

EVALUATING GOVERNANCE AND LEGITIMACY DEFICIENCIES IN SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria has had a widespread problem of governance legitimacy, closely linked to corruption, election misconduct, and institutional inefficiencies. This paper examines the various dimensions of governing legitimacy in Nigeria, analysing historical context, contemporary difficulties, and possible avenues for reform. By comprehending a cycle that sustains illegitimacy, we can promote structural reforms that restore public trust and improve governmental accountability. The aim is to underscore the pressing necessity for extensive reforms to disrupt this cycle of governance legitimacy crises. This paper employs a qualitative method to assert that election integrity is fundamental to democracy, underpinning government and societal stability. Findings reveal that Nigeria has traversed turbulent political challenges since gaining independence, regarded the 2023 presidential election as a vital indicator of its democratic vitality. Restoring legitimacy within Nigeria's political system is crucial, not just for the immediate satisfaction of its population but also for the long-term peace and development of the nation. Allegations of anomalies, including voter suppression and vote-buying, depict a troubling scenario of a compromised democratic process. Various watchdog agencies have emphasised that these issues indicate governance deficiencies and intensify a long-standing legitimacy crisis. The paper recommends that the path forward necessitates a comprehensive plan that amalgamates election changes with a robust commitment to effective governance principles. We must harness the collective responsibility of stakeholders, including government officials, civil society, and the public, to cultivate a political environment that fosters the growth of democracy. At this critical juncture, the choices made today will profoundly affect the course of governance, democratic ideals, and societal cohesion in Nigeria.

Keywords: Governance, Legitimacy deficit, Electoral sustainability, Judicial Corruption

Introduction

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, characterized by a rich cultural heritage and abundant natural resources, exhibits a paradox of considerable potential, contrasted with notable governance and legitimacy challenges. Nigeria has faced these challenges since gaining independence from colonial rule in 1960, evident in political instability, corruption, ineffective judicial systems, and the alienation of citizens from governmental processes. An examination of Nigeria's historical landscape is essential for a comprehensive understanding of its current governance. The integration of various ethnic groups by British colonial

administrators in 1914 established a foundation for persistent ethnic tensions and conflicts. Following independence, Nigeria alternated between civilian and military governance, with several coups intensifying the instability of its political structures (Adeleke, 2019). Military regimes frequently governed via violence and repression, which eroded democratic institutions and promoted a culture of impunity (Jega, 2014). The lasting impact of these power struggles has resulted in a precarious political landscape characterized by systemic deficiencies. The country has been facing governance challenges that have resulted in a legitimacy crisis. This crisis jeopardizes political stability, economic development, and social cohesion (Uche, 2022).

The government's inability to fulfill citizens' expectations contributes to distrust and disillusionment. Nigeria's transition to civilian governance in 1999 marked the end of a prolonged period characterized by military rule and unsuccessful democratic attempts. During the political transition, numerous Nigerians articulated expectations for a "democracy dividend" that would enhance political freedoms, elevate government efficacy, promote accountability among leaders, and rejuvenate the struggling economy. After the initial euphoria of the Abacha dictatorship, a significant portion of the public has adopted a more realistic perspective. The expected advantages of democracy have been gradual in their emergence, and the new political framework has not met the expectations of numerous Nigerians. Analysts, commentators, and citizens express significant concerns regarding political violence, corruption, ineffective governance, unresponsive leadership, and economic deprivation. This paper examines the relationship between governance deficits and legitimacy crises, highlighting their impact on national growth and development, (Yahaya, et.al, 2024). The paper contends that addressing the governance legitimacy crisis in Nigeria requires stakeholders to comprehend the fundamental causes, such as corruption, electoral malpractices, and ineffective governance structures.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to investigate the governance and legitimacy deficiencies in Nigeria. The qualitative design facilitates a comprehensive understanding of intricate governance deficits and legitimacy crises in Nigeria. This design is ideal for our study because it allows us to explore social and political topics that are difficult to quantify, (Obi, et.al, 2024). Consequently, it aligns effectively with our research objectives, which aim to understand the impact of governance concerns on the legitimacy crisis that hinders growth in Nigeria. These elements necessitate interpretive interpretation instead of statistical measurement, rendering a qualitative method most suitable. Numerous essential components enabled the implementation of the concept. Document analysis constitutes the foundation of the data collection technique, encompassing government reports, official declarations, and scholarly journal articles. This strategy facilitated the collection of comprehensive, thorough information regarding Nigeria. We used content analysis as the primary analytical method to conduct a systematic evaluation of the collected papers and case study materials. This method effectively identifies patterns, themes, and trends within extensive textual data, thereby facilitating the establishment of links between the dependent and independent variables, specifically the governance issue and legitimacy crisis in this study. The emphasis on the period from 2015 to 2023 facilitates an analysis of contemporary trends and developments, essential for comprehending the current condition of governance and policy matters and their ongoing ramifications. This modern emphasis will augment the significance and use of the study outcomes. This design boasts numerous

strengths that make it highly suitable for the study. The flexibility facilitates the integration of developing themes and insights as the research evolves, which is crucial due to the dynamic nature of governance in a complex nation such as Nigeria.

Framework of Analysis

Governance Deficits: Nigeria's political structures suffer from a variety of governance deficiencies, (Usman, *et.al*, 2024). One of the most important aspects is the widespread instance of corruption that can be seen at every level of government. The data provided by Transparency International indicates that Nigeria has maintained its position as one of the countries with the highest levels of corruption in the world (Transparency International, 2022). The corruption in question undermines the effectiveness of institutions, diverts public resources, and deprives regular persons of their rights. As an illustration, the theft of oil money amounting to billions of dollars by government personnel exemplifies the severe shortcomings of fiscal governance (Nwankwo, 2021). The substandard quality of public services further demonstrates the inadequacies in governance. Nigeria's educational and healthcare systems suffer from severe underfunding and poor administration, resulting in a range of disappointing outcomes. The World Health Organisation (WHO) conducted research revealing that Nigeria has one of the highest rates of maternal death globally (WHO, 2021). In addition, the education sector is disproportionately affected by bad governance, as evidenced by the fact that millions of children are not attending school, which is a failure to offer fundamental services that are necessary for the advancement of socioeconomic conditions (UNICEF, 2020). In addition, the absence of a dependable judicial system and the rule of law contributes to the severity of these deficiencies. According to Imoize and Coker (2021), many people have the misconception that the legal system is corrupt, slow, and difficult to access. Some people even question whether or not it can bring justice. This pessimism regarding the effectiveness of the judicial system creates a vicious cycle of dissatisfaction and alienation, thereby eroding public trust in governmental institutions.

Corruption Epidemic: The Impediment to Governance Legitimacy

Corruption is frequently characterised as a malignancy that deteriorates the foundational structure of society, diminishing faith in institutions and resulting in socio-economic stagnation. Pervasive corruption in Nigeria severely compromises the judiciary, intended to defend the law and administer justice, and poses a substantial threat to the nation's democratic integrity, economic advancement, and the safeguarding of human rights. This essay contends that corruption in the Nigerian judiciary undermines legal efficacy and maintains a cycle of injustice, thereby requiring extensive judicial changes. Corruption is arguably the most significant element eroding governance legitimacy in Nigeria. Transparency International indicates that Nigeria continuously ranks among the most corrupt nations worldwide (Transparency International, 2021). The widespread prevalence of corruption skews public resource distribution, favours a limited group, and hinders economic progress. Public funds designated for health, education, and infrastructure are frequently misappropriated by corrupt authorities. In 2019, the Nigerian government projected that more than \$400 billion had been lost to corruption since independence (Zainab, 2020).

As a result, the socioeconomic divide expands, resulting in widespread poverty for many residents, while the affluent accumulate wealth to the detriment of the collective

welfare. The populace's dissatisfaction with the government's failure to mitigate corruption exacerbates their disillusionment, resulting in dependence on informal governance and dispute resolution methods. This parallel structure undermines the legitimacy of state institutions, (Thomas and Obi, 2017). When voters view their government as an enabler of corruption instead of a protector of fairness and justice, their allegiance to the state wanes, creating a cycle of illegitimacy, (Usman, *et.al*, 2024) The Nigerian judiciary consists of multiple levels, including the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, and High Courts, among others. Although ostensibly autonomous, the court frequently suffers from corruption at multiple tiers. Multiple reports indicate that judges and court officials may partake in corrupt activities, including receiving bribes to sway judicial results (Uwaifo, 2021). Transparency International's survey indicates that Nigeria is among the most corrupt countries globally, signifying a pervasive moral deterioration. The reliance on financial incentives in judicial decision-making directly undermines the rule of law, rendering the judiciary susceptible to manipulation by influential political and economic entities (Nwosu, 2019). Consequently, public trust in the judiciary diminishes, prompting individuals to pursue alternate, frequently violent, methods of dispute resolution.

The ramifications of judicial corruption transcend individual cases and directly influence societal norms and values. When citizens see that the judiciary functions on the principles of corruption and favouritism, a culture of impunity emerges. This environment not only deters individuals from pursuing justice but also heightens the probability that they would turn to unlawful methods to settle conflicts. Furthermore, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), a substantial 67% of Nigerians perceive judicial corruption as a significant obstacle that erodes their confidence in the legal system (NBS, 2020). This prevalent belief in corruption perpetuates a circle of unfairness, enabling the affluent and influential to exploit legal structures to escape accountability, while the underprivileged disproportionately endure the burdens of an inequitable system. The corruption inside the judiciary exacerbates the overall instability in Nigeria. Economic progress necessitates a dependable legal structure that upholds contracts and safeguards property rights. When the judiciary is viewed as corrupt, it deters both domestic and foreign investment, hindering economic progress (Okeke, 2022). The aggregate impact of these difficulties leads to a society in which the rule of law is undermined, human rights are infringed, and socioeconomic disparity is sustained.

Electoral Irregularities Threat to Democratic Legitimacy: The Role of Governance Deficit in 2023 Election

Electoral integrity is essential for the legitimacy of governance. Free and fair elections serve as essential prerequisites for authentic representation. Nigeria's electoral system faces significant challenges, including violence, voter suppression, and a lack of transparency (Erogugah, 2021). Election cycles have frequently been characterised by violence, resulting in fatalities and displacement, particularly during the 2011, 2019 and 2023 elections (Vanguard, 2019). The political landscape is marked by an absence of party ideologies, with political parties functioning as instruments for personal ambition rather than as platforms for public service. This results in elections being perceived as formalities instead of authentic competitions for leadership (Ibeanu, 2020). Voter apathy has increased as individuals increasingly perceive their votes as inconsequential.

The disconnect between the populace and the political class intensifies feelings of powerlessness, thereby confirming a legitimacy crisis. Addressing electoral malpractices

necessitates a multifaceted strategy, encompassing thorough electoral reforms, increased transparency, and mechanisms to guarantee accountability among political actors. Empowering citizens to actively participate in the electoral process is essential for revitalising civic engagement and restoring trust in democratic systems, (Usman, *et.al*, 2023). The 2023 presidential election exhibited numerous irregularities that have elicited both national and international condemnation. Reports indicated numerous instances of disenfranchisement, wherein eligible voters were prevented from exercising their electoral rights due to bureaucratic inefficiencies or intentional obstructions (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2023). These occurrences violate the principles of free and fair elections and reveal underlying governance deficiencies. The United Nations Development Programme emphasises that electoral integrity is crucial, serving not only as a procedural requirement but also as a fundamental aspect of governance that strengthens the social contract between the state and its citizens (UNDP, 2023). Moreover, accusations of vote-buying and result manipulation have significantly undermined the integrity of the electoral process. Reports from multiple civil society organisations indicate occurrences of voters being offered monetary incentives to influence their decisions (Ogunleye, 2023). In a democratic system, this type of corruption diminishes the electorate's intent and weakens the accountability that ought to define the interaction between the government and its citizens. The perception of votes as commodities for purchase leads to disillusionment and diminishes trust in the democratic process.

Understanding the ramifications of the 2023 electoral irregularities requires situating them within the broader context of governance deficits in Nigeria. Governance inherently includes the frameworks, procedures, and customs that define the exercise of power, the means by which citizens express their opinions, and the processes through which decisions regarding public matters are reached (World Bank, 2023). The governance landscape in Nigeria is characterised by insufficient accountability, pervasive corruption, and a deficiency in the rule of law, all of which have consistently impeded the country's development. Corruption has consistently been identified as a significant barrier to effective governance in Nigeria. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index positions Nigeria poorly in a global context, intensifying the distrust that citizens have towards their leaders (Transparency International, 2023). Governance deficits significantly affect electoral outcomes; when citizens observe widespread corruption among leaders, their willingness to participate in the electoral process declines. When leaders believe they can manipulate the electoral process without facing consequences, it fosters a cycle of corruption that infiltrates all aspects of governance. The importance of inclusivity is significant. Governance in Nigeria frequently marginalises certain demographic groups, thereby perpetuating societal inequalities. When elections are biased against specific groups, the political discourse shifts towards divisiveness instead of fostering unity. This exacerbates the legitimacy crisis, as substantial segments of the population experience alienation from the political system, leading to doubts regarding the fundamental nature of their representation.

Deficiencies in Legitimacy

Colonial legacies, military governance, and ethnic divisions have historically undermined the legitimacy of the Nigerian state (Ake, 1996). The British colonial administration imposed arbitrary boundaries that consolidated several ethnic groupings, resulting in enduring problems. Following independence, Nigeria fluctuated between military dictatorship and civilian governance, with each era characterized by corruption and a deficiency in

accountability (Odeyemi, 2019). The military junta's contempt for democratic values undermined popular faith in the political system, fostering skepticism among citizens regarding the efficacy of government institutions in promoting the common good. The shift to civilian control in 1999 signified a new era in Nigeria's administration; however, it failed to address entrenched problems. Anomalies frequently tainted numerous elections, leading to extensive accusations of fraud and manipulation (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Consequently, the electorate's confidence in the political process is tenuous, resulting in an ongoing cycle of disillusionment and discord.

Legitimacy deficits arise directly from government inadequacies. The notion of legitimacy in political theory pertains to the moral and ethical justification of power and governance. The disconnection between the Nigerian government and its citizenry is significant. A significant number of Nigerians perceive their leaders as self-interested, resulting in pervasive apathy and a feeling of alienation from the government (Bello, 2019). The political elite's inability to tackle urgent societal problems exacerbates this sentiment, as demonstrated by the extensive rallies against police brutality in 2020, which were epitomized by the #EndSARS movement. These protests symbolized widespread dissatisfaction with governance and the call for accountability. The widespread violence and insecurity in the country substantially undermine the government's credibility. The Boko Haram insurgency, together with pervasive banditry and kidnappings, highlights the state's failure to uphold its primary responsibility of safeguarding its inhabitants (Akinyemi, 2020). People view the government's failure to adequately address these problems as a substantial violation of the social compact between the state and its citizens, leading to further alienation. The ethnic variety in Nigeria, which should ideally serve as a source of strength, frequently intensifies governance and legitimacy deficiencies, (Obi and Uche, 2018). Conflicting interests among many ethnic groups often lead to political instability and discord (Suberu, 2018). Policies that privilege one ethnic group over others incite anger and exacerbate hostility. People have charged the present administration with favouritism that exacerbates ethnic tensions (Adeleke, 2021). The politicisation of administration based on ethnicity forces citizens to identify with ethnic groups instead of national unity, undermining the collective identity of the Nigerian state. Furthermore, the accumulation of electoral irregularities and governance deficiencies generates a legitimacy crisis, characterized by a widespread belief that political power is wielded legitimately (Mansbridge, 2003).

A deficiency of confidence in the electoral process engenders pervasive cynicism toward the leaders that arise from such defective systems. The ramifications of a legitimacy crisis are extensive; they frequently lead to social upheaval, heightened polarization, and a disenchanted populace. Following the 2023 elections, protests ensued in multiple locations as residents voiced their dissatisfaction with the alleged illegitimacy of the electoral process. Social media served as a catalyst for mobilizing disenchanted young people, who expressed their grievances through online campaigns and public rallies (Ibrahim, 2023). The act of individuals protesting in public indicates a deterioration of confidence in democratic institutions, thereby undermining the nation's social cohesion. Moreover, the ramifications of a legitimacy crisis transcend political dissatisfaction; they jeopardize national security. In areas where local residents experience disenfranchisement, the likelihood of recruitment by extremist organizations increases, further destabilizing the nation (Rohini, 2023). In this scenario, it is clear that the alleged voting irregularities not only disrupt the political landscape but also jeopardize the very essence of national unity.

Governance Structures and Inefficiencies

Another factor that contributes to the legitimacy issue is the inefficiency of the mechanisms of governance. According to Bello (2022), the federal system of Nigeria is defined by bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate service delivery, and a lack of responsiveness to the needs of the public. Nepotism and politicisation have plagued the civil service, once a competent body, diminishing its potential to carry out policy efficiently. Moreover, inefficiency and corruption plague local administrations, the supposed intermediaries between the people and the state. They are unable to successfully respond to local concerns because they lack autonomy and are frequently dependent on state administrations (Osaghae, 2018). This hinders their ability to properly respond to local issues. Residents who perceive their opinions as neglected due to this gap are more prone to resentment, which further exacerbates the legitimacy dilemma. It is necessary to make a deliberate effort to decentralize power, empower local governments, and streamline bureaucratic procedures in order to improve the legitimacy of governance. Increasing the level of engagement between citizens and the policymaking process helps enhance the connection between the state and its residents by ensuring that the actions taken by the government are reflective of the needs and aspirations of the populace, (Avidime and Obi, 2018). Nigerian civil society has emerged as a significant player in demanding accountability to address governance and legitimacy deficiencies. Numerous non-governmental organizations actively promote the perspectives of citizens in political discourse (Ribadu, 2021). These organizations push for transparency and good governance. The judicial system and the media play a crucial role as allies in this fight for reform and oversight, advocating for increased autonomy and integrity to ensure accountability of the administration. In addition, the international community has a dual role to play in the process of responding to these deficiencies. International assistance and investment are absolutely necessary for the growth of Nigeria; nevertheless, they must be reliant upon improvements in the country's governance standards. Applying pressure from international actors to respect human rights and encourage better governance could lead to positive outcomes for citizen involvement and institutional reform.

End Bad Governance Protest as Product of Governance Deficit

Bad governance in Nigeria represents a concrete reality with observable manifestations. It is characterized by entrenched corruption, a lack of accountability, ineffective public services, and weak institutions (Charas Madu Tella, 2019). Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) consistently positions Nigeria among the highest in corruption levels, underscoring the widespread nature of the issue (TI, 2020). Numerous unaddressed allegations of embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds further demonstrate the absence of accountability. Moreover, public services, including healthcare, education, and infrastructure, are in a state of disrepair, indicating governmental neglect (Obi-Ani et al., 2020). The escalating situation surrounding the #EndBadGovernance movement culminated in a nationwide protest, resulting in fatalities in several Northern States, including Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, and the Federal Capital Territory. The 10 'Days of Rage' concluded on Saturday, August 10, prompting inquiries into the effectiveness of the protest and whether President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's nationwide broadcast addressed the grievances presented by the protesters. The effects of poor governance are complex and significantly damaging. It inhibits economic growth, deters foreign investment, and worsens poverty levels. Nigeria, while ranking among the largest oil producers worldwide, has over 40% of its population living below the poverty line, as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (NBS,

2020). Bad governance has eroded the social contract, resulting in increased civil unrest and insecurity, as evidenced by the Boko Haram insurgency and widespread kidnapping (Adibe, 2020). The inadequacy of state institutions became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic response, where diminished trust in the government led to widespread skepticism and noncompliance with public health directives (Maclean & Marks, 2020).

The EndSARS movement that emerged in Nigeria in late 2020 represented a pivotal instance of collective opposition to widespread governance failures (Akinwotu, 2020). The protest against poor governance concluded in 2023. Anger towards police brutality sparked this youth-led movement, which quickly expanded into a wider protest addressing issues of ineffective leadership and governmental shortcomings. The EndSARS protests have received substantial support and international attention, reflecting the profound frustration of the Nigerian populace and indicating a collective readiness to pursue and implement change.

Possible Approaches to Reform

Addressing the governance legitimacy crisis in Nigeria requires comprehensive reforms across various sectors. Establishing transparent mechanisms for accountability is essential through constitutional amendments. We should empower anti-corruption agencies and safeguard them from political interference (Olaniyan, 2021). Establishing judicial autonomy is crucial to upholding the law. Secondly, prioritizing electoral reforms is essential to eradicating malpractice. The improvement in BVAS or implementation of technologies like electronic voting and biometric verification can improve the integrity of the electoral process. Restoration of public confidence in elections necessitates that citizens perceive their votes as impactful and that they possess the means to hold elected officials accountable. Addressing socio-economic inequalities can reduce public frustration with the government. Investment in health, education, and infrastructure is essential for cultivating a sense of ownership within the population. Tangible benefits from government actions can facilitate the rebuilding of trust among citizens. Finally, promoting civic engagement is crucial. Public awareness campaigns grounded in data can inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities. Promoting involvement in local governance enhances the democratic process and increases trust in state institutions.

Addressing judicial corruption in Nigeria requires a focus on judicial independence. We should regard the judiciary as an unbiased institution, free from external influences such as economic or political pressures. An independent judiciary serves as a counterbalance to the excesses of other government branches and offers citizens a forum to pursue justice free from retribution or bias. Achieving independence necessitates systemic reforms that target the fundamental causes of corruption. Implementing strict regulations for appointments and promotions in the judicial system can ensure that only qualified individuals occupy judicial roles. Implementing mechanisms for accountability, such as independent oversight bodies with the authority to investigate allegations of judicial misconduct, would enhance the integrity of the judiciary. Initiatives focused on training and capacity-building for judges and court personnel may effectively reduce corruption within the judiciary. The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) has actively promoted ethical standards, and broader legal education initiatives may transform the existing culture of corruption into one of integrity and professionalism (NBA, 2021).

Examining the relationship between electoral irregularities and governance deficits is essential for improving legitimacy. Concrete reforms are essential to restore public trust and ensure the integrity of the electoral process. Enhancing the Independent National Electoral

Commission (INEC) by augmenting resources, providing training, and implementing oversight mechanisms may substantially reduce occurrences of electoral fraud (African Union, 2023). Engaging civil society organizations in monitoring and advocacy initiatives fosters transparency and accountability in the electoral process. Addressing government deficits necessitates a comprehensive strategy that emphasizes anti-corruption initiatives, improves public sector accountability, and encourages grassroots participation in the political process. Legislative reforms designed to strengthen independent oversight bodies can reduce corruption and foster accountability for misconduct among public officials. These initiatives may restore the electorate's confidence in their political representatives and enhance civic engagement.

Conclusion

Nigeria is at a critical crossroads; the convergence of governance deficiencies and legitimacy issues has created a systemic ailment that obstructs advancement. Addressing these difficulties requires a collaborative effort among governmental entities, civil society organizations, and foreign partners. Reforms must emphasize improvements in openness, accountability, and unwavering commitment to the rule of law. As individuals exercise their agency and engage substantively in governance, Nigeria has the potential to reform its political structure, promoting the development of a more credible and efficient state apparatus. Reconciling the divide between governing entities and the population is crucial for fostering national unity, stability, and progress. Nigeria's legitimacy crisis is a complex issue that stems from a history of injustices, widespread corruption, and ineffective governance. Election misconduct and corruption create a persistent cycle of disappointment that requires a thorough reform approach. By prioritizing accountability, ensuring free and fair elections, decentralizing governance institutions, and investing in socioeconomic programs, stakeholders may incrementally restore legitimacy to the Nigerian state.

The process of building a legitimate administration is fraught with challenges, yet it also offers opportunities for renewed optimism and robust democratic ideals. Nigeria must establish a governance system that engenders public trust, an essential requirement that cannot be disregarded. The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria has distinctly underscored the profound interconnection between electoral irregularities, governance deficiencies, and legitimacy challenges. This article has demonstrated that rectifying electoral systems alone is insufficient without addressing the underlying governance concerns. The path forward necessitates a comprehensive plan that amalgamates election changes with a robust commitment to effective governance principles. Restoring legitimacy within Nigeria's political system is crucial, not just for the immediate satisfaction of its population but also for the long-term peace and development of the nation. We must harness the collective responsibility of stakeholders, including government officials, civil society, and the public, to cultivate a political environment that fosters the growth of democracy. At this critical juncture, the choices made today will profoundly affect the course of governance, democratic ideals, and societal cohesion in Nigeria.

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