Opposition Politics in Emerging Democracies: Appraising the Roles and Challenges of Civil Society Organizations towards Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Musa Kabir Umar, Abubakar Sani Tambai

Department of Political Science, Umaru Musa Yar' adua University Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria

Abstract

Objectives: This paper investigated the roles and challenges of Civil Society organizations (CSOs) as opposition actors in their drive towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria. As the third sector, Civil Society is known to be at the forefront in the democratization process for quite a long period, however, their contributions are continuously being relegated especially by the state who viewed them with negative lenses, particularly when they are opposed to their heinous political practices. The paper had, therefore, tried to pinpoint the tremendous task of three civil society organizations, namely Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Alliances for Credible Elections (ACE), and Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) by unveiling their unflinching roles and challenges towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Methodology: It achieved this objective by using a qualitative semi-structured face to face interviews supported with secondary sources of data through which thorough discussions and analysis of how the civil society organizations serve as the major player in opposition politics rather than the misperception that the political parties are majorly at the forefront in democratic consolidation process.

Results: It finds out that Civil Society is more enduring and trusted in seeing that the ideals of democracy are strictly followed for the smooth consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The study revealed that CSOs in Nigeria had promoted the reliability of election by observing every phase of the country's electoral process. They have also stimulated policy changes in some crucial governmental socio-economic policies such as the Freedom of Information bill. Indeed, the CSO's have promoted democratic principles of civic participation, political engagement, and tolerance in the population, thereby advancing democratic citizenship, which immensely contributed to democratic consolidation in the polity. Again, the study revealed that CSO's faced challenges of funding, which seriously distresses their operations and sustainability.

Implications: The paper concluded by suggesting that the Civil Society must devise a means of economic survival as well as further strengthens their capacity through training and retraining to fully understand how governments operate for effective and concrete criticisms that would enhance democratic productivity and development.

INTRODUCTION

Opposition politics has become key to the growth, strength, and stabilization of almost all democracies throughout the world. Indeed, the democratic system goes with opposition as buttressed by Naanen (2015) where he rightly concluded that vibrant and responsible opposition is a crucial character of any democratic style of government. The non-party mode of opposition politics is unique as it covers members coming jointly on the ground of collective interests or backgrounds devoid of party affiliation to pursue interests that conflict with the policies of the government (Norton, 2008). It is therefore pertinent to note that organized opposition's challenge to authorities can be regarded as one of the greatest signposts showing the maturity of democratic institutions (Van Biezen & Wallace, 2013). Thus, opposition actors have been widely seen as increasingly crucial

agents for checking the excesses of governments, strengthening political accountability, and improving the quality of governance for democratic consolidation (Case, 2013; Diamond, 2010; Pridham, 2014). In this wise, Van Biezen and Wallace (2013) observed that in the present-day European societies, there exist various forms of opposition to the conventional holders of power, who seems incapable of fruitfully providing answers to the series of harsh contemporary socio-economic and political realities. Thus, a neutrally renewed vision of opposition, which is not restrictive and exclusive, makes the study of opposition politics to include myriads of actors on a non-party basis. From this standpoint, Brack and Weinblum (2011) defined political opposition as follows:

"a disagreement with the government or its policies, the political elite, or the political regime, expressed in public

sphere, by an organized actor through different modes of action (Weinblum, 2011:13)".

Similarly, based on this perspective, Haven and Haven (2004), offered another clear-cut description of opposition political actors. This is how they described it:

"any organized actor – the parliament; represented political parties; nonrepresented political forces; trade unions; social movements expressing its stance in the public sphere–in the government; in the parliament; in the media; in the street, etc. – that permanently or punctually checks, informs and criticizes the current state of affairs through different non-violent modalities – legislative processes; parliamentary questions; press releases; mobilization of the media; public protests, demonstrations, etc., the targets of its critiques being the government and/or its policies and/or the political elite and/or the political regime as a whole (Haven & Haven, 2004:10)".

It is interesting to note that Blondel (1996) in expanding the notion of political opposition to be applicably suitable to different types of situations, context and political systems; it became paramount to take into cognizance the reality that a lot of opposition actions happen outside the borders of political parties. To this effect, therefore, Diamond (1994) argued that Civil Society is an important mechanism for checking the excesses of democratic governments, scrutinizing their possible abuses and violations of the law, and subjecting them to public scrutiny. Thus, vibrant Civil Society groups are most likely additional essential elements for bringing, consolidating, and maintaining democracy. In his conception, Civil Society is:

"A vast array of organizations, formal and informal which include groups that are: 1) economic (productive and commercial associations and networks); 2) cultural (religious, ethnic, communal, and other institutions and associations that defend collective rights, values, faiths, beliefs, and symbols); 3) informational and educational (devoted to the production and dissemination – whether for profit or not – of public knowledge, ideas, news, and information); 4) interest-based (designed to advance or defend the common functional or material interests of their members, whether workers, veterans, pensioners, professionals, or the like); 5) developmental (organizations that combine individual resources to improve the infrastructure, institutions, and quality of life of the community); 6) issue-oriented (movements for environmental protection, women's rights, land reform, or consumer protection); and 7) civic (seeking in nonpartisan fashion to improve the political system and make it more democratic through human rights monitoring, voter education and mobilization, poll- watching, anticorruption efforts, and so on). In addition, Civil Society encompasses "the ideological marketplace" and the flow of information and ideas (Diamond, 1994:2)".

Interestingly, the foregoing brought to the fore the significance of Civil Society organizations as oppositional actors in a democratic regime. However, despite the centrality of political opposition in a democracy, limited research has been conducted on non-party actor's roles and challenges in opposition politics towards democratic consolidation. This lack of studies, according to Brack and Weinblum (2011), citing Ionescu and de Madariaga (1968) and Neunreither (1998), is even more obvious when it comes to theoretical contributions. This is because the majority of traditional scholars have tended to understand opposition in a relatively restrictive and normative

way (Brack & Weinblum, 2011). They further reiterated that this perspective has clearly left its mark on the current studies on the opposition in which the consequence has been that most scholars have integrated a very limited range of actors with a very specific role and restrictively defined by single aim of taking over power. This view, according to them, has excluded several opposition actors from the investigative discourse of opposition politics. Consequently, scholars such as Blondel (cited in Brack & Weinblum, 2011) have encouraged researchers to go beyond such a limited and restrictive view of political opposition. This coincided with the submission of Parry (1997) where, in a few words, mentioned several forms of oppositions that can be found in lobbies and Civil Society. This is due to the fact that the latter, has been to a great extent, limited and circumscribed to mere opposition players in military regimes (Stephan, 1997; Kopecky & Spirova, 2008), hence overlooked in democratic regimes (Brack & Weinblum, 2011). Beginning from this observation, the key objective of this paper is to explore and analyze CSOs as non-party opposition political actors in Nigeria's democratic project since 1999. Thus, the study restricted itself to three selected CSOs in Nigeria, namely Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Alliances for Credible Elections (ACE), and Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN). Following the introduction, the paper dealt with operational definition of concepts. The third part of the paper covered the methodology, the fourth section dwelled on the discussion of findings, and the final part dealt with conclusion and recommendations.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Opposition Politics

Undoubtedly, it is one of the basic components of a democratic state because democracy cannot effectively work without strong opposition. Opposition politics has been conceptualized in many ways and perspectives. Indeed, many scholars had made various efforts to explain the meaning of opposition politics. This is prominent in the western part of the world, where it becomes a very significant subject of discussion among scholars and practitioners for so many decades (Case, 2013; Pridham, 2014). In the opinion of Diamond (2010), opposition politics has become a key factor to determine the development of almost all democracies world over. Most often, the concept is used as a relative term, referring to a form of correlation: positioning in some form of inconsistency to another body (Norton, 2008). Dahl (1971) sees opposition when B is opposed to the conduct of government A. In addition, Schapiro (1967) rightly argued that opposition should be translated to mean an organized political group or groups whose main objective is to get rid of government in power to occupy the throne. In the same way, Aborishade (2013) opposition politics is an ideological stance taken by a group of politicians whose party fails to win a convincing majority in the election. In a less restrictive approach, authors have also conceived opposition as a force trying to influence the legislative agenda by using formal rules to make sure that the majority of the government is responsive and can justify their actions (Brack, 2011).

It is noteworthy that Brack (2011), in his classical study, focuses attention much more on actors other than political parties and or parliament. He argued that the concept of opposition should be better explained as a position of disagreement expressed in the public sphere by mobilized actors, through diverse modes of actions, the object of dissatisfaction being the government or its policies, the political leaders, or the political system. In a similar conception, Haven and Haven (2004)

argued that opposition(s) could be better translated to mean any organized actor that checks, informs, and criticizes the existing via diverse and non-violent ways, the targets of its critiques being the government, its policies, and the political elites or the political system in general. This is because opposition politics is beyond the activities of the defeated political parties alone (Dahl & Tufte, 1973). This perspective would allow for the adoption of a more unbiased understanding of opposition politics and take into account a wider collection of actors and forms of interactions (Haven & Haven, 2004). This new perspective possibly will assist overcome the underlined flaws of the literature and expand its scope to better grapple with the scope of modern-day oppositions (Brack & Weinblum, 2011). In this paper, opposition politics is therefore regarded as any civic activity by independent groups or associations geared towards advancing good governance through checking the excesses of the state, public enlightenment, and promotion of democratic ideals.

Democratic Consolidation

The concept of democratic consolidation was meant to represent the problems challenging the making of emerging democracies to secure and or extend their stay through a longer period without any fear of being punctuated by authoritarian elements. Thus, Schedler (1998) argued that democratic consolidation is beyond this original meaning as it must include some other tasks such as popular legitimacy, diffusion of democratic values, party building, stabilization of electoral rules, decentralization of state power, judicial reform, alleviation of poverty, elimination of authoritarian enclaves, the organization of functional interest, and economic stabilization.

Worthy is necessary about the recent fact that contemporary realistic studies on democratic consolidation more often than not follow two strategies to understand what the notion entails, i.e., the '*substantive*' and '*prospective*' approaches (Svolik, 2015). The substantive approach focuses attention on a set of results to be observable in a well-entrenched democracy and then weigh the degree at which democracy satisfies them. Such attractive results often consist of strong political opposition, energetic Civil Society, and popular acceptance of key democratic principles among the general populace. Additionally, the second potential approach principally links consolidation with the stability of democracy (Svolik, 2015). Equally important, is the argument of Usman cited by Ibietan and Ajayi (2015) where on cautionary note argued that changing over to a democratic form of governance is not an automatic certification for democratic consolidation. To them, democratic consolidation involves refining the democratic institutions and interactions between and among political actors. There is, therefore, the tendency to link democratic consolidation with the profound unlikelihood of democratic collapse. It is, therefore, pertinent to note that scholars have differing views on the definition of democratic consolidation. One is a "*minimalist conception*," emphasizing procedural or formal democracy. The other is a "*maximalist conception*," focusing on the outcomes of politics, such as the institutionalization of political institutions, social justice, and economic equality (Lee, 2007). The minimalist conception of a consolidated democratic regime viewed it as the process of transforming the arrangements, prudential norms, and solutions that have emerged during the transition into relations of cooperation and competition that are reliably known, regularly practiced, and voluntarily accepted by those persons or collectives that participate in democratic governance (Schmitter, 1992; Akubo et al., 2014). In the same vein, Asiwaju (as cited in Akuboet et al., 2014) highlights that

democratic consolidation implies the internationalization of democratic culture and the institutionalization of democratic best practices by a country that has successfully embarked on a democratic transition. In its positive formulations, this branch of consolidation studies speaks about the goal of reaching democratic continuity, maintenance, entrenchment, survival, permanence, endurance, persistence, resilience, viability, sustainability, and irreversibility. By contrast, negative formulations call upon the inevitability of moving beyond states of "non-consolidation," beyond democratic fragility, instability, uncertainty, vulnerability, reversibility, and the threat of breakdown. For all differences in nuance, the unifying purpose beneath this multifaceted vocabulary is straightforward. In biological metaphors: it is basically preoccupied with keeping democracy alive, with preventing its 'rapid death' (O'Donnell, 1992). In this paper, democratic consolidation is referred to as the persistence and stability of democracy and its principles.

Civil Society

The World Bank (2013) translates the phrase Civil Society as a large group of nongovernmental and non-profit making organizations that exist in public life, projecting the interests and values of their members or others, based on principled cultural, political, scientific, religious, or philanthropic considerations. In other words, it can also be construed to mean non-governmental entities such as community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations. According to Markus (2001) in his focus on the development of the concept of Civil Society in Poland, argued that the usage of the term Civil Society is constantly increasing, including other social phenomena, from associations to civility, trust to social capital, and thus became relevant for both present social theory and practical activities of people of various societies. Moreover, Islamoglu (2001) viewed Civil Society as a self-regulating, self-governing body outside the state which is always opposing the state, representing both societal associations expected to generate civility, social cohesion, and morality. In this discourse, CSOs denote to associations that are neither in the state nor private sector but is involved in a civic activity meant at promoting the interests of its members and the general society.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this paper is a qualitative approach using face to face semi-structured interviews in the data gathering procedure. According to Yin (1984) and Babbie (2004), the qualitative design is considered more appropriate for explanatory and descriptive researches. The choice of the qualitative design was further informed by the need to explore the perspectives, thoughts, and perceptions of the relevant stakeholders and experts in CSOs and democracy, politicians, and academics, respectively. The study also used expert choice sampling techniques in recruiting the six informants, who included political party leaders, leaders of the three selected CSOs, and an academic (an expert in political studies). This method was used because the informants possessed a wide range of vast relevant expertise and experience on the phenomenon under investigation. Secondary data in the form of journal articles, newspapers, textbooks, and some documentary materials from the political parties and civic organizations were used to support the interview submissions. The interview data were subjected to the managing procedures by first organizing the data, the preliminary reading of database, coding, transcribing, thematic

organization, representation, and forming an interpretation of them as Creswell (2013) viewed that doing such enables the researcher to present more reliable and precise results.

The reason for selecting these informants was because they have broad ideas and experiences in the political opposition activities of CSOs in their efforts to consolidate democracy in the country. They were interviewed to get the most reliable and first-hand data on the nature of opposition politics since 1999. The data was analyzed after transcription, coding, thematic organization, and representation.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The Role of CSOs as Opposition Actors for Democratic Consolidation

Civil Society organizations are indispensable actors in a democratic enterprise. To some degree, their contributions in terms of consolidating democracy supersede political parties, particularly in Nigeria. The diagram below shows the informants who responded to the contributions of CSOs towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The role of CSOs become more pronounced, especially in the developing societies of Asia, Africa, and Latin America where immediately after their independence, the military toppled their bequeathed democratically elected governments and held onto power for many decades. This powered the emergence of civil associations with pro-democratic agendas to start agitating rigorously for the entrenchment of democratic rule. Informants 4 and 6 have argued that civic associations have been the major players in Nigeria's democratic process since the military. They further lamented that CSOs were the actors that pressured the military to go back to their respective barracks for their constitutional responsibilities, thereby paving the way for the re-emergence of democracy in Nigeria. Indeed, the role of Civil Society in deepening democracy is tremendous, as Thapa (2016) points out, citing Stephan and Linz (1996) observed that a strong Civil Society is necessary at the beginning of democratic transition as well as in consolidating it. To this effect, informants 2 and 3 argued that at all levels, Civil Society plays a significant role in democratic processes up to the end of deepening or consolidating it in the system. Fig1 They enlighten the public on civic responsibilities such as voter education programs, monitoring elections as well as checking the excesses of the state. The CSOs engage in pushing for policy options preferable to them or which they go against, which in turn influences positively in consolidating democracy in Nigeria. They do this through various events such as public speaking, media campaigns, workshops, seminars, among others (Bocthway, 2018). In fact, in Nigeria, the CSO's have been the voice of the poor, especially when an unwanted policy is about to

be put in place. Accordingly, apart from giving citizens respect for the state and positive engagement, vigorous Civil Society plays an immeasurable role towards democratic consolidation by enhancing the accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, effectiveness, and the legitimacy of the political system (Diamond, 1994). In the opinion of Informants 1 and 5 as per as democratic consolidation is concerned CSO's are at the forefront in promoting the ideals of the process more than the political parties. According to him, in Nigeria, most of the political parties are becoming inactive and mute until a new election season is approaching. In the contemporary world, opposition parties are the most distinctive features of democracy and the absence of which is regarded as the absence of democracy (Robert Dahl, as cited in Van Biezen & Wallace, 2013), yet, CSOs' roles supersede the former as it is the live wire of democratic movement from the beginning to the end (Thapa, 2016). The chief functions of Civil Society in democratic consolidation in these societies can be illustrated as ensuring credible elections; guarding against democratic threats; influencing public policy; responding to empowering citizens as well as voter education, among others (Mercy, 2012).

The study further revealed that CSOs are very vital opposition actors in Nigeria's democratic process through monitoring numerous governmental or political activities in the country. Unarguably, through monitoring, the CSOs' challenge any policy proposal that is inimical to democratic principles. Thus, it improves the efficiency and success of democratic governance and its consolidation. It has also revealed that these CSOs engaged in advocacy programs that help in enlightening the public on civic education and several policy programs of the state that would aid in the betterment of the lots of the populace (Informants 5 & 1, interviewed on the 16th June 2018).

The Challenges Confronting Civil Society Organizations in Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation

One of the greatest challenges of the Civil Society organization world over is the political leaders and corporate interest to scuttle their efforts for either challenging the few elites that want to concentrate power in their grip or protection of human rights. Sriskandarajah (2015) maintained that Civil Society suffers long-lasting attacks in many countries because of the

Table 1: The code and the category of informants

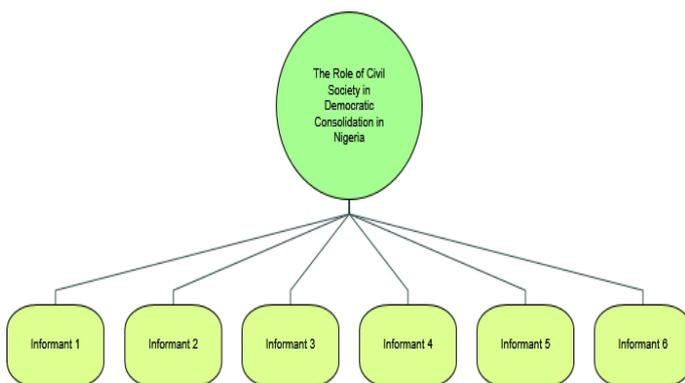| Code	Interpretation	Frequency
Informant 1, 2, 3, and 4	Civil Society leaders	4
Informant 5	Political party leader	1
Informant 6	Academic	1
	Total	6

Source: Field Work, 2018

Fig1: The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria
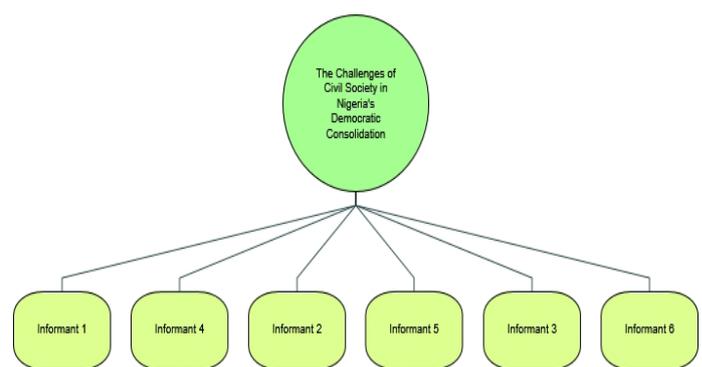**Source:** Nvivo 12

Fig2: The Challenges of Civil Society in Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation
Source: Nvivo 12

serious questions they ask about power, which the elites usually went to any length to get and maintain. This, indeed, make the Civil Society space a very tumultuous one and risk-bearing, which at times cost the lives of some actors. Not only this, but the Civil Society is also being confronted with the challenge of lack of space, resources, and very limited access to the people in the position of authority. In addition, the majority of the Civil Society organizations are urban-based Fig2 . They concentrate their operations more largely in the urban centers leaving the rural areas aside, which are more densely populated, particularly in the developing world.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The paper had revealed the roles and the challenges faced by the CSOs as opposition politics in the advancement, consolidation, and entrenchment of democratic order in Nigeria. It shows how they have been the greatest force in nurturing and maintaining democratic ideals in any society without which democracy might likely be on the verge of collapse. It is vividly clear that this important third sector remains imperative as they engage in strong political opposition and massive public enlightenment on how democracy operates for it to be consolidated in emerging new democracies like Nigeria. The discourse has recommended that it is necessary for Civil Society, as opposition actors, to restructure their patterns and strategies in interacting with democratic stakeholders for providing a viable opposition that would eventually consolidate democracy with fruitful outcomes. This would allow Civil Society opposition actors to ventilate freely for the advancement of democratic consolidation in developing democracies. Finally, additional studies on how these CSOs liaise with democratic stakeholders in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria would be of immense contribution to knowledge in the area.

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