

# Comparative politicsassignment assignment



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Examine the growth of civil society and its impact on democratisation in Nigeria. Civil Society refers to non-state organisations that chiefly seek to advance the interest of the people. It is generally understood in Hegelian terms as the distinct sphere of public space, separate from the state which manages the social relations and communication between the state and the citizens.

ICSO action across sub-Saharan Africa became dense and widespread in the 1990s as a result of influx of foreign aid from western government and monetary forces such as the Bretton Woods Institutions who shifted the main recipients of donor aid from governments to civil societies; hence a growth stimulant leading to widespread CSO action across the African continent.

Naomi Chazan has written about the prominent role of these organizations in the political liberalization in the early 1990s that was seen as the resurgence of civil society in Africa.

She states that “[t]he urban protests of the late 1980s and early 1990s that triggered the process of reform were initiated either by civil servants, students, professional organizations, trade unions, or churches, and carried out by a combination of these and other groups in over 20 countries”. Civil society in Nigeria has had a noticeable impact and has played a contributory role to the democratisation process albeit often faced with problems of corruption among the higher echelons of the CSO movement.

Civil society tradition has existed in Nigeria preceding the colonial era and evidenced in the era of imperial colonialism and subsequent authoritarian military regimes. Generally orchestrated Trade union strikes in 1964 and

1981 are evidence of this, bringing the nation to a standstill and forcing the governments of the time to negotiate civil society groups.

Civil society activity in Nigeria has been dominated since independence by the older, larger organizations like the trade unions, professional associations like the Nigerian Bar Association, religious institutions, and traditional institutions, all of which have large memberships capable of filling the streets during protest actions. Since the 1980s, however, a growing number of small groups” the NGO movement” have risen on the back of the new technologies of the information revolution to play an important role in the public discourse on emocracy and, to some extent, organization of public action.

In addition, the NGO movement has built strong relationships with international donors and won a large portion of their funds available in Nigeria (Kew forthcoming 2013). As in Ghana and Uganda among other African countries, Nigeria’s military government implemented 5SAPs in the late 1 9805 that sparked extensive public protests led by the trade unions (Lewis 1996). Two glaring aspects of Nigerian military’ rule, however, reduced the impact of civil society political activities of the period.

The first was the military regime of 61brahim Babangida which implemented a gradual democratization program shortly after taking office in 1985, and deflected civil society criticism by channelling it toward improving the transition program rather than removing the military from office (Oyediran et al. 1993). Secondly, the Nigerian military sat atop the nation’s vast oil wealth, which was gutted by generally low oil prices in the 1980s and 1

99Ds, but was still sizeable and sufficiently concentrated in government hands as to provide important leverage over political and civil actors.

As Nigerian per capita incomes dropped from roughly \$ 1 000 in 1 980 to \$ 250 in the early 1990s, and as structural adjustment gutted the nation's public infrastructure and social safety net, government largesse proved increasingly irresistible to political leaders and some civil society actors, and corruption boomed, allowing the military to lengthen its rule (Olukoshi 1993). 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 manoeuvring, co-optation, giving political appointments to key civil society leaders, rent seeking, patronage, nepotism, corruption, and victimization were General Babangida's favoured instruments for consolidating his grips on political power.

Rule by Abacha proved no more favourable to civil society organisations. By 2002, as the president and the PDP looked to retain office in the 2003 elections, relations between the government and civil society began to shift. President Obasanjo turned to the PDP machinery, which used its access to vast public resources and control over the election system to deliver itself a

lock hold on federal, State, and local offices in 2003—a pattern it repeated in 2007 and 2011.

Civil society, now vastly larger and more diverse than in the 1990s, split in many directions over the growing oligarchic nature of PDP governance. NGOs from many sectors with government funding found protest difficult, or actively joined the PDP coalition (Kew forthcoming 2013). NGOs with foreign donor funds have had greater freedom to criticize PDP corruption and election malfeasance, but have been unable to sustain reform coalitions in between election cycles, as occasional government reform policies have attracted support and participation from both the donors and reform NGOs.

Consequently, Nigerian civil society has had no proactive democratization coalitions since 1999, when it had the clear threat of the military as a rallying point. Instead, multiple issue-specific coalitions have dominated civic life: election-reform coalitions, anticorruption coalitions, one for the passage of a Freedom of Information Bill, and others. Some organizations belong to multiple coalitions, but no central, sustained alliance exists as in the 1990s.

Doubtless, the complicated relationships between the large civil society groups—the unions, professional associations, religious institutions, and the like—and the government has sapped their ability to organize a sustained political reform agenda. As vast, complex organizations, these groups have seen some local and national affiliates deeply compromised by government largesse, while others remain deeply committed to the public interest. Post 1999, opposition parties grew feeble providing, civil society groups few alternatives to back. However, January 2012 saw a new movement arise.

Dubbed Occupy Nigeria, these protests sought to seek redress for the New Year day fuel increment by 9President Goodluck Jonathalnn, apparently caused by the removal of a long standing fuel subsidy. A week later, labour leaders suddenly called off the emonstrations after reaching a compromise with the government that reinstated half of the subsidy.

Non labour activists howled with anger that labour leaders had again been “settled” (i. e. , bribed) into a deal that squandered a golden opportunity for fundamental democracy-building concessions, but without the NLC’s massive organizing potential” and its 5 million members” the protests soon died out, and Occupy Nigeria became primarily an online phenomenon. These events illustrate both the potential and the limitations implicit in the growth of civil societies in Nigeria and their impact on democratisation.