

The role of the media and civil societies in nigeria's elections.

[Media](#), [Television](#)



THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS IN NIGERIAN ELECTIONS. The London School of Economics & Centre for Civil Societies defines Civil societies as a body of individuals carrying out collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. Civil society groups also known as non-governmental organisations commonly embrace a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, they vary in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil society groups include organizations such as community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups, etc. Mass media on the other hand refers collectively to all media technologies, including the internet, television, fliers/handbills , billboards, newspapers, and radio, which are used for mass communications, and to the organizations which control these technologies. From these definitions, we can deduce that both the media & civil society groups play an inevitable role in fashioning various facets of our society ; including the machinery of governance, which needless to say can only be sustained by the existence of a viable transition programme — elections. However, Elections in Nigeria over the years, have been marred by various irregularities such that it now seems impossible to have a credible transition programme devoid of all the inconsistencies that have been associated with elections in the past. As a panacea to this problem, the media & civil society groups must wake up to their responsibilities towards ensuring credible elections, they must synergise to carry out certain functions expected of them such as whistle blowing ie checking corruption and abuse of power, ensuring free flow of information,

synthesis in diagnosis and feedback, design and implementation of programs that are distinctive in style, symbiotic in interest and complementary in objective and finally monitoring. Alexis de Tocqueville in his book Democracy in America. states that " the state should be overseen and checked by the independent eye of the society made up of a plurality of interacting, self organized and constantly vigilant civil associations ". De Tocqueville's assertion brings to the fore, the whistle blowing function of civil societies and media groups during elections. This simply entails that it behoves them to curb the excesses of politicians, political parties, and any other persons or group that may constitute a menace to the success of elections in Nigeria by exposing all such persons and their modus operandi once they are identified. This will not only make such persons unpopular but also serve as a deterrent to intending dissidents to desist from all such actions that may disrupt the smooth conduct of elections. Furthermore, civil societies and media groups also have the role of ensuring prompt dissemination of factual information during elections in Nigeria. Information they say is power and he who is not informed is deformed, elections in Nigeria do not only heat up the polity but also increases our volatility as a nation and this is largely due to the epileptic flow of information experienced during elections. To address this problem, Civil societies can assist media groups in collating information while the media groups focus on the dissemination of the information, this way the burden of collation is partially lifted from the media people and information is disseminated faster as well. In addition to the roles so far mentioned, during election, the media and civil societies should also be able to design and implement programs that are distinctive in style, symbiotic in intent and

complementary in training which they can administer to the electorates, for example civil society groups in Nigeria can embark on mass enlightenment campaigns to educate illiterate eligible voters on the need to, and how to register as well as how to vote, while the media houses can complement their efforts by embarking on mass advertising campaigns that will display the venue and dates of electoral activities and how to use electoral materials like ballot papers. This will also help them monitor electoral activities effectively since it is only after they have monitored the processes and apparatus closely that they can educate the electorate on usage. Monitoring on its own however constitutes a major role that the media and civil societies should play during elections, all stake holders in the electoral process should as a matter of necessity be closely monitored to avoid having them become indolent or indifferent to their duties. INEC, law enforcement agents, politicians and political parties all need to be kept in check via monitoring. However civil societies can take this a step further by organizing protests & demonstrations when they discover any foul play or are convinced that election results do not reflect the people's wishes. For example after the general elections in Tunisia in 2005 civil societies via protests and demonstrations forced the incumbent government to accept the election results and leave office. To achieve all these, civil societies and media groups must therefore work cooperatively during elections as no progress can be made in an atmosphere of rancour and disunity, maintaining a healthy and peaceful working environment between themselves during elections therefore becomes a major role for both civil societies and media groups. Collective efforts must be made to build back trust and efficiency on

both sides. Data collection, analysis, research and dissemination of results must be done under a constructive partnership that emphasizes independence, objectivity and above all honesty. However, achieving this goal may become very difficult because major players in electoral issues who do not mean well for the polity consider a healthy relationship between media groups and civil societies a major threat to their evil plans hence they strive tirelessly to ensure that this relationship is strained. Bearing this in mind, civil societies and media group should endeavour at whatever cost that they do not achieve their goals. Finally as we continue to chart a reliable path to credible elections in Nigeria, it is pertinent to note that cleaning up institutions without allowing citizens to develop the knowledge and skills that will trigger civic competence at the grassroots will only lead to policy discontinuity. In this regard civil society and media groups who enjoy trust among their members are best positioned to become ready interlocutors of government policy at the grass root level thus engendering the much needed social re-engineering. Sustainability of the reforms can only be achieved when the ordinary citizens feel a true sense of ownership and are willing to hold governments accountable for it's actions. This can only happen through revamping the civic infrastructure through grassroots mobilization and social engineering. Hence, if Nigeria were a thesis and credible elections an antithesis civil societies and media groups should therefore consider themselves a synthesis ; a bridge to realizing the much elusive free and fair elections. BIBLIOGRAPHY 1. Alexis de Tocqueville (1988). Democracy in America vol. 2. New York: Harper and Row. 2. Moru John " Civil Society and Social Change in Nigeria" John. Moru@actionaid. org.

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