is a worrying trend, that both the government and the political class in general need to reflect upon- there is an urgent need to improve the quality and relevance of Nigeria's democracy".

Civil Society and Legitimisation of Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Flowing from our treatise on Nigeria's democratic governance is that the process is be-devilled by legitimacy deficit and stands the risk of capitulating to authoritarianism if conscientious and well-articulated efforts are not taken to revalue the democratic process and restore the

confidence and trust of the mass of the people in it. The point is that there is a need to rejig the nation's democratic governance system, both in terms of processes and contents. Otherwise, it stands the risk of collapsing like the previous democratic governance experiments the nation had had.

Admittedly, several reforms have been made to the electoral process to enhance its credibility, it is obvious, going by the reality of the 2023 elections, that the reforms are not strong enough to effectively reverse the declining legitimacy of the ongoing democratic process in the country.

In light of the above, this segment of the paper engages the four basic functional dimensions (values) that are present in the relationship between civil society and the democratic state to interrogate the role civil society can play in reversing the declining legitimacy of the ongoing democratic process in Nigeria. The four basic functional dimensions (values) are, namely, defensive, legitimising, participative and integrative (Muller, 2003).

First, the role of civil society as a force to act as a defence against the propensity of the leadership of the Nigerian state to abuse and expand state power to serve their self-centred and group interests at the expense of the masses of the people cannot be over-emphasised. Indeed, the legitimacy of the ongoing democratic governance system in the country is fast declining due largely to the abuse of power by the ruling elite. This abuse of political power has manifested in diverse ways, such as, in the allocation of huge state resources to service, exclusively, the political class, stealing of state resources and violation of the rights of the citizenry. A well-coordinated effort on the part of the civil society in defence of the rule of law and good governance would check the propensity of the ruling class to abuse power and this will ultimately impact positively the stocks of legitimacy of the ongoing democratic process in the nation.

Second, the civil society can also through its independence and autonomy create the social resources of political power and give the state its government legitimacy (Taylor, 1999. 207). Democratic governance flourishes when it can generate and sustain the trust and confidence of the people. The civil society through its networks can aggregate the public opinion in support of democratic principles and practices. When this happens, the political class is forced to bow to public opinion because it is not possible in democracy to rule for any period of the government conflicts with the expressly declared position of the people. The point is that civil society can facilitate government submitting to the will of the people. When this is the case, the legitimacy of the government of the state is enhanced.

Third, civil society through its activities can help to deepen the participation of the people in the decision-making process in the polity. Broad-based civic participation in the ongoing democratic governance in Nigeria has become of utmost importance as this is germane to reversing the declining legitimacy of the governance process in Nigeria. The fourth and last has to do with civil society's integrative function (Cohen, 1999. 55). Undoubtedly, one of the factors responsible for the fast-declining legitimacy of the democratic process in Nigeria is the loyalty of the mass of the Nigerian people to primordial interests and particularised form of social capital. This characteristically undermines government legitimacy in a multi-ethnic Nigerian society. The point is that civil society can facilitate the creation of bridging social capital that promotes the reproduction of shared values and norms that enhance the legitimacy of a democratic governance system in a multi-ethnic society.

Conclusion

The implications of the declining legitimacy of the ongoing democratic governance system in Nigeria should be fairly clear from the narrative in this paper. The scenario that appears to be playing out is that the ongoing democratic process in the country might collapse like the previous democratic experiments. Thus, this calls for the need to put in place necessary and effective mechanisms targeted at sanitising the political processes and improving the quality-of-service delivery,

especially in terms of making the state capable, accountable and responsive. Our submission is that when civil society comes alive in terms of performing its four basic functional dimensions that define the relationship between civil society and the democratic state, the level of citizens' political inclusion, participation, representation and government performance will considerably increase and this will positively impact on the legitimacy of the democratic process in the Nigerian state.

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