

Democratizing Democracy In Nigeria: The Role Of Civil Society Organizations

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Abstract

The political landscape of Nigeria has undergone a dramatic transformation since independence in 1960. Nigeria has spent most of after independence years struggling with political, social, and economic failure. Repeated attempts to sustain and consolidate democratic government have faltered. The resurgence of ethnic and religious conflicts all over the country has once again fueled pessimism concerning not only the future of democracy in Nigeria, but also the existence of Nigeria as a political entity. The way the Nigerian government resolves these challenges will determine whether Nigeria's fledgling democracy is transient or sustainable and, more importantly, whether Nigeria disintegrates or reconfigures itself as a nation-state. This article focuses on the role of civil society in sustaining Nigeria's fledgling democracy. My argument in this article is that a weak civil society and non-democratic culture is to a large degree the product of political instability; conversely a vibrant civil society coupled with civility and social capital are the basic building blocks for democratic survival. Moreover, a vibrant civil society can champion government reforms, confront corruption, advocate respect for human rights, promote and defend democratic processes and institutions. Our best and perhaps only chance to bring into being a more sustainable peace, economic development, and stable government in Nigeria is to give civil society a greater role in governance.

As democracy spreads around the world, the realization is growing that a nation's political future, its economic strength, its national vitality, and its very identity will be shaped by the creation of better, more transparent government in partnership with a vibrant civil society.

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Introduction

The political landscape of Nigeria has undergone a dramatic transformation since independence in 1960. Nigeria has spent most of the forty-one years since independence struggling with political, social, and economic failure. Repeated attempts to sustain and consolidate democratic government have faltered. The resurgence of ethnic and religious conflict all over the country has once again fueled pessimism concerning not only the future of democracy in Nigeria, but also the existence of Nigeria as a political entity. The way the Nigerian government resolves these challenges will

determine whether Nigeria's fledgling democracy is transient or sustainable and, more importantly, whether Nigeria disintegrates or reconfigures itself as a nation-state.

In the light of these concerns, it becomes imperative to reconsider the concept of civil society as a possible antidote for Nigeria's democratic failure. To think about the concept of civil society in the context of Nigeria's political theatre is an exhilarating task. The question that first comes to mind is: Will this theorem hold in an environment so different—in every social and physical sense—from that of the West, the citadel of democracy? The answer requires going beyond a prescriptive approach, and to employ an approach that linked the concept of civil society inextricably to the social, cultural, and historical institutions of a society. Thus civil society becomes a representation of the value of those experiencing it and not that of the West.

In recent years, the concept of “democratic governance” has become increasingly prominent in the literature on development, and the buzzword “civil society” has become a key element of the post-military zeitgeist in the developing world. As increasing attention is paid to democratization, human rights, popular participation, regime stability, transparency, accountability, probity, privatization, and reducing the size of the state, the important role of civil society can no longer be ignored. The growing universal consensus on the relevance of civil society to the survival of democracy can be traced to phenomena ranging from the decline of the Western welfare state to the transformation of the former Soviet bloc to resistance against authoritarian regimes in the developing world.

USAID has helped to bring the concept of civil society to the limelight of democratic discourse in the developing world. As Laurie Denton has noted: “Support for civil society is a core component of USAID's democracy and governance agenda, reflecting a growing realization of the value of autonomous centers of social and economic power to democracy. Promoting accountable, participatory governance, these groups are essential to keeping emerging democracies moving in the right direction.” USAID shares this concern and is carrying out several projects in developing nations that are geared toward strengthening civil society.

The 1996 Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) quadrennial global conference in Cairo, which focused on the theme “The Rise of Civil Society in the 21st Century” underscored the significance of this new consensus on civil society when it argued that “many societies today are out of balance. Political systems, even so-called democracies, provide little opportunity for inclusive citizen participation.” To ICA, “culture—those shared understandings, values, patterns, symbols, and stories that build community and provide a context for decisions—needs to be re-empowered if a more people-centered, sustainable society is to emerge from the present situation.”

Democratization in Nigeria has not benefited from this new consensus on civil society. Post-colonial statism and the protracted years of military dictatorship have provided a scant basis for the aggregation of private interests and the attenuation of state authority. As a consequence, corruption has become widespread in Nigerian society. When civil society functions well, it can

champion government reforms, confront corruption, advocate respect for human rights, and promote and defend democratic processes and institutions.

In an attempt to explain why the concept of civil society is vital for sustaining Nigeria's nascent democracy, and in seeking to forecast future democratic developments, we will ask these fundamental questions pertinent to the role of civil society in democratic consolidation:

1. What is civil society and why is it critical to democratic survival?
2. What is the relationship between civil society and the state?
3. Is the consolidation of democracy feasible in Nigeria?

These questions relate to long-standing debates about Nigeria's quest for the ever-elusive goal of democratic consolidation. One of my main arguments in this article is that the consolidation of democracy requires a balanced relationship between civil society and the state. Linz and Stefan, arguing along the same lines, have written the following: "At best, civil society can destroy a non-democratic regime. However, a full democratic transition, and especially democratic consolidation, must involve the state... It is important to stress not only the distinctiveness of civil society and the state, but also their complementarity..."

The more central thesis here holds that a weak civil society or non-democratic culture is to a large degree the product of political instability; conversely, a vibrant civil society coupled with civility and social capital are the basic building blocks for democratic survival.

I will try to demonstrate that intrinsic to the idea of an effective state is an effective civil society. The relationship between civil society and the state was necessarily symbiotic. Civil society could not function without the state, and the state could not realize its potential completeness and universality without a properly constituted and functioning civil society.

This study, therefore, is a call for cultural and civic renaissance in Nigeria. The aim is to liberate civil society from the suffocating grip of the state by way of raising the Nigerian masses to new levels of political consciousness, building a wide array of voluntary organizations, and stimulating democratic awareness and participation.

What Is Civil Society And Why Is It Critical To Democratic Survival?

Theoretical Justification

In seeking to explain the meaning of civil society in theoretical and practical terms, as well as its relevance to African reality, an attempt will be made here to go beyond the normative definition in the abstract world of politics and economics to embrace the empirical definition in the real world. This involves viewing civil society from a historical perspective. It is only through an examination of history that one can fully understand the current environment within which civil society dwells and its implications for democratic governance.

Historically, three traditions provided support for the development of civil society. Firstly, the Mediterranean European tradition of the 16th Century Renaissance in Italy triggered the

conceptualization of the three most fundamental values of civil society: “The Citizen’s rights, peace and safety; the right to enjoy one’s possessions and one’s wealth; and one’s right to have and defend one’s convictions.” These three values set the stage for the current debate on the relevance and meaning of civil society.

Secondly, the continental European tradition characterized by the activities of the guilds (associations of craftsmen and merchants) in Germany provided a sufficient basis for the aggregation of private interests and attenuation of German authority, which later metamorphosed into a burgeoning associational life.

Thirdly, the development of civil society was supported by the liberal Anglo-American tradition, which consists of 1) John Locke’s philosophy of private property; 2) Adam Smith’s ideology of modernization and self regulation; 3) Thomas Paine’s conception of a limited government; 4) Alexis de Tocqueville’s historic visit to America during the 19th century, which trumpeted the burgeoning associational life Americans were enjoying at that time; and 5) John Stuart Mill’s juxtaposition of state and civil society in the context of complementarity, not dependence. All helped in one way or the other to bring civil society into the socio-political discourse of the earliest part of the 19th century. To sum up this perspective, Peter Lewis postulated that the emergence of civil society is inextricably linked to the interrelated changes in the modern-legal-rational state, the economy and forms of social organizations. The idea of civil society came as a way of facilitating the growth of private enterprise, and to help ensure that the state does not suffocate the economy. The middle class that emerged out of the success of capitalism serves as a counter-hegemonic force on state power.

Aristotle, who defined civil society as a “public ethical community of free and equal citizens under a legally defined system of rule,” first popularized the concept of civil society in the academic literature. In this definition, it was hard for Aristotle to separate civil society from the state. His conception of the community also emphasized the interplay of the state and civil society. For Aristotle, the state and civil society are intertwined. For more than two thousand years, civil society was perceived as a form of political party and had served that purpose.

John Keane, in his influential analysis of the evolution of the concept of civil society drawing on the works of Adam Ferguson and Thomas Paine, delivered a polemic against viewing the state and civil society as one entity. His contentions essentially centered on the premise that civil society plays a vital role in aggregating private interest and concomitantly attenuating state authority, and as such is different from the state in its roles, composition, shapes, and contours. This approach finds an intellectual ally in Alexis de Tocqueville writings on democracy in 19th century North America, which emphasize the importance of civil associations for the creation and maintenance of democracy. De Tocqueville claims that civil society is thought to be separate from the state and political parties, thus referring to a largely autonomous sphere of freedom. In addition, civil society is likened to large free schools, which teaches the general theory of association. Civil society is viewed from this

perspective as a source of counter-hegemonic social movements concerned with political and societal actors playing by the rules of the political game and thus seeking to legitimize the state but not to win control over the state.

Contrary to the songs of praise chanted above, Hegel was extraordinarily critical of the supposed contribution of civil society to the success of democracy. Hegel viewed civil society as a source of conflict that can spill over into the larger society. His argument is supported by the premise that not every organization in civil society works for the success of democracy; some actually work to undermine democracy. Nigeria's primary civil society organizations—the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), The Oduduwa Peoples Congress (OPC), and The Arewa Peoples Congress (APC), are cases in point.

In support of Hegel's work, Antonio Gramsci conceptualizes the concept of "hegemony" as it relates to conflict and oppression. He argued that civil society is not only separate from the state; it is also separate from the economy.

Evolution of Civil Society in Nigeria

In looking at the origin of civil society in Africa, if there is indeed any such thing, Mahmood Mamdani's book entitled *Citizen and Subject* makes an interesting case; Mamdani argues that the history of civil society in colonial Africa originated from colonialism with racism as the prevailing factor. Such a description of the situation, however, raises the problem of whether concepts such as civil society, which have evolved from within a specific historical context in Western society, can with relevance be applied to an analysis of contemporary Nigeria without forcing an ethnocentric perspective on the situation. Is it possible to use these concepts without taking into consideration that they also have a history in Africa, which is bound up with colonialism?

In his seminal work on colonialism and the two publics in Africa, Peter Ekeh succinctly provides us with an explanation of Africa's predicament during the colonial era. He asserts that "the experiences of colonialism in Africa have led to the emergence of a unique historical configuration in modern post-colonial Africa: the existence of two publics instead of one public, as in the West." This configuration, according to Ekeh, has manifested itself in the form of moral and amoral spheres of influence. The former is likened to what he calls the "primordial public"—in charge of regulating personal relations within the group. He calls the latter realm the "civic public"—the generic name for the public realm. Living in both spheres is a matter of survival, as the civic public is considered to be a threat with no sense of ownership, attachment, and belonging. In this realm "almost all were victims of colonial ravages and exploitations, which have produced dehumanizing, disarticulating, and under developing effects. Almost all continue to be subject to peripheral capitalism wherein exploitation, oppression, ignorance, disease, malnutrition and poverty still hold sway. Almost all are subjected to authoritarian, inefficient, and unresponsive regimes, which they have struggled to overthrow since independence. Most have suffered severe deprivations even when their economies prospered, have been victims of wide income inequalities. Finally, almost all (approximately 70

percent in each country) remain rural, and therefore, belong to the periphery of the periphery. As a result, stealing from the civic public was glorified and condoned.” This action is akin to robbing Peter to pay Paul. In other words, the people considered the state as public enemy and whatever belongs to the state must be devoured, abused, and even destroyed whereas in the primordial public, interaction between the state and individuals was characterized by feelings of patriotism, reciprocity, and a sense of affinity.

If there is any lesson to be drawn from the past, it is that for civil society to perform at its fullest capacity, its shapes, forms, colors, and contours must be inextricably linked to the social, cultural, and historical institutions of a society.

The emergence of civil society in Nigeria is still a nascent historical process, which can be divided into three stages: First, the period that preceded independence was informed by a national liberation struggle characterized by the burgeoning activities of nationalist movements that culminated in one of the fiercest battles against colonial domination anywhere in the world. On the basis of this single objective to get rid of colonial rule, it was relatively easy to mobilize support across internal ethnic and religious lines. From the start, nationalism in Nigeria was a political rather than a cultural, let alone an ethnic, movement. But after independence in 1960, the political competition that ensued created political problems that often impacted social cohesion adversely. The momentum that the struggle had generated subsided, and the civil society movements that had sprung out of the struggle retreated into isolation and eventually dwindled along ethnic, religious, and regional lines. The next government of Sir Abubakar Tafewa Balewa, following in the traditions of the colonial administration saw little benefit in providing an enabling environment for the growth of private interests. As a result, these moribund movements were co-opted by the state and others atrophied.

The second period of civil society growth can be traced back to the anti- Babangida and Abacha sentiments that grew out of excessive state repression and failed economic policies. Protests and demonstrations against the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in the 1980s engendered another upsurge of civil society organizations (CSOs) in response to the dehumanizing effects of the SAP on the Nigerian poor masses.

This period was followed by what Adigun Agbaje called “mobilization by design”—characterized by government involvement in social mobilization at both the elite and mass levels. This mobilization was foisted on Nigerians by the then-military dictator General Ibrahim Babangida. As Adigun Agbaje has noted, “developing and nurturing pro-democratic values (at both the elite and mass levels) is likely to depend more on the growth of associational life and the further empowerment of civil society than on the actions of the state and its managers.” Ihonvbere and his colleagues argued, along the same lines that Babangida’s government “was bent on imposing ‘democracy’ from the top and curtailing the country’s burgeoning civil society. Indeed, the military and their advisers rejected the notion that liberal democratic traditions require at least an attempt to nurture the emergence of

civic organizations.” A case in point was the creation of a national Directorate of Social Mobilization and Political Education charged by Babangida’s political bureau with the responsibility of bringing forth a new political culture that would be supportive of constitutional democracy. This was a classic case of what Lawrence Fuchs calls “coercive pluralism.”—An attempt to introduce a new political culture that will foster “discipline, loyalty, true patriotism, commitment, dedication and accountability to the Nigerian State.” Evidence suggests that any attempt by the state to augment the mobilization processes will work only “outside of dictatorial contexts, where states can play a valuable role in developing a healthy civil society. They can do so by establishing clear and workable regulatory frameworks for non-governmental sectors, enacting tax incentives for funding of non-profit groups, adopting transparent procedures, and pursuing partnerships with non-governmental organizations.” The growth and development of civil society in Nigeria has been intermittent. Once the assumed missions had been accomplished, civil society disintegrated or retreated into isolation, only to surge again when threats reappeared. The state has played an enormous role in the development of civil society in Nigeria through co-optation, manipulation, and oppression since independence in 1960. As Richard Carver puts it, “Nigeria has the advantages of vast natural wealth, a rich and politically sophisticated history, abundance of human talent and a vibrant civil society. Yet poor government has transformed it from a potential continental leader to a brutal and poverty-stricken pariah. Its administration is corrupt and inefficient. Its citizenry is plagued by violent crime. Religious divisions are increasing, as is ethnic fragmentation.”

In light of the above, it becomes imperative to rethink the importance of civil society to Nigeria’s fledgling democracy at the dawn of the new millennium. The importance of civil society derives from the awareness that there is a pressing need to democratize and stabilize the system of government in Nigeria. The need is pressing because for sustainable development initiatives to take root in Nigeria, there must be a stable, democratic, and accountable government. The pivotal role of civil society in achieving this end can no longer be underestimated.

Definition of Civil Society

In this study, civil society will be defined utilizing the approach taken by Larry Diamond, a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution and one of the leading scholars on Nigerian politics. Larry Diamond defines civil society as “the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.” Senator Bill Bradley’s address to the National Press Club best summed up this perspective; he argued that “government and market are not enough to make a civilization. There also must be a healthy, robust civil sector: a space in which the bonds of community can flourish. Government and market are similar to two legs of a three-legged stool. Without the third leg of civil society, the stool is not stable and cannot provide support for a vital America.”

Civil society derives its importance from the above-mentioned roles in the society and the economy. According to a 1997 report of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, “Many

elements of civil society can work to reduce hatred and violence and to encourage attitudes of concerns, social responsibility and mutual aid within and between groups. In difficult economic and political transitions, the organizations of civil society are of crucial importance in alleviating the dangers of mass violence.” Civil society’s importance, according to Keane, “stems from the growing realization that a stable democracy rests not only on properly functioning elections and institutions but also on the more elusive ‘civic’ qualities in society.”

Richard Sandbrook has conducted research on the issue of democratization and civil society in six African countries. In his opinion, free and fair elections are just the beginning of a democratic process. Democracy entails accountability, transparency in decision-making, responsiveness of government and legal process. To attain these ideals in Africa requires the institutionalization of civil society. Chuka Onwumechili supports the above view. According to him, civil society organizations have a phenomenal role to play in the democratization process. Collectively, civil society could effectively influence the attitudes of governments by way of “strong media that continue to ensure that governments are on their toes and uphold the principles of good governance, irrespective of the myriad difficulties that face them; impartial and objective judiciary, vibrant associations of members of the legal profession, the labor force, the academic and the student body, and public institutions for international studies and research.” Proponents of the effectiveness of civil society lend credence to the above view by pointing to examples of successful popular opposition to repressive regimes or state policies. People’s power in the Philippines, the Velvet Revolution in what was Czechoslovakia, the recent popular grassroots campaign to ban landmines by Jody Williams—these are the great success stories of civil society.

The executive branch of the present administration in Nigeria has not relented in its effort to eradicate corruption. Its determination is evinced by the creation of the national corruption commission to weed corruption out of Nigerian society. This approach seems plausible, but cleaning up political institutions without helping citizens develop the civic knowledge, skills, and sense of community service and political efficacy associated with civic competence, is likely to prove fruitless. As Robert Putnam has argued,

The key determinant of the success or failure of democratic reforms in a society is the character of its civic life. To create and sustain democratic institution, a society must possess a critical mass of citizens who are well educated about their rights, concerned about the long-term goals of the community as a whole, and are in constant social contact with each other, allowing a free exchange of ideas.

Civil society has its pitfall as exposed by the Strategic Planning Workshop on Democratic Development in Nigeria. The 1997 report of the proceedings on the State of Civil Society revealed three major constraints on civil society in Nigeria: 1) “There is much wasted and/or inefficient utilization of resources and dissipation of energy in the ways in which many Nigerian civil groups have been operating. The Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Constitutional Rights Project (CRP)

and Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR) are all publishing annual reports that repeat the same things over and over again; 2) The Campaign for Democracy (CD) and Democratic Alternative (DA), for example, are circling around the same field, with the same issues and objectives; and 3) Previous efforts by the Campaign for Democracy (CD), National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), and United Democratic Front of Nigeria (UDFN) have been constrained either by stigmatization, petty squabbles at the leadership level, or by the divide-and-rule tactics of the state and the ruling classes.” The report, in its conclusion, calls on all CSOs in Nigeria to put their local resources and energy together so as to strengthen the efficacy of their mobilization base. This will engender a broad popular coalition in support of democracy.

Many studies on democratization in Nigeria tend to blame the weakness of civil society on the military alone and fail to consider other possible explanations. However, contrary to this general tendency, my argument is that the operational strategies, goals, and objectives of the CSOs themselves leave much to be desired. I shall argue that CSOs fail because of their preoccupation with putting an end to military rule. Once that goal was accomplished, winning control of state power became their primary objective at the expense of building a community of citizens capable of determining what they want and acting in a way that forces the government to respond accordingly. The time has come for Nigerians to look beyond the politics of affection, nepotism, prebendalism, clientelism, ethnicity, and religion to find strength in common civic and democratic values. Civil society can be strengthened to champion a new national unifying force that embraces ethnic and religious diversity, yet based on the ideals of progress, equality, optimism, and opportunity. National identity based upon beliefs—civic nationalism, not blood or ethnic nationalism—provides the best context in which sustainable democratic governance can be achieved in Nigeria.

As this study demonstrates, Nigeria will not be able to sustain democracy nor revamp its ailing economy until there is an improvement in its devastated civic infrastructure. This can be accomplished by grassroots mobilization through social engineering, crosscutting social ties, and a strong and vibrant civil society that will usher in a democratic cultural ethos.

The State-Civil Society Dichotomy

The confrontation between the state and civil society in Nigeria is analogous to a popular African saying “when two elephants fight, only the grass will suffer.” This means literally that any time there is a bout between the state and civil society, the masses will always pay the price: they will bear the brunt of the neglect of social services.

Many scholars have expounded the intricacies of state-civil society relations in Nigeria. Prominent among them is Marina Ottaway. Her groundbreaking study relating to state-civil society relations in Nigeria blazed the trail for our understanding of the state-civil society dichotomy. Since independence, the post-colonial state in Nigeria has created a condition inimical to civil society’s survival. The military has succeeded in consolidating its grip on political power “despite the breadth

and apparent leverage of the groups arrayed against the military government, popular pressure failed to dislodge the military oligarchy.” Disenchanted with absolute state power, the people abdicated their citizenship roles and retreated into isolation. Civil society became separated from the rest of the society. “The chain of events since the June 1993 annulled presidential election,” Ottaway argues, “reveals limits to the scope of mobilization and the reach of associational activity in Nigeria. The democratic elements of civil society have been unable to constitute a viable counterweight to authoritarian rule.” She points out that “civil society organizations in Nigeria have been severely weakened and a number of structural and strategic traits have impeded the political efficacy of Nigeria’s civic realm. First among these is the segmentation within civil society. Class division and ethnic parochialism have served to limit the reach and capacity of the democratic organizations. Second, organized labor has been virtually neutralized as a source of militant opposition, and business interests see little incentive for engaging in politics. Other important segments of society have become alienated from the democratic cause for ethnic or factional reasons.” As a consequence, the state has thus succeeded in abnegating its major socio-economic responsibilities to its citizens for more than four decades in Nigeria.

The confrontation between the state and civil society was more intense during Babangida and Abacha’s regimes than any other rulers in Nigerian history. Civil society was seen as a threat to their existence. As a result, they created and entrenched a culture of timidity and fear towards the military. This was perhaps best illustrated by the action of some politicians who dared to confront the military and demand that it relinquish power. Political maneuvering, co-optation, giving political appointments to key civil society leaders, rent seeking, patronage, nepotism, corruption, and victimization were General Babangida’s favored instruments for consolidating his grips on political power.

Between June 1993 and late 1994, Amnesty International reported that as many as 200 pro-democracy protesters had been killed by security forces in Nigeria.

In October 1986, the first assault of this instrument fell on one of Nigeria’s finest journalists, Dele Giwa, the founding editor of Newswatch Magazine, when he was assassinated by a parcel bomb. Almost two decades later, the murder remains a mystery. Dele Giwa was eliminated because he had evidence of a drug deal that may have involved the wife of a senior army officer. On November 10, 1995, in another case of state repression, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other environmentalists who trudged out to protest the injustice of the multinational oil firms in their land were hanged by General Sani Abacha in defiance of international pleas. Ken Saro-Wiwa helped formed the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which protested the undesirable conditions of rusty roof tops, graying farms, polluted waters, sooty skies, and foul air left behind by the Federal Government and Shell Oil Company after the exploitation of oil in Ogoni’s land.

On June 12, 1993, the third republic imploded and military rule persisted following the annulment of the presidential election, which was presumed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola. When the

winner declared himself the new president, he was arrested along with other prominent Nigerians such as human rights activist Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, former head of state General Olusegun Obasanjo, Alhaji Shehu Musa Yar Adua, and others, and was charged with treason and sedition. Two years later, an unknown assassin murdered Kudirat Abiola, wife of the presumed winner of the presidential election, and a social activist in Lagos. Alex Ibru, publisher of the Guardian newspaper, escaped narrowly an assassination attempt on his life. All these violent events fed public disillusionment and the steady and perceptible erosion of the legitimacy of Babangida and Abacha's regime.

Toward A Consolidation Of Democracy In Nigeria

Democratization may be in vogue in Africa, but democracy is not yet a reality in Nigeria. One possible explanation is the weakness of civil society. If civil society is strengthened to perform its democratic roles, civil society can exert pressure on the state and promote democratic development and consolidation. The creation of a vibrant civil society therefore is critical for the effective performance of democracy and must be linked inextricably to the social, cultural, and historical institutions of a society. Let us now turn to the role of civil society in consolidating democracy.

Checking Corruption and Abuses of Power

The relevance of civil society to democratic survival was well articulated by USAID: "Civil society organizations engage in public advocacy, analyze policy issues, mobilize constituencies in support of policy dialog, serve as watchdogs of government performance, and act as agents of reform in strengthening democratic governance." Civil society can make claims for particular needs on the state and then try to mediate these claims as fairly as possible to benefit the common good of society at large. Thus civil society serves as a bulwark against excessive expansions of state power into the social realm.

The three sectors of society—the state, business, and civil society organizations—must work together for the common good of society. CSOs in Nigeria should be part and parcel of the Obasanjo administration's anti-corruption, privatization, and poverty alleviation programs, if these programs are to survive. By including the organizations of civil society, the general public will perceive these programs as responsive to their needs, transparent, and accountable.

Nigeria's nascent democracy will remain an illusion until the country is able to improve the material welfare of its citizens, tackle corruption, and combat balkanization. More importantly, the state cannot afford to default on its most basic duty to provide law and order. Civil society has a vital role to play in ensuring that the state carries out these measures, which could deter coup d'etat. As Larry Diamond constantly reminds us, "The greatest imperative for avoiding a military coup is effective governance. The military intervene in politics (whether by coup or by a more gradual expansion of power and prerogatives) when civilians, politicians, and parties are weak and divided, and when their divisions and manifest failures of governance have generated a vacuum of authority."

Nigeria's greatest weaknesses lie in the civic, cultural, and moral realm where government solutions are often deficient and unworkable. If Nigeria has to reduce the role of the government, it will have to find ways to strengthen other sectors that are public but not governmental—that is civil society. Developing a system spearheaded by civil society for measuring government performance from the local government level to the national level provides the best context for checking government's corruption and abuse of power. If civil society is to help develop and consolidate democracy, "its mission cannot simply be to check, criticize, and resist the state. It must also complement and improve the state and enhance its democratic legitimacy and effectiveness." Limiting state power via decentralization is key to successful governance. Over-centralization of power encourages tyranny. As the saying goes, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Decentralization of state power to the grass root level also brings the government closer to the people. In addition, it encourages experimentation and promotes unity without uniformity.

Olu Falae, the defeated presidential candidate in the last election has not been seen or heard from since he conceded the election to President Olusegun Obasanjo. A case like this where a defeated candidate retreated from the political center stage for lack of confidence in the system, engenders a weak opposition, which invariably minimizes its opportunity to engage in legislative opposition as a means of holding the government accountable and transparent.

Stimulating Political Participation

As the nexus for participation in governance, civil society begins with individuals and demands involvement by communities, governments, businesses, and voluntary organizations. Citizen participation is the core of the democratic process. Attempting to grow a democracy in a parochial political culture is a recipe for failure. Democracy requires not only new institutions but also a new sense of citizenship. Citizenship can take the form of "voting in local elections, serving on government boards and commissions, attending public hearings, and being active in volunteer, neighborhood, civic organizations." One of the challenges facing the newly established civilian government in Nigeria today is how to ensure that power is decentralized to the grassroots level. Conventional wisdom has it that the top down approach to developmental processes has failed several leaders in the past. The time is now ripe for citizens in this great country to fold up their sleeves and put their shoulders to the wheel by engaging in the initial stages of policy-making processes. Participant political culture is clearly the ideal soil in which to sustain a democracy. Few can disagree with Brian Atwood when he argues that, "the challenge in newly established democracies is to decentralize political power. Not by replacing a national 'strongman,' with hundreds of local 'strongmen,' but through citizen participation in each and every one of the municipalities throughout the country."

The dominant western concept of socioeconomic development based on liberalism and market forces maintains that civil society must be supported because of its political role within democracy. This concept is premised on the fact that when people are empowered to take over some aspects of

development from venal, overbearing, and inefficient states, democracy will thrive. Robert M. Hutchins sums it up best when he states that “the death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment.”

The past is coming back to rear its ugly head, as it is business as usual in some areas. The essence of governance is for citizens to seize the initiative and reclaim their rightful place as the catalysts of social change. Nigerians cannot afford to stand and stare while democracy is subverted again. Democracy begins at home, workplaces, and in the community—the duties of citizenship are carried out in the context of associational life, not just through participation in politics. As Elstain reminded us: “The heartbeat of democracy lives neither in the government nor in the market, but rather in the overlap of what people do in their homes, workplaces and neighborhoods.”

Civil society can act as a conduit in promoting popular participation by increasing the political efficacy and civic obligation of the populace. The idea of the Community Action for Popular Participation Project in Lagos, Jos, and Abuja should be expanded to cover the 36 states in Nigeria. A true test of how the government, people, and the business community work together or do not work together in the nation’s body politic is during constitutional engineering. Constitutional engineering should be an inclusive exercise where every citizen has a voice. In addition, constitutional engineering will not be sufficient unless it is based on a clear understanding of local political realities. Therefore, any attempt to democratize the environment in which viable constitutional engineering can take place in Nigeria should take into consideration the roles played by civil society. CSOs can become an intermediate agent between the government and the people by striking a balance between what the people want from the government and what the government delivers to the people. It is imperative that the present administration begins earnestly to redress some of the pressing issues that the military had succeeded in suppressing for a very long time. Sharia Law is a prime example. The controversy surrounding the Sharia Law in Nigeria demands immediate attention. The constitution must be amended to address this volatile issue once and for all before it escalates to the level of a religious war, as we have seen in Bosnia. This is a propitious time for Nigerians to create an enabling environment for constitutional engineering that will address the Sharia Law and other pressing issues with all the citizens involved. But it must be done with caution so as not to undermine the power of the present government. For this reason, the call for a sovereign national conference is out of the question because it would destabilize the already tattered country and create a run away constitution. This would not be in the best interest of democracy in Nigeria. But a new constitution, one that will be responsive to the country’s need, one that will endure, is desperately needed to address the different aspirations of diverse interest groups and citizens in Nigeria. As Femi Falana has observed, “any constitution that does not emerge from widespread consultations with all nationality and interest groups cannot be regarded as legitimate.”

There are no adequate precedents for the kind of constitution that might meet Nigeria's unique needs. But such a constitution could benefit from the processes and procedures that informed constitution making in South Africa. South Africa's constitution was not perfect the first time but it was adopted and people worked to modify it for adoption the second time. This experience should be taken as a precedent in constitutional re-engineering in Africa. The meaning of constitutionalism both in legal and general terms embraces two issues: first, the process and procedures for making the constitution must be open, popular, inclusive, participatory or process-led, and democratic. Second, the constitution must represent the living rather than the dead by "taking it to the people so that they are in a position not just to have access to it, but also to understand it, claim ownership and use it in defense of the democratic enterprise." In the absence of these conditions, constitutionalism in Nigeria will be rendered infertile.

The present Nigeria constitution is flawed in many respects: first, it was not subjected to any rigorous public debate; second, it was not voted upon or adopted through a process-led constitutional approach, but drafted by a few hand-picked elites. As a result, it is treated like an alien document with no sense of ownership attached. Furthermore, the 1999 constitution is silent on key issues vital to the survival of Nigeria as a nation. For example, controlling the military, language, human rights, citizenship, constitutionalism, political restructuring, gender, federalism and so on did not receive sufficient attention.

To make matters worse, no provision was made for how to educate the people, especially the poor and uneducated in rural areas, about the constitution as it relates to their rights, duties, and obligations as citizens. The proclivity to circumvent the law and subvert democracy is high in such circumstances where people are not involved in constitution-making and its features such as the rule of law, democratic ideals, and their rights and obligations.

Citizenship and Leadership Education

Civic education is fundamental to democracy. Civic education includes strengthening participation in civil society as well as setting up programs to enhance civic behavior. It is much more than teaching civics—governmental structures and procedures. It involves what is now known as "Democracy Education"—the broader dimension of teaching civic knowledge, skills, character development, and community services. Democracy should be taught in workplaces in support of the occupational training that is built on a premise of good citizenship as the foundation. Civic education reproduces and strengthens civic culture. When civic education and civic culture function effectively, large numbers of people who have the formal status of citizens in a liberal democracy actually develop the attitudes, dispositions, and values proper to citizenship. Liberal democracies can exist only if these numbers are sufficient to meet whatever political challenges arise. The result of Almond and Verba's pioneering empirical research on political culture revealed that the more educated a society is about civic responsibilities, the greater the chance that democracy will thrive in that society.

In every diverse community, leaders may either weld various elements together or sharpen their disunity. Leadership is not an accident, but a product of interpersonal charisma, emotional sensitivity, diplomatic persuasion, and creative initiatives. Civil society can help in nurturing these qualities in community leaders to aid them in resolving the community's problems, such as inter-tribal rivalries, ethnic tension, religious bigotry, hate, and rumor-mongering. Above all, a good leader must know when to lead the followers and when to follow them.

Civil society leaders must endeavor to shun politics at all times. It is by setting an example that they can lead without partisanship. They must also avoid being co-opted by the state to repress the opposition that CSOs present. What civil society can do in this direction is to engage in the business of recruiting and training people at the mass level. The result will be a new breed of political leaders who will move away from the exclusionary and autocratic leadership style, which divided the community in the past. The work done so far by the Citizenship and Leadership Training Center in Nigeria is a prime example of how citizens can take responsibility for nourishing institutions, imparting character, and encouraging the creation of new political culture that is supportive of democracy.

The traditional rulers and community heads all over the country should strive to work together and be very effective in recognizing key demographic changes in their communities, so as to settle communal disputes in a timely fashion. "A stitch in time saves nine" goes the old saying. If you give due attention to the little details of life, in the long run you will save yourself considerable time, worry, and expense. Problems should be resolved when they first appear before they escalate to the levels of mayhem, carnage, ethnic cleansing, and fragmentation. Recent incidents in the form of clashes, skirmishes, and confrontation between different factions in Ife, Lagos, Sagamu, Kano, Aba, Kaduna, and Jos rightly demonstrate the upsurge of ethnic and religious nationalism in Nigeria and also pointed to the need for immediate action.

The military destroyed the educational system in Nigeria either by sheer ignorance or in a deliberate attempt to keep the people uneducated. As Mongolian Member of Parliament Rinchingiin Narangerel once put it: "If participation is essential to democracy, then people must have the knowledge and skills to have a say in their daily lives. History showed that the worst deeds were done by uneducated people or against uneducated people who did not know their rights and how to protect themselves."

Without any doubt, education plays a pivotal role in a democracy. Voting, confronting the government for reform, human rights monitoring, poll-watching, and anti-corruption efforts all require some education on the part of the citizenry. Military rule has robbed the present generation of Nigerian youths of good education. Education is the best legacy a nation can bequeath to its citizens, but the military instead left a dismal educational system in Nigeria characterized by the decay of physical facilities, over-crowding of classrooms, a dearth of books, and "brain drain". The progress made since independence on education was reversed by changing the educational

system from a mountain of excellence in the 1970s to a valley of decadence at the end of the millennium.

The public should be given equal access to educational opportunities at all levels because education is a key factor to improving the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions of citizens.

Promoting Political Democratic Culture

Political Scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba jointly conducted a study in 1959 based on civic culture in five Western European nations. The study concluded that “the civic values that sustain democracy are moderation, pragmatism, compromise, a high regard for individual rights, support for the community as a whole, a willingness to accept less than perfect solutions, and an inclination to play by the rules.” Civil society in Nigeria can capitalize on these civic values to bring democracy to life.

The road to democratic stability requires governmental, private, and voluntary associations to work together to constantly rebalance political and social forces as circumstances demand. Let me start here by borrowing a leaf from former U.S. President John F. Kennedy’s most quoted speech: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Volunteerism is the essence of democracy. Commenting on ways communities can fill the void of lack of volunteers, David Okubo argues that “financial exigencies coupled with increased social problems have worked together to put a strain on government resources. Future community efforts to manage scarce resources amid increasing demands should focus on ways of strengthening available philanthropic and volunteer capacities of the community by embarking on the policy of expanding community service opportunities.”

In my opinion, I think community service will positively transform the new democracy in Nigeria. This can be accomplished by expanding and reorienting the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC, a national volunteer program for university graduates) to reflect the new realities of democratic ethos and civic renewal. The national youth corp members can be utilized wisely not only to rebuild the country’s devastated physical infrastructures, but also to rebuild its devastated civic infrastructures. If youth corp members are involved in social engineering and civic empowerment through NYSC, in collaboration with the new National Civic Renewal (NCW), they will develop civic obligation and civic nationalism that will serve as catalysts for the emergence of civic leaders and grassroots community development initiatives. Expanding the democratic role of NYSC will obviously increase the nation’s social capital. There is no doubt that there has been a decline in social capital in Nigeria after many years of authoritarian rule.

In a report on sustainable human development, UNDP states: “Social capital is not being formed by decree or by the stroke of a pen. The moral commitments that constitute the core of social capital evolve only in the context of meaningful human interaction. It has come from the bottom up.” Social capital is the complex interaction of people and groups through which decisions are made and problems resolved—how the community as a whole works or does not work together to set priorities

and confront challenges. The quality of this interaction determines a community's health, both economic and social.

Harvard University political scientist Robert Putnam uses social capital to explain civic capacity when he defines social capital as "networks of trust and reciprocity that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." In Putnam's seminal article entitled "Bowling Alone" Putnam outcries the loss of social capital in America through gradual decline of civic participation. Putnam had sensitized us to the importance of social capital to community health and welfare. Today, even America, the citadel of democracy, must still be very much overly concerned about declining social capital, let alone Nigeria, a country in need of social capital more than anything else to build back its devastated civic infrastructure. Monte Roulier likens social capital to civic infrastructure when he argues that "communities have witnessed the onslaught of social change and the corresponding deterioration of their civic infrastructure. Like physical infrastructure, the civic infrastructure must be maintained, and sometimes rebuilt, if a community hopes to assert control over its future." The accumulation of reciprocal trust, as demonstrated by a variety and combination of voluntary efforts for the creation of common goods, helps to build social capital and contributes to effective governance.

In looking at Nigeria's unique situation, Larry Diamond's article "Nigeria: The Uncivil Society and Descent into Praetorianism" makes an interesting case. Diamond describes the Nigerian political culture as lacking the "horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation (cutting across social cleavages) that breed the honesty, trust, and law abidingness that mark the civic community." Historically, Nigerians are known to have operated under the Peter Ekeh's "two publics" we discussed earlier. One of the vestiges of colonialism that still serve as a stumbling block to building social capital in Nigeria today is the public negative perception of the modern state. The norms in the primordial realm are those of honesty and reciprocity, but "these primordial norms and traditions of honesty and reciprocity did not carry over into the arena of the modern state, an alien institution toward which no primordial group felt any sense of ownership or identification." Larry Diamond further argues:

Instead, the modern state was a resource, devoid of moral content or attachment, to be pursued, occupied, milked—and later plundered—for the individual politician and his support group. Unless the modern Nigerian state could become the subject of political identification across ethnic and communal lines, and unless it could impose strong institutional constraints against corrupt behavior in state office, these patterns were bound to intensify over time and to shape more profoundly patterns of political engagement at all levels.

Finally, James Coleman, the originator and exponent of social capital sees social capital as a byproduct of social relations; an attribute of the structure of relations between individuals and among groups. Increasing the nation's social capital will entail involving businesses and individuals

alike in the habit of contributing their time, money, and services to community development. In addition, programs for compensating volunteers for a job well done should focus on “target goals for per-capita volunteer hours and average dollar contributions per capita; number of service projects completed; level of private support; and meaningful forums in which to express appreciation for volunteers.”

The international community can help as well. Richard Joseph notes, “the role of international actors in facilitating Africa’s abertura must not be underestimated, but neither should their capacity to hasten or slow down the closure presently underway.” If donor nations really seek a thorough democratization in Nigeria, the spirit of George Marshall may be more appropriate than the theories of Robert Putnam.

Military leaders, before leaving office, succeeded in repressing civil society and fragmenting Nigerian society into warring factions that differ fiercely on fundamental issues. Government by discussion and compromise is now a thing of the past, as we have learned from the rise of violence in Nigeria. The acts of mayhem committed in Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, and Jos are prime examples.

Almost every issue in Nigeria has a political dimension. Commenting on this fixation with governmentalism, one of Nigerian finest minds, Claude Ake, writing as far back as 1983 asserted, “We are intoxicated with politics. The premium on political power is so high that we are prone to take the most extreme measures in order to win and maintain political power, our energy tends to be channeled into the struggle for power to the detriment of economically productive effort, and we habitually seek political solutions to virtually every problem. Such are the manifestations of the over-politicization of social life in Nigeria.”

The resurgence of religious nationalism—the Christian-Muslim divide over the issue of Sharia—has resulted in Islamic fundamentalists committing carnage, atrocities, and mayhem against innocent citizens in the name of religion. In addition, the upsurge in ethnic nationalism ranging from Afenifere and Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) to Ohanezee and Igbo People Congress (IPC) to Egbesu and the Northern Elders and Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) are all ominous manifestations of religious and civil war that could undermine Nigeria’s nascent democracy.

This deficiency of crosscutting cleavages that unite society coupled with the lack of overlapping memberships in associations that cut across ethnic, religious, and regional lines represents a national catastrophe. At stake is the continued existence of Nigeria as a political entity. There is a growing public cynicism about the ability of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government to address problems affecting the entire nation. Therefore, the need for a new national unifying project in an increasingly tension-packed, fragmented, and volatile society is more apparent now than ever. The driving force like anti-military sentiment, which unified the country for almost four decades, has run out of steam since the military went back to the barracks in 1999. As Celestin Monga has observed, “There is an obvious need to restore hope and a sense of common destiny in the hearts of people who hardly believe in the relevance of any kind of public authority. The aim

must be to convert what appears as violent collective anger against the state into a source of energy for a more dynamic process of social engineering.”

Social engineering begins with civility. Political sociologist Edward Shils described civility as “the most fundamental concept for understanding how societies are shaped and organized and, hence a distinctive rules of etiquette and standards of behavior that render the behavior of individuals more or less predictable and set the tone for public life.” A strong and well-respected civility betokens an integrated and coherent society. Moreover, a society's level of civility determines how democratic is its political culture. Pluralistic democracy requires the highest degree of civility. As Lucian Pye puts it:

When civility totally breaks down, society ceases to exist. When civility is strong and widely upheld, the society will be integrated and coherent. Civility is critical not just for private, personal relationships, but also for relationships of power and authority. Since parliamentary democracy cannot operate without respect for rules of civility, civility is the measure of democratic political culture: High civility means smooth democracy; low civility means repressive rule to keep people in line. Pluralistic democracy, especially when it involves rival moral concepts, requires an exceptionally high level of civility.

In the context of contemporary Nigeria, it is impossible to conceive of true democracy without a genuine national unity. This necessitates a new national project that will unite the country without regards to ethnic origin, religious background, or political affiliation. Civic nationalism—the notion that national identity is a matter of belief, not blood—should form the basis of such a new national project. In the long run, this will engender the most needed foundation for social interaction: the “Nigerian creed.” It is only through such a national creed that the stage for mixing and mingling of different cultural traditions that cut across long-standing regional, religious, ethnic, or partisan cleavages will be set. Yet with such great diversity comes a great responsibility to respect the different lifestyles of others and continue to build a nation united around the principles of fairness and justice for all. These principles encourage tolerance for differences and a greater readiness to compromise.

Free Flow of Information

The media are at the center of the democratic process, and their situation can be used as a barometer for testing the depth of political change. Citizen participation in the media is indispensable in order to carry out coherently the economic and cultural development of a society. Although communication cannot by itself engender development, inadequate communication slows down development and makes it more difficult. In a developing country such as Nigeria where the literacy rate is low, it is imperative that “civil society must have access to information that could empower the electorate to make informed political decisions.” The media can break this barrier by introducing the use of several creative devices to make information readily available to the various citizen groups, taking into consideration their different languages, cultures, and backgrounds. It is

the responsibility of the citizens also to make an effort to stay abreast of the current information necessary for making an informed decision.

One ray of hope in the new democratic dispensation is the alacrity with which the press exposes the credibility and responsibility of the acts of elected officers to the benefit of transparency, accountability, and probity. The Nigerian press must try to eschew the sensational and inflammatory publicity that are so prevalent in western democracies and endeavor to educate the citizenry rather than engaging in unscrupulous confrontations for ethnic and parochial reasons. The exposure of certificate forgery of former speaker Buhari and the bringing to light of former senate president Chief Okidigbo's corrupt acts are classic examples of investigative journalism at its best. Objective journalism in its most objective form, devoid of value-laden themes, is still very much in a nascent stage in Nigeria. The media should try to make its reports in a non-partisan manner and avoid the politics of the past, whereby "the media actually helped to sustain military regimes by undermining civilian supremacy."

Civil society can use the community as a laboratory in testing out new ideas, as far as these ideas are within the limits of both local and national law. If an idea is successful, then the information can be disseminated to other communities.

Promoting Economic Reform

Here I will attempt not to go into debates surrounding whether democracy preceded economic development or economic development preceded democracy. There is no doubt that "a relatively prosperous nation, with an equitable distribution of wealth, provides the best context for democracy. Starving people, by contrast, are more interested in food than in voting. Where economic power is concentrated, political power is concentrated. Well-to-do nations have a greater chance of sustaining democratic governments than do those with widespread poverty". The belief that Nigeria, with its 110 million people, can sustain democracy without either a Marshall-sized aid package to buttress it or some kind of domestic traditions and institutions on which to build is an illusion.

Today, the World Bank classifies Nigeria as among the poorest nations on earth. The latest World Bank world development report says about 70 percent of Nigerians still live on less than \$1 a day although the country is the world's sixth largest oil exporter. Standards of living and the state of social and essential services are inferior to those of 20 years ago. A foreign debt of about \$30 billion hangs over Nigeria's more than 110 million people, with no sign of a breakthrough in efforts to win relief from creditors. To crown it all, the military left the country's infrastructure fragmented and its institutions in shambles. State control of economic activities and regulations within the centralized government strangled the economy.

The distribution of income across the economic spectrum has been far more skewed in African countries than in the Western countries, and the absence of a large middle class is universally regarded as a stumbling block to democratic rule. Nigeria is an example. Twenty-nine years of military rule have widened the disparities between rich and poor. These disparities are the

manifestation of the absence of a middle class and upward mobility in Nigerian society today. Upward mobility in this society is not a product of hard work and effort but rather is the result of political contacts. As Richard Joseph eloquently puts it, "State offices are regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by office holders, who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents and kin groups." This "prebendal" culture manifested itself, to use Samuel P. Huntington's terms, in the descent from institutionalism into praetorianism—"the absence of effective policy institutions capable of mediating, refining and moderating group political action." Larry Diamond supports the above view. According to him, "The State stifled civil society by its lengthening shadow over every other realm of society. Lacking both productive state investments and significant private enterprise, the economy reduces to the swollen state, feeding voraciously on oil." Diamond further argues that "It's unlikely that Nigeria can sustain democratic government or achieve self-sustaining growth so long as the state looms so large in social and economic life. The size of the state must be reduced. Many of the tentacles that have lifted the privileged few to fantastic wealth must be cut off." There is also immediate, practical reason to question the national state paradigm. Paradoxically, the belief that only a national state can solve important contemporary public policy challenges and resolve serious societal conflicts has become both a cause of conflict and a deterrent to responsible action by non-state actors. It is a source of conflict because it reinforces the perception that the state is crucial to the protection and advancement of the interests of both individuals and groups. This increases the perceived stakes involved in the struggles to win control over the state.

Coalition and Consensus Building

Coalition building is the key to successful inter-group relations. Political coalitions that are designed to share the "national cake" equitably among various segments of society are the backbones of democratic survival. More importantly, political coalitions built around a belief system—civic nationalism will have more chance of enduring any political strife than one built around blood or ethnic nationalism.

The recent proliferation of diverse interest groups along ethnic, religious, and regional lines and the attendant violence calls for communication as a key to successful inter-group and intra-group relations. Civil society can best tackle the issue of communication by teaching these skills. A training program that is geared towards the teaching of conflict resolution skills, such as peaceful negotiation, tolerance, respect for other viewpoints, bargaining, and compromise will definitely make a huge difference. These skills are not natural instincts, but are taught. Civil society should also emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity and the ability to accept people who are different from oneself. The idea of a non-violent strategy for social revolution, which started in India with Mahatma Gandhi and later introduced to the United States during the civil rights era by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. should be replicated in Nigeria. It has proved to be instrumental in liberating the

Indians and African-Americans from the hands of their oppressors. CSOs in Nigeria can capitalize on this concept to save the country from ethnic and religious violence.

The buzzword for consensus building is collaboration. The events of May 29, 1999 demonstrated that the elites have reached a critical democratic consensus in Nigeria's history on the need to put an end to military dictatorship and to move the nation forward beyond the impasse. After the military exited the helm of affairs, the hard-won democratic consensus began to disintegrate into ethnic and religious parochialism. The concept of "Wazobia" or "One Nigeria" has begun to outlive its usefulness and is obsolete to the present-day scheme of things in Nigeria.

Militarism has been, since independence, a "dirty" word in the lexicon of Nigerian political rhetoric. Yet Nigeria has been governed longer by the military than by elected politicians since independence in 1960. Despite the fact that military incursion in domestic politics has received wide acceptance at times of anarchy, chaos, and confusion, the legitimacy and efficacy of military rule have always been vigorously contested. As Robin Luckham observes, "consensus needs to be forged between soldiers and civilians around reforms to reinstall civilian supremacy, while respecting the military's need to maintain professionalism and have some voice in national security policy."

The central problem of emerging democracies in a turbulent country such as Nigeria is how to ensure sufficient stability for development. Political stability requires, among other things, keeping the civil-military conflict to a minimum. The most crucial balance in Nigeria since independence has not been between the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches of government, but between the military and civilians. Some politicians in Nigeria have concluded that there are really two parties in Nigeria: the military and the civilians. There is a growing consensus among Africanists and students of stable democratization that the degree of success of the new democracies in exercising control of their military and security agencies will constitute the touchstone of democratic survival in Africa.

Samuel Decalo's civil-military relations study in twelve African countries came in the nick of time to caution us about the flaws associated with the application of Euro-centric paradigms to Africa's unique situation. In his book, Decalo conceptualized a workable paradigm he called "strategies of control." These seven strategies, adopted by twelve African states in an attempt to keep the military under civilian control, seem to have worked effectively in keeping civil-military conflict to a minimum. These strategies include: 1) Ethnic matching of regime and army; 2) The erection of elite armed control structures—Presidential Guards, Republican Guards, etc.; 3) The appointment of members of the Head of State's family to key command posts in the Armed Forces; 4) The recruitment of expatriates to the officer corps; 5) Securing guarantees of military support from external powers against domestic power-grabs; and 6) internal legitimacy; and the last but not least; 7) Conscious "payoff" by the civilian hierarchy to the army as a corporate group and/or to key individual officers. According to Decalo, the same conditions that "sustained civilian rule in Africa between 1960-1990 are 'mutatis mutandis' the same that sustained relatively stable military rule as well." Obasanjo's

administration may have adopted some of these strategies if not all in maintaining civilian supremacy over highly corrupt, venal, and inefficient elements in Nigeria's military. Although protection against coup makes sense, but it is not a practical and long-run solution. The fact remains, Nigeria might sign as many military pacts as possible with other nations, but without the development of a vibrant civil society, democracy will neither grow nor flourish.

Once again militarism is fast gaining ground in some quarters. The military inculcates an authoritarian ideology in the citizens of Nigeria, as we have learned from Senator Joseph Waku's call for a coup d'etat. Lack of "democratic consensus"—general acceptance of the ideals of democracy—can be an obstacle to effectively building a democratic political culture, and constitutes an ominous sign of authoritarian recidivism. To treat the concept of democratic consensus further, a well-developed literature by John Clark makes a strong case that "the institution and maintenance of democracy depends largely on favorable attitudes toward democracy by elite and ordinary citizens." John Clark further argues, "democracy is a state of mind: if people deeply believe that democracy will work and are committed to democratic forms, then, no matter what the material or social circumstances, democracy can work."

There is no doubt that civil society actors constitute a crucial foundation for the construction of a civic community from the bottom up. However, most of the conditions needed for developing such civic values, crosscutting social ties, are still only partially developed. Civil society groups have been handicapped by the dismal educational, economic, social, and ideological legacies of the previous administration.

Still, with all their weaknesses, debilitations, and divisions, civil society organizations remain Nigeria's best resource for sustaining democracy. The notion that government is the panacea for all of Nigeria's economic woes is fraught with uncertainty. Neither the private nor the public sector alone can provide solutions for the deepest problems confronting the country. The institutions of family, neighborhood, churches, synagogues, and charitable and voluntary organizations need to be strengthened if democracy is to be consolidated. Our best and perhaps only chance to bring into being a more sustainable peace, economic development, and stable government in Nigeria is to give civil society a greater role in governance.

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