International Journal of Innovative Inventions in Social Science and Humanities

ISSN(print): 3050-6921, ISSN(online): 3050-693X

Volume 03 Issue 09 September 2026

DOI: 10.58806/ijiissh.2026.v3i9n14

Page No: 1255-1268

Political Leadership and the Trajectory of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Oloruntade Ganiu Babatunde

Department of Political Science, Lagos State University, Nigeria,

ABSTRACT

Nigeria's Fourth Republic has sustained uninterrupted civilian rule since 1999, yet the persistence of electoral democracy has not necessarily translated into democratic consolidation. The completion of more than two decades of the Fourth Republic, alongside the accumulation of evidence from successive electoral cycles and developments in scholarship on Nigeria's democratic institutions, provides an opportunity to reassess how political leadership has shaped the country's democratic trajectory over time. This study examines the relationship between political leadership and the trajectory of democratic consolidation in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023, with particular attention to electoral governance, constitutionalism, institutional accountability and civil liberties. Drawing on qualitative content analysis of scholarly literature, institutional reports, policy documents and other relevant secondary sources, the study examines how the conduct and incentives of political leaders have shaped democratic institutions and practices across successive administrations. The study finds that political leadership has been an important factor in shaping the quality and direction of Nigeria's democratic development, particularly where political competition has encouraged the manipulation of institutions, weakened accountability mechanisms and undermined democratic norms. However, the study situates leadership within a broader institutional and political environment rather than treating it as an independent explanation for all democratic shortcomings. It argues that the survival of electoral government since 1999 represents institutional continuity, but that continuity should not be equated with full democratic consolidation. The study contributes to the literature by bringing political leadership, elite interests and institutional constraints into a longitudinal analysis of Nigeria's Fourth Republic and examining how their interaction has shaped the uneven trajectory of democratic consolidation between 1999 and 2023.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Published On:
26 September 2026

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, Political Leadership, Democratization, Democratic Consolidation, Fourth Republic, Political Institutions.

Available on:
https://ijiissh.com/

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has maintained uninterrupted civilian rule since 1999, making the Fourth Republic the country's longest period of continuous democratic governance. Since the transition from military to civilian rule, successive administrations have conducted regular elections, transferred political power through electoral processes and maintained the formal institutions of representative government. Yet the persistence of electoral democracy has not necessarily translated into equivalent progress in democratic consolidation. Concerns about electoral integrity, political accountability, institutional autonomy, constitutionalism, civil liberties and the use of state resources for political purposes have remained central to debates about the quality and trajectory of Nigeria's democracy.

The establishment and repetition of democratic procedures do not, by themselves, guarantee the institutionalisation of democratic norms. As Schedler (1998) observes, consolidating democracy presents a more complex challenge than establishing democratic institutions. Democratic consolidation requires political actors to accept democratic rules, respect institutional constraints and regard democratic competition as the legitimate basis for acquiring and exercising political power. The extent to which these principles become embedded in political practice therefore matters as much as the regularity of elections.

Political leadership is particularly important to this process because political institutions are shaped not only by formal rules but also by the behaviour and incentives of the actors who operate them. Leaders determine, directly or indirectly, how institutions are

used, how political competition is managed, how constitutional constraints are interpreted and how accountability mechanisms are treated. Where political elites regard state institutions primarily as instruments for acquiring and retaining power, formal democratic institutions may persist while democratic norms and practices remain weak. Conversely, political leadership that accepts institutional constraints and democratic competition can contribute to the development and institutionalisation of democratic practices.

This relationship is especially important in Nigeria, where political competition has frequently been characterised by elite competition for control of state resources and institutions. Scholars have associated Nigeria's governance challenges with patronage, weak accountability, institutional fragility and the concentration of political and economic power. Wani and Suwirta (2013), for instance, links prolonged political instability and ineffective leadership to weaknesses in governance and development, while Omotosho (2013) highlights the distance between political leaders and the citizens to whom they are formally accountable. Such arguments suggest that the leadership question cannot be separated from broader questions about the character and performance of Nigeria's democratic institutions.

However, much of the literature on Nigeria's democratic development has tended to examine individual dimensions of the problem, particularly elections, electoral violence, political parties, institutional weakness and governance, without sufficiently connecting these issues to the behaviour and incentives of political leadership across the Fourth Republic. Examining leadership therefore provides an additional lens through which the uneven trajectory of Nigeria's democratic development can be understood. Rather than treating leadership as a single explanation for every weakness in the democratic system, this study considers how political leadership interacts with institutions and political incentives to shape democratic outcomes.

Against this background, this study asks how political leadership shaped the trajectory of democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It argues that political leadership has been a significant factor in shaping the quality and direction of Nigeria's democratic development, particularly through its influence on electoral governance, constitutionalism, institutional accountability and political competition. The study situates leadership within the broader institutional and political environment of the Fourth Republic.

The study contributes to the literature by bringing these dimensions together in a systematic examination of the relationship between political leadership and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It also provides a basis for understanding why the continuation of electoral democracy since 1999 has not necessarily been accompanied by equivalent institutionalisation of democratic norms and practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Democracy

Democracy is a contested concept with both procedural and substantive dimensions. At its most basic level, procedural conceptions emphasise the existence of competitive elections through which citizens select their political representatives. Broader conceptions, however, extend beyond electoral competition to include political participation, inclusion, public contestation, civil liberties and institutional constraints on the exercise of political power. Dahl's (1971) conception of polyarchy is particularly useful in this regard, as it places participation and political contestation at the centre of democratic government. Dahl's later work further situates democracy within a broader theory of political equality, participation and collective decision-making (Dahl, 1989).

The distinction between procedural and substantive conceptions is important because the existence of elections does not, by itself, establish the full operation of democracy. Elections provide an essential mechanism for political competition and the selection of representatives, but democratic government also requires citizens to have meaningful opportunities to participate in political life, contest the exercise of power and hold public officials accountable. A political system may therefore retain formal democratic institutions while falling short of broader democratic expectations where participation is restricted, political competition is systematically constrained or institutional checks on political authority are weak.

The return to civilian rule in 1999 established the institutional basis for electoral democracy and was followed by repeated elections and the continuation of civilian government. However, the quality of electoral administration, the autonomy of political institutions and the ability of citizens and political actors to participate meaningfully in political competition have remained important questions in assessments of Nigeria's democratic development. Omotola (2010), for example, argues that weaknesses in electoral administration and the institutionalisation of the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC) and political parties affected the democratic quality of elections during the early Fourth Republic.

Democracy is therefore understood as more than the periodic conduct of elections, but a political system in which citizens can participate meaningfully in the selection and exercise of political authority, political competition is institutionally protected, civil liberties are respected, and public officials are subject to institutional and political accountability. This broader conception provides the basis for distinguishing democracy from democratization and democratic consolidation, which concern respectively the process through which democratic institutions and practices develop and the extent to which they become embedded in political life.

2.2 Democratization

Democratization refers to the process through which political systems move away from authoritarian forms of rule and develop institutions, practices and norms associated with democratic government. Unlike democracy, which describes a form of political rule, democratization is concerned with political change over time. The literature on transitions from authoritarian rule emphasises that this process can take different forms and produce different outcomes, rather than following a uniform path from authoritarianism to established democracy (O'Donnell, G., Schmitter, P. C., & Whitehead, L. (Eds.). (1986). Democratization therefore involves more than the formal adoption of democratic institutions; it encompasses changes in political competition, participation, institutional authority and the relationship between citizens and the state.

The transition from prolonged military rule to civilian government in 1999 represented a major stage in Nigeria's democratization. The Fourth Republic subsequently established a degree of institutional continuity that had eluded Nigeria's earlier republics, with successive elections and civilian administrations maintaining the formal framework of representative government. Yet the continuation of electoral politics has not eliminated the institutional and political challenges associated with democratic development. Omotola's (2010) examination of the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections, for instance, identifies weaknesses in electoral administration, the autonomy of the electoral management body and the institutionalisation of political parties as important constraints on Nigeria's democratization process.

Democratization is consequently understood in this study as an ongoing process of establishing, developing and institutionalising democratic institutions, practices and norms. Its success cannot be assessed solely by the survival of elected governments; it also depends on the extent to which political competition, participation, accountability, constitutional constraints and institutional autonomy become embedded in political practice. This provides the conceptual basis for examining democratic consolidation as a distinct stage and for subsequently considering how political leadership and political elites influence the direction of Nigeria's democratic development.

2.3 Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation concerns the process through which democracy becomes sufficiently institutionalised and accepted that its continuation is no longer dependent solely on the preferences of particular political actors. Linz and Stepan (1996) distinguish democratic consolidation from democratic transition by emphasising the institutionalisation of democratic rules and practices across political and social life. In their formulation, a consolidated democracy requires democratic procedures to become established not only within government but also in the behaviour and expectations of political actors and citizens. Consolidation therefore represents a deeper stage of democratic development than the establishment of an elected government.

Schedler (1998) further cautions against treating democratic consolidation as a single or easily measurable condition. He identifies several dimensions through which consolidation can be understood, including the survival of democratic institutions, the acceptance of democratic rules by political actors and the capacity of democratic institutions to withstand political challenges. This perspective is important because democratic regimes may survive for extended periods while continuing to exhibit weaknesses in accountability, institutional autonomy or political competition. Democratic longevity, therefore, should not automatically be equated with democratic consolidation.

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has maintained an uninterrupted elected government and conducted successive general elections. The longevity of the Fourth Republic represents an important departure from the instability that characterised the country's earlier republics. However, the regularity of elections does not, in itself, establish that democratic institutions and norms have become fully consolidated. Studies of Nigeria's electoral administration have continued to identify institutional weaknesses and challenges that affect the quality of electoral democracy, while scholarship on the Fourth Republic has examined persistent problems involving political parties, electoral competition and institutional accountability.

For this study, democratic consolidation is therefore understood as the institutionalisation of democratic rules, norms and practices to the point at which political competition, constitutional constraints, accountability and political participation become established features of political life. The willingness of political leaders and elites to respect institutional constraints, accept political competition and submit to mechanisms of accountability can either strengthen or weaken the institutionalisation of democratic practices.

2.4 Political Leadership

Political leadership concerns the exercise of political authority and the capacity of those who occupy positions of power to influence the direction of government and public affairs. Ogbeidi (2012) describes political leadership as the ruling class responsible for managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by setting and influencing policy priorities through decision-making structures and institutions. This conception places political leaders within the institutional framework through which political authority is exercised, while also recognising their capacity to shape the priorities and practices of government.

Democratic institutions establish rules and constraints, but political leaders influence how those rules are interpreted and applied in practice. Their decisions can strengthen institutional autonomy, political accountability and respect for constitutional procedures, or weaken them when political interests take precedence over institutional constraints. Modibbo-Umar and Isumonah (2023), in their examination of presidential leadership styles across Nigeria's Fourth Republic, similarly draw attention to the relationship between

the exercise of executive power and the functioning of democratic institutions, particularly constitutional safeguards, accountability, rule of law and separation of powers. Agbude and Afolabi (2022), examining political leadership and democratic sustainability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, also argue that the practices of political elites have affected the extent to which democratic principles are sustained.

Political leadership should therefore be examined not simply in terms of whether leaders possess desirable personal qualities, but in terms of how they exercise political authority within democratic institutions. This includes their approach to constitutional constraints, political opposition, electoral competition, institutional autonomy and mechanisms of accountability. In this sense, leadership becomes relevant to democratic consolidation because the institutionalisation of democratic rules depends partly on whether political actors accept and operate within those rules, including when doing so may conflict with their immediate political interests.

2.5 Political Elites and Democratic Development

Political elites constitute a broader category of actors than political leaders. While political leaders occupy formal positions of political authority, political elites include governing elites and other influential groups whose actions can shape the distribution and exercise of political power. Fatai (2017) describes political elites as governing elites and other contending groups that play important roles in determining the processes and outcomes of political and state control.

The importance of political elites to democratic development derives from their capacity to either support or challenge the institutions and rules through which democratic competition takes place. Diamond (1999) identifies elite attitudes and behaviour as important to democratic consolidation, particularly because consolidated democracy requires political actors to accept democratic rules and constraints as legitimate features of political competition. Democratic consolidation therefore depends not simply on the existence of democratic institutions but also on the willingness of influential political actors to operate within them. Where elites accept democratic procedures even when electoral or political outcomes are unfavourable to them, they can contribute to the institutionalisation of democratic practices. Conversely, when political actors selectively observe democratic rules according to their interests, the formal institutions of democracy may remain in place while their substantive operation is weakened.

The question, therefore, is what determines whether political elites support or undermine democratic institutions. Fatai (2017), drawing on VonDoepp and Villalón (2005), identifies three considerations that help explain elite behaviour: the extent to which elites are committed to democratic values, the normative environment within which they make political decisions, and their strategic interests. The first concerns the extent to which political actors regard democracy and its procedures as legitimate. Where elites perceive democratic institutions as valuable beyond their immediate political utility, they may be more willing to respect democratic rules even when those rules produce unfavourable outcomes. The second concerns the political norms and expectations that develop through repeated interaction. Elite behaviour is shaped not only by formal institutions but also by established political practices and expectations about how political competition should be conducted.

The third consideration is strategic interest. Political elites operate within political systems in which access to state power can provide significant political and material advantages. Consequently, their commitment to democratic rules may be tested when those rules threaten their political position or interests. Fatai (2017) argues that elites may support democratic procedures when the costs of abandoning them are high, but may also seek to circumvent those procedures when doing so appears advantageous. This perspective does not assume that political elites are inherently anti-democratic; rather, it draws attention to the incentives that influence their choices within particular institutional and political environments.

The role of institutions is consequently central to understanding elite behaviour. Effective democratic institutions can constrain political actors by establishing rules that regulate competition, distribute authority and make violations subject to institutional consequences. Przeworski (1991) similarly emphasises the importance of institutions in structuring political competition by making political outcomes uncertain while providing actors with rules through which uncertainty can be managed. Democratic institutions thus serve not only as mechanisms for organising political competition but also as constraints on the ability of political elites to determine outcomes solely according to their preferences.

2.6 Political Leadership, Political Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

The preceding discussion establishes that democratic consolidation depends not only on the existence of democratic institutions but also on how political actors operate within them. Political leadership and political elites are therefore relevant to the study of democratic consolidation because they are among the principal actors through whom political authority is exercised, contested and reproduced. Their choices can influence the operation of institutions, the conduct of political competition and the extent to which democratic rules are respected in practice.

Ibietan and Ajayi (2015) examine the role of governing elites in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and argue that the conduct of successive governing elites has significant implications for democratic consolidation. Their discussion highlights accountability, constitutionalism, institutional reform and consensus-building as important conditions for strengthening democratic governance. This places elite behaviour within the broader institutional environment in which democratic consolidation takes place. Nnani (2022)

similarly examines the relationship between national leadership and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, focusing on the political and socioeconomic conditions surrounding the exercise of leadership.

Other scholarship approaches the relationship through particular institutions and political processes. Omotola (2010), in his examination of elections under the Fourth Republic, demonstrates the importance of electoral administration, political parties and institutional capacity to Nigeria's democratic transition and consolidation. His analysis of the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections shows how weaknesses in electoral administration and the institutionalisation of political parties affected the development of electoral democracy. Katsina (2016) similarly examines presidential elections in relation to democratic consolidation, paying attention to the roles of the state, political elites and electoral authorities. These studies demonstrate that elite competition and political leadership cannot be considered separately from the institutions through which political competition is organised.

The relationship between leadership and democratic institutions is also examined by Modibbo-Umar and Isumonah (2023), who analyse presidential leadership styles across Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Their study considers presidential leadership in relation to constitutional safeguards, the rule of law, civil and political rights, accountability and the separation of powers. This perspective is useful because it locates leadership within an institutional setting rather than treating the personal characteristics of individual leaders as sufficient explanations for democratic outcomes. Political leadership may influence democratic development, but its effects are mediated by institutional arrangements, political incentives and the wider configuration of political power.

The interaction between elites, leaders and institutions is consequently central to understanding Nigeria's democratic trajectory. Political elites compete for access to state power and resources, while political leaders exercise formal authority within institutions that establish the rules and constraints of political competition. The relevant issue is therefore not whether political elites or leaders are uniformly democratic or anti-democratic, but how their interests, choices and political norms interact with institutional rules.

Studies have examined governing elites and consolidation, national leadership, presidential leadership, electoral administration, presidential elections and political parties. The contribution of the present study is not to claim that these relationships have been neglected, but to bring these strands into a single longitudinal analysis of the Fourth Republic between 1999 and 2023. The study focuses specifically on how political leadership, operating within a broader elite and institutional environment, has shaped electoral governance, constitutionalism, institutional accountability and civil liberties. In doing so, it treats leadership neither as the sole explanation for Nigeria's democratic shortcomings nor as an isolated characteristic of individual officeholders, but as an important factor in the broader and uneven process of democratic consolidation.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts Elite Theory as its principal theoretical framework for examining the relationship between political leadership and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The theory is useful because it directs attention to the distribution and exercise of political power and to the role of influential political actors in shaping political outcomes. This is particularly relevant to the study because democratic institutions operate through political actors whose interests and behaviour can influence how those institutions function in practice.

Elite Theory is principally associated with the works of Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels. Despite differences in their formulations, the classical theorists emphasised the concentration of political power among relatively small groups within society. Mosca distinguished between a governing minority that exercises political authority and the larger population over which authority is exercised, while Pareto examined the distinction between elites and non-elites and the processes through which elites are replaced or renewed. Michels, through his analysis of political organisations, highlighted the tendency for decision-making authority to become concentrated among a relatively small leadership group. These propositions established the foundations of elite analysis by directing attention to the relationship between political power, organisation and leadership.

Contemporary applications of elite theory provide a more useful basis for examining democratic politics than a simple division between rulers and the ruled. Burton, Gunther and Higley (1992), for example, define elites in terms of actors capable of influencing national political outcomes regularly and substantially. Fatai (2017) applies this perspective to democratic consolidation and emphasises the importance of elite values, political norms and strategic interests in shaping political behaviour. From this perspective, the existence of political elites does not necessarily constitute a threat to democracy. Rather, the relevant question is how elites use political power and respond to democratic institutions, particularly when institutional rules conflict with their political interests.

Linz and Stepan (1996) emphasise the importance of political society, including political parties, elections, electoral rules, political leadership and legislatures, to the institutionalisation of democratic government. Elite Theory adds an actor-centred dimension to this institutional perspective by examining the interests and behaviour of those who occupy or substantially influence these institutions. For this study, political leadership is treated as an important component of the broader political elite because political leaders occupy formal positions from which they can influence policy, institutional relationships and the enforcement of political rules.

The theory is therefore applied in this study to examine how political leaders and other influential political actors have interacted with democratic institutions during Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Particular attention is given to the relationship between elite interests

and electoral governance, constitutionalism, institutional accountability and civil liberties. Elite Theory does not, however, assume that political elites are uniformly opposed to democracy or that elite behaviour alone determines democratic outcomes. Rather, it provides a framework for examining how elite interests and behaviour interact with institutional constraints and democratic norms, and how these interactions may contribute to or constrain democratic consolidation.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design and uses qualitative content analysis to examine the relationship between political leadership and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret political processes, institutional practices and patterns of political behaviour rather than measure relationships through statistical analysis. Qualitative content analysis provides a systematic means of examining textual materials by identifying and interpreting relevant themes and patterns within a body of documents (Schreier, 2012).

The study covers the period from 1999 to 2023, encompassing the administrations of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari. This longitudinal scope allows the study to examine political leadership across successive administrations and to identify recurring patterns in the relationship between political authority and democratic institutions.

4.2 Sources of Data

The study relies exclusively on secondary data. The materials examined include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books and book chapters, institutional and government reports, constitutional and legal documents, policy documents, electoral reports and other relevant documentary sources.

Academic literature provides the conceptual and theoretical foundations for the study and supports engagement with existing scholarship on democracy, democratization, democratic consolidation, political leadership and political elites. Institutional and documentary materials provide evidence concerning electoral processes, constitutional arrangements, institutional performance and the exercise of political authority during the Fourth Republic.

4.3 Method of Data Analysis

The study employs qualitative content analysis to examine the selected documentary materials. The analysis involved repeated reading of the materials, identification of evidence relevant to the research question, organisation of recurring issues into analytical themes, and comparison of those themes across administrations and across the study period.

For the revised article, the analysis is organised around four principal dimensions of democratic consolidation: electoral governance, constitutionalism, institutional accountability and civil liberties. These dimensions were developed from the study's research question, theoretical framework and engagement with the relevant literature. The documents were examined for evidence concerning the conduct of political leaders and political elites, the exercise of executive authority, electoral competition, the treatment of political opposition, institutional autonomy, accountability mechanisms and adherence to constitutional and democratic rules.

4.4 Analytical Procedure

The analytical process involved four broad stages. First, relevant documentary materials were identified and reviewed in relation to the study's research question and conceptual framework. Second, material concerning political leadership, political elites and democratic institutions was extracted and organised according to the four analytical dimensions. Third, evidence was compared across successive administrations to identify patterns in the exercise of political authority and its interaction with democratic institutions. Finally, the evidence was interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework and the broader literature on democratic consolidation.

4.5 Scope and Limitations

The study is limited to Nigeria's Fourth Republic between 1999 and 2023 and focuses specifically on the relationship between political leadership and democratic consolidation. It does not seek to provide an exhaustive explanation of all factors affecting Nigeria's democratic development.

The reliance on secondary and documentary sources also means that the analysis is dependent on the availability, quality and interpretation of existing evidence. In addition, because the study does not draw on interviews or other forms of primary fieldwork, it does not claim to capture the subjective perspectives of political actors or citizens directly. Its contribution instead lies in the systematic interpretation and synthesis of existing documentary evidence across the Fourth Republic.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Political Leadership and Electoral Governance

Elections are a central mechanism through which political authority is acquired, contested and transferred in democratic systems. Their contribution to democratic consolidation, however, depends not only on their regularity but also on the credibility of electoral

institutions, the fairness of political competition and the willingness of political actors to respect established rules. Omotola (2010), in his assessment of Nigeria's 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections, identifies electoral administration, the institutionalisation of political parties and the autonomy of electoral institutions as important factors in the country's democratic development. Electoral governance therefore provides an important basis for examining how political leadership and political elites interact with democratic institutions.

Nigeria's Fourth Republic has maintained an electoral government since 1999, with general elections conducted in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023. This continuity represents an important departure from the instability of Nigeria's earlier republics. However, the persistence of elections has coexisted with recurring problems concerning electoral administration, political competition, violence and institutional credibility. The trajectory is consequently better understood as one of institutional continuity accompanied by uneven electoral development rather than as either uninterrupted progress or continuous decline.

The early elections of the Fourth Republic illustrate the difficulty of translating electoral continuity into credible democratic competition. The European Union Election Observation Mission's assessment of the 2007 elections found that the polls fell far short of basic international standards. It identified poor organisation, insufficient transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud, voter disenfranchisement, unequal conditions for contestants and numerous incidents of violence. The mission also identified significant evidence of fraud during the result-collation process. These findings are significant because they demonstrate that the formal existence of an electoral management body and regular elections does not necessarily ensure that electoral institutions can effectively regulate political competition.

The 2011 elections provide evidence of both institutional improvement and continuing political violence. Human Rights Watch reported that INEC, under Attahiru Jega, significantly improved the conduct of the elections through measures including a new voters' register and greater transparency in the reporting of results. The organisation nevertheless documented continuing incidents of violence, ballot-box hijacking, police misconduct, vote buying, ballot-box stuffing and inflation of results. The presidential election was followed by severe violence in parts of northern Nigeria. Human Rights Watch reported that more than 800 people were killed during three days of post-election violence across 12 northern states, while relief officials estimated that more than 65,000 people were displaced.

The 2011 experience is therefore important to the leadership question because it demonstrates that improvements in electoral administration did not eliminate the political incentives that could produce violence and electoral malpractice. Institutional reforms can improve the capacity of an electoral management body, but their effects are mediated by the behaviour of political actors, party supporters and other groups involved in electoral competition. From the perspective of Elite Theory, the episode illustrates the importance of examining how political interests interact with institutional rules rather than treating institutional performance as independent of elite behaviour.

The 2015 elections marked a significant development in the Fourth Republic's electoral trajectory. The National Democratic Institute described the presidential and legislative elections as the most competitive since the return to civilian rule in 1999 and attributed part of this competitiveness to divisions within the ruling Peoples Democratic Party and the emergence of the All Progressives Congress as a viable opposition party. NDI observers also reported improvements in polling-unit procedures and noted that the use of permanent voter cards and card readers appeared to reduce opportunities for certain forms of electoral fraud.

The presidential election subsequently produced an alternation of power, with incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan conceding defeat to Muhammadu Buhari and the presidency transferring from the governing PDP to the opposition APC. The significance of the episode lies in the fact that electoral competition produced an outcome in which the incumbent political party lost presidential power and the result was accepted without a post-election crisis comparable to that which followed the 2011 presidential election. The electoral victory of the APC provides evidence that political actors can contribute to the stability of democratic competition when electoral outcomes are accepted and political power is transferred through established procedures. It should not, however, be treated on its own as evidence that democratic consolidation had been achieved.

The 2019 elections were affected by administrative and political problems. The joint International Republican Institute/National Democratic Institute observation mission identified weak internal democracy within political parties, opaque campaign financing and candidate-selection processes as continuing weaknesses. The European Union Election Observation Mission also documented problems with polling and results data, mathematical anomalies in examined results forms, missing data and cases in which valid votes exceeded the number of accredited voters. During supplementary elections, EU observers reported intimidation, obstruction, interference by party agents and cases of vote buying. These findings indicate that the institutional problems surrounding electoral competition persisted after the 2015 transfer of presidential power.

The 2023 elections further exposed the uneven development of electoral governance. The European Union Election Observation Mission concluded that shortcomings in electoral law and administration hindered the conduct of well-run and inclusive elections and damaged public trust in INEC. It identified the need for reforms concerning the selection and accountability of INEC members, publication and accessibility of election results, protection of media practitioners, women's participation and the prosecution of electoral offences. The mission's final report also documented violence and intimidation in several parts of the country, including the use of vigilantes by some state-level actors and threats against political opponents and voters.

The electoral experience of the Fourth Republic reveals a combination of institutional continuity, periodic reform and recurring weaknesses. The 2007 elections demonstrated severe failures in electoral administration and integrity; the 2011 elections showed measurable administrative improvements alongside substantial post-election violence; the 2015 elections demonstrated the possibility of an opposition victory and peaceful presidential alternation; while the 2019 and 2023 elections exposed continuing weaknesses in electoral administration, party competition, transparency and accountability.

The evidence therefore suggests that political leadership shapes electoral governance through its interaction with electoral institutions and the incentives of political elites. Political leaders are not merely subjects of electoral rules; they are also competitors within the system and, when in government, actors with substantial influence over the institutional environment in which competition occurs. Where political actors accept electoral uncertainty and institutional constraints, they can contribute to the continuity and legitimacy of democratic competition. Where political incentives encourage the manipulation of institutions, intimidation of opponents or circumvention of electoral rules, the formal persistence of elections may coexist with weaker democratic institutionalisation. Electoral governance in the Fourth Republic consequently illustrates the central argument of this study: political leadership is an important factor in the trajectory of democratic consolidation, but its effects are mediated by elite interests, political incentives and the strength of democratic institutions.

5.2 Political Leadership, Political Parties and Political Competition

Political parties are central to democratic competition because they organise political interests, recruit candidates, structure electoral choices and provide mechanisms through which citizens can participate in government. Their contribution to democratic consolidation, however, depends partly on the extent to which these functions are performed through transparent and internally democratic processes. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, political parties have provided the institutional framework for sustained electoral competition, but their internal organisation has frequently been shaped by elite interests, patronage and struggles over access to political power.

The 2015 elections illustrate both the competitive potential and structural weaknesses of Nigeria's party system. The National Democratic Institute described the elections as the most competitive since the return to civilian rule in 1999, attributing part of this development to divisions within the governing PDP and the emergence of the APC following the merger of four opposition parties in 2013. At the same time, the NDI identified patronage networks, opaque candidate-selection processes and weak internal party democracy as persistent features of the political environment. The emergence of the APC therefore expanded the possibilities for electoral competition without resolving the organisational weaknesses within the party system.

Problems surrounding candidate selection became particularly visible during the 2019 electoral cycle. INEC's review of the 2019 general election recorded concerns about the absence of internal democracy, non-compliance with party constitutions and the Electoral Act, and a lack of transparency in some party primaries. Participants in the Commission's review meetings linked these practices to weakened participation in party activities, defections and extensive litigation over candidate nominations. The IRI/NDI observation mission similarly identified opaque campaign financing, weak internal party democracy and flawed candidate nomination processes as continuing challenges.

These patterns are significant from an elite-theoretical perspective because they demonstrate how political parties can become arenas in which relatively powerful actors exercise disproportionate influence over political recruitment and competition. This does not mean that Nigerian political parties are simply instruments controlled by a single elite group. Rather, they function as sites of negotiation and competition among politicians, party leaders, financiers and other influential actors seeking access to political power. Dan-Azumi (2024), examining political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, similarly characterises the major parties as loose amalgams of powerful interest groups seeking to obtain and retain political power, while identifying weak internal party democracy, fluid membership and poor representation as persistent challenges to party institutionalisation.

Where candidate selection is controlled by narrow groups or lacks transparency, electoral competition may become focused more heavily on access to party structures and political networks than on competition between clearly differentiated programmes. This can weaken the representative function of parties and reduce opportunities for citizens, women and younger political actors to participate in political recruitment. The NDI, for example, identified internal party patronage structures and candidate-selection practices as barriers to broader political inclusion in 2015.

At the same time, the experience of the Fourth Republic demonstrates that political parties have not been uniformly detrimental to democratic development. Party competition has produced changes in governing coalitions, including the 2015 transfer of presidential power from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressives Congress (APC). The emergence of a viable opposition demonstrated that electoral competition could generate uncertainty over political outcomes, an important condition for democratic competition. The subsequent persistence of two dominant parties also provided voters with identifiable alternatives at the national level, even though the organisational and ideological distinctions between them have often remained contested.

The evidence therefore points to a tension within Nigeria's party system. Political parties have helped sustain electoral competition and facilitate alternation in government, while weaknesses in internal democracy, candidate selection and party institutionalisation have constrained the quality of that competition. From the perspective of Elite Theory, this tension reflects the interaction between

political competition and elite interests: political actors require parties to compete for office, but may also seek to control party structures in ways that protect their access to political power.

Political leadership is particularly relevant because leaders do not operate outside these party structures. Presidents, governors, legislators and other political actors both depend on parties for political advancement and participate in shaping their organisation and internal rules. The relationship is therefore reciprocal: parties structure the opportunities available to political leaders, while influential leaders and elites can shape party institutions and candidate-selection processes. Democratic consolidation depends partly on whether this interaction produces parties capable of regulating political competition through predictable, inclusive and internally democratic procedures.

Nigerian political parties have demonstrated considerable resilience and have enabled repeated electoral contests and changes in political control. Yet recurring weaknesses in internal democracy and elite-dominated nomination processes indicate that party institutionalisation remains uneven. Political parties consequently represent an important link between political leadership and democratic consolidation: they can facilitate competitive politics, but their capacity to perform this function depends substantially on whether political elites accept internal rules and allow party institutions to constrain, rather than merely legitimise, the pursuit of political power.

5.3 Political Leadership, Constitutionalism and Institutional Accountability

Democratic consolidation requires political authority to be exercised within established constitutional limits. Constitutionalism therefore requires political actors and institutions to recognise the constitution as a binding framework for the exercise of public power. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the 1999 Constitution established a presidential system based on separation of powers and provided mechanisms through which the legislature and judiciary could constrain executive authority. The effectiveness of these arrangements has nevertheless depended substantially on the willingness and capacity of political actors to operate within institutional limits.

The experience of the Fourth Republic provides evidence of both institutional constraint and attempts by political actors to extend or protect their authority. One of the clearest early examples was the effort during the Obasanjo administration to amend the Constitution in a manner that would have enabled the president to seek a third term. The proposal generated substantial political opposition and ultimately failed to secure the required legislative support. Sklar, Onwudiwe and Kew (2006) identified the episode as an important test of Nigeria's post-1999 constitutional order. Its significance lies not simply in the proposal itself, but in the fact that constitutional procedures and political resistance prevented an alteration of presidential tenure from being achieved through executive preference alone.

The episode illustrates an important feature of constitutionalism: democratic institutions can constrain political leaders when other political actors are able and willing to enforce institutional rules. Political elites are not necessarily unified around the interests of the incumbent executive. Legislators, party actors and other influential groups may have different interests and may use institutional positions to resist attempts to concentrate political authority. Constitutional constraints can therefore become effective when political competition among elites reinforces, rather than undermines, institutional rules.

The relationship between the executive and legislature has remained an important test of this institutional balance throughout the Fourth Republic. The National Assembly possesses constitutionally defined legislative, investigative and oversight powers, while the executive controls substantial policy and administrative authority. Studies of executive–legislative relations have nevertheless identified recurring tensions over appointments, budgets, legislation, oversight and the distribution of political influence. Baba (2019) argues that effective checks and balances require the legislature to exercise its constitutional functions rather than merely operate as an extension of executive authority. More recent scholarship similarly identifies executive–legislative relations as a persistent source of institutional negotiation and conflict within the Fourth Republic.

The 2018 incident involving the National Assembly provides a particularly visible example of the tensions surrounding institutional autonomy. In August 2018, the Senate President reported that armed security personnel had prevented lawmakers and staff from entering the National Assembly complex. The statement described the complex as being under lockdown and characterised the action as an interference with the functioning of the legislature. While the circumstances and political interpretations of the episode were contested, the incident demonstrated the sensitivity of executive–legislative relations and the importance of institutional autonomy to constitutional government.

Judicial independence represents another dimension of institutional accountability. The judiciary performs an important constitutional function by adjudicating disputes involving political authority, electoral outcomes and the interpretation of legal rules. Aka (2014), examining judicial independence under Nigeria's Fourth Republic, identifies political interference, institutional weaknesses and questions surrounding the conditions under which judicial officers exercise their functions as important challenges to judicial independence. The judiciary has nevertheless remained an important avenue for resolving political disputes, particularly electoral disputes, demonstrating that institutional weaknesses do not eliminate the capacity of formal institutions to constrain political actors.

The broader pattern is therefore one of institutional contestation rather than the simple dominance of one branch of government. Political leaders have operated within constitutional structures that provide mechanisms of legislative oversight, judicial review and institutional accountability, but the effectiveness of those mechanisms has varied according to political circumstances and the incentives of actors occupying institutional positions. This distinction is important because constitutional institutions do not enforce themselves. Their effectiveness depends partly on whether political elites regard institutional constraints as legitimate and whether they are prepared to use available mechanisms to enforce them.

From the perspective of Elite Theory, constitutionalism is consequently shaped by the interaction between institutional rules and elite interests. Political leaders may seek to maximise executive authority, while legislators, judges, opposition actors and other elites may either constrain or accommodate such efforts. Democratic consolidation is strengthened when these competing interests are channelled through constitutional procedures rather than through the circumvention of institutional rules.

5.4 Political Leadership and Civil Liberties

Civil liberties provide another important measure of democratic consolidation because they determine the extent to which citizens can participate in political life, express dissent and organise collectively without undue interference from the state. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution provides protections for fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, assembly and association. The experience of the Fourth Republic, however, demonstrates a persistent gap between the formal protection of these rights and their exercise in practice.

The relationship between political leadership and civil liberties is particularly visible in the treatment of political dissent and public criticism. Research on press freedom in Nigeria has identified restrictions on journalists, legal constraints and political pressure as recurring challenges during the Fourth Republic. Adeoluwa and Adedayo (2023), examining the period from 1999 to 2019, argue that although the media has played an important role in democratic development, its effectiveness has been constrained by political, legal and institutional factors.

These constraints have not been uniform across administrations or issues. Security concerns have frequently provided governments with grounds for restricting political expression and public assembly, particularly where authorities have perceived protests or political mobilisation as threats to public order or national security. Freedom House's assessment of Nigeria's political environment under the Buhari administration, for example, documented restrictions affecting journalists, protests and online expression, while also noting that the country retained a relatively vibrant media and civil society environment. This combination is important: the existence of restrictions does not mean that civic space disappeared, but rather that citizens and institutions continued to operate within a contested environment.

The #EndSARS protests of 2020 provide one of the clearest examples of this tension. The protests emerged from longstanding complaints about police abuses and developed into a nationwide mobilisation demanding police reform and broader accountability. The government announced the dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad on October 11, 2020, but security forces subsequently used force against protesters in several locations. Human Rights Watch documented the use of excessive force during the protests and reported that protesters were subjected to arrests, intimidation and other forms of repression. Amnesty International separately documented killings and other abuses during the crackdown and reported that, one year later, those responsible had not been brought to justice.

The #EndSARS movement demonstrated the capacity of citizens, particularly young Nigerians, to use digital platforms and public mobilisation to challenge government institutions. Research on the movement describes it as a significant mobilisation for police accountability and identifies the interaction between online organisation and street protest as an important feature of contemporary Nigerian civic participation. The subsequent response demonstrated, however, that the ability of citizens to mobilise does not necessarily translate into effective institutional accountability.

The government's suspension of Twitter in June 2021 further illustrated the tension between state authority and freedom of expression. The suspension followed Twitter's removal of a post by President Muhammadu Buhari. Human Rights Watch reported that the ban restricted access to a platform that had become important for political discussion and mobilisation, including during the #EndSARS protests. The ECOWAS Court subsequently found that the ban violated rights to freedom of expression, access to information and media freedom.

These episodes are relevant to the leadership question because they demonstrate how political authority can shape the practical boundaries of civil liberties. Political leaders operate within constitutional and legal frameworks, but their governments also control institutions with coercive and regulatory powers, including the police, security agencies and communications regulators. The exercise of these powers can either reinforce citizens' rights or narrow the space available for dissent.

At the same time, civil-liberties outcomes cannot be attributed exclusively to presidential leadership. Security threats, institutional weaknesses, legal frameworks and the conduct of state and non-state actors also affect the protection of rights. The Fourth Republic therefore presents a more complicated picture than a simple progression from greater to lesser freedom. Formal constitutional protections have remained in place, while citizens, journalists, civil society organisations and courts have continued to contest restrictions on those protections.

The evidence nevertheless suggests that the conduct of political leaders and state institutions matters to the institutionalisation of democratic norms. Democratic consolidation requires not merely the constitutional recognition of civil liberties but the consistent application of those protections, particularly when citizens exercise them in ways that challenge those in power. Where governments tolerate criticism, protest and independent organisation, democratic participation can become more deeply institutionalised. Where dissent is met with coercion or administrative restriction, the formal survival of democratic institutions may coexist with weaker democratic practice.

5.5 Civil Society and Democratic Accountability

Civil society provides an important counterweight to the concentration of political power because it creates spaces through which citizens and organised groups can monitor government, articulate demands and seek accountability outside formal political institutions. In Nigeria, civil society organisations played a significant role in the struggle against military rule and continued to participate in democratic politics after the establishment of the Fourth Republic. Their post-1999 role has therefore been less about securing a transition to civilian rule and more about influencing how civilian government operates.

Literature on Nigeria's Fourth Republic indicates that civil society organisations have remained involved in electoral observation, governance monitoring and public accountability. Animashaun (2008) argues that, contrary to expectations that civil society would become less relevant after the return to civilian rule, Nigerian civil society organisations continued to engage government and promote accountability. More recent research examining organisations including the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Alliances for Credible Elections (ACE) and Stakeholder Democracy Network similarly identifies election observation and civic engagement as important contributions to democratic consolidation.

Electoral politics provides one important arena for this engagement. Civil society organisations have monitored elections, reported irregularities, promoted voter education and advocated electoral reform. Their activities do not replace formal electoral institutions, but they provide an additional layer of observation and public scrutiny. This is significant because electoral accountability does not end when votes are counted; it also depends on the availability of independent actors capable of documenting institutional failures and placing pressure on political and electoral authorities.

Civil society has also played a role in monitoring public resources and government performance. Ugbudu and Jev (2021) identify budget monitoring, expenditure tracking and project monitoring as areas in which Nigerian civil society organisations have sought to strengthen transparency and accountability. They nevertheless note limitations including the concentration of many organisations in urban areas and the difficulty of achieving broad-based participation. These limitations are important because civil society should not be treated as a unified or universally representative actor. Its effectiveness varies according to organisational capacity, access to information, funding, geographic reach and the political environment in which organisations operate.

The #EndSARS movement further demonstrated the changing relationship between civil society and political accountability. Although the movement was not organised in the conventional form of a single civil society organisation, it illustrated how citizens could use digital networks to organise collective action outside established political institutions. The government's response, including the repression of protesters and subsequent restrictions affecting supporters, also demonstrated the limits that political authorities could place on civic mobilisation.

From the perspective of Elite Theory, civil society is significant because it provides a mechanism through which groups outside governing elites can challenge the exercise of political power. Political elites control formal state institutions, but they do not possess complete control over political discourse or collective action. Civil society organisations, journalists, professional groups and social movements can expose abuses, influence public debate and create political costs for decisions made by those in power.

The relationship is nevertheless contested. Civil society organisations depend partly on the political and legal environment established by the government, while governments may regard critical organisations as political opponents rather than independent accountability actors. The resulting tension can narrow civic space and make sustained monitoring more difficult. Yet the persistence of civil society engagement throughout the Fourth Republic indicates that democratic accountability is not produced exclusively within formal state institutions.

5.6 Political Leadership and the Trajectory of Democratic Consolidation

The preceding analysis demonstrates that Nigeria's democratic trajectory between 1999 and 2023 cannot be explained either by the persistence of elections alone or by the conduct of individual political leaders in isolation. The Fourth Republic has established a degree of institutional continuity that distinguishes it from Nigeria's earlier democratic experiments, but the quality of democratic consolidation has remained uneven across electoral governance, political parties, constitutionalism, institutional accountability and civil liberties.

The evidence from electoral governance shows this unevenness most clearly. Elections have been conducted regularly since 1999 and have produced changes in political control, including the transfer of presidential power from the PDP to the APC in 2015. Yet recurring weaknesses in electoral administration, party competition, political violence, vote buying and institutional credibility have persisted across successive electoral cycles. The evidence therefore supports a distinction between the endurance of electoral democracy and the deeper institutionalisation of democratic rules.

Political parties have also provided the principal organisational structure for political competition and have enabled alternation in government, but weaknesses in internal democracy and candidate selection have repeatedly created opportunities for powerful political actors to influence political recruitment. The party system has consequently sustained competition while simultaneously limiting the extent to which competition is organised through strongly institutionalised and internally democratic organisations.

The analysis of constitutionalism and institutional accountability produces a comparable finding. The Fourth Republic contains formal mechanisms of separation of powers, legislative oversight and judicial review, and these mechanisms have at times constrained political authority. The failure of the third-term initiative demonstrated that political leaders could be checked by institutional and political resistance, while the continuing tensions between the executive, legislature and judiciary demonstrate that institutional autonomy remains contested. Constitutional rules therefore matter, but their practical force depends partly on the behaviour and incentives of the political actors operating within them.

Civil liberties further demonstrate the importance of political leadership to democratic practice. Constitutional protections for expression, association and assembly have remained in place, while Nigeria has retained an active media and civil society environment. At the same time, the treatment of protests, journalists and online expression demonstrates that political authorities can narrow civic space when dissent is perceived as a challenge to state authority. Civil society provides an important counterweight to these pressures. Organisations engaged in election observation, governance monitoring, public advocacy and litigation have expanded the range of actors capable of scrutinising government.

These findings support the central proposition of the study that political leadership is an important factor in Nigeria's democratic trajectory, but not an independent or sufficient explanation for it. Political leaders operate within an environment shaped by political parties, elite networks, electoral institutions, legislatures, courts, civil society and broader political incentives. Their decisions can strengthen or weaken democratic institutions, but the effects of those decisions are mediated by the capacity of other actors and institutions to impose constraints.

Political power remains concentrated among actors with privileged access to state institutions and political resources, but elites are neither politically homogeneous nor uniformly opposed to democratic institutions. Their interests can lead them to compete against one another, defend institutional constraints or attempt to circumvent them. Democratic consolidation therefore depends partly on whether elite competition is channelled through predictable democratic rules and whether political actors accept those rules even when they produce outcomes contrary to their immediate interests.

The findings therefore show that political leadership has shaped democratic consolidation principally through the way political authority has been exercised within, and sometimes in tension with, democratic institutions. Leadership has influenced electoral governance, party competition, constitutional accountability and civil liberties, but its effects have consistently interacted with elite interests, institutional capacity and political constraints. Democratic consolidation in Nigeria is a question of whether political institutions and political actors can make democratic rules sufficiently authoritative to govern political competition and the exercise of power.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

Nigeria's Fourth Republic represents the country's longest uninterrupted period of civilian government, but its longevity should not be equated automatically with democratic consolidation. The evidence examined in this study shows a political system in which democratic institutions have survived and, in some respects, developed, while important weaknesses remain in electoral governance, party institutionalisation, constitutional accountability and the protection of civil liberties.

The study finds that political leadership has shaped this trajectory through the exercise of executive authority, participation in electoral and party competition, interaction with accountability institutions and responses to political dissent. However, leadership does not operate independently of political structures. The behaviour of political leaders is shaped by elite interests, party organisations, institutional incentives and the capacity of other political and social actors to impose constraints.

The central argument of the study is therefore that political leadership is an important intervening factor in Nigeria's democratic consolidation, but not a sufficient explanation for its uneven trajectory. Democratic outcomes emerge from the interaction between leaders, political elites, institutions and citizens. Where political competition is governed by predictable rules and political actors accept institutional constraints, democratic institutions acquire greater authority. Where political interests encourage the manipulation or circumvention of those rules, institutional continuity can coexist with weaker democratic consolidation.

Nigeria's experience consequently demonstrates that the durability of democracy and the quality of democracy are related but distinct questions. The Fourth Republic has demonstrated considerable resilience in surviving repeated political crises, elections and changes in governing parties. The continuing challenge is to deepen the institutionalisation of democratic rules so that political competition, the exercise of public authority and the protection of citizens' rights become less dependent on the preferences of individual political actors.

6.2 Policy and Institutional Implications

The findings suggest several implications for strengthening democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

First, democratic institutions require greater practical autonomy and accountability. The analysis demonstrates that constitutional rules are insufficient where institutions lack the capacity or independence to enforce them. Reforms should therefore focus on strengthening the operational autonomy, transparency and accountability of electoral, legislative, judicial and other oversight institutions. Institutional reform should be designed not merely to create formal independence but to make institutions more capable of resisting political interference and enforcing established rules.

Second, political parties require stronger internal democratic mechanisms**.** Candidate selection is one of the principal points at which elite interests shape electoral competition. Political parties should therefore strengthen transparent nomination procedures, enforce their own constitutions and provide meaningful avenues for participation by party members. Legal regulation can support these objectives, but the experience of the Fourth Republic suggests that formal rules alone are insufficient where party leaders have incentives to circumvent them.

Third, the protection of civic and political freedoms should remain central to democratic reform. Freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly allows citizens and civil society organisations to scrutinise government and contest the exercise of political authority. Protecting these freedoms is therefore not peripheral to democratic consolidation; it is part of the institutional environment through which accountability is produced. The experience of civil society and citizen mobilisation during the Fourth Republic demonstrates the importance of preserving this space.

Fourth, accountability mechanisms should create meaningful consequences for violations of democratic rules. The findings indicate that democratic institutions become vulnerable when political actors can disregard institutional constraints without effective consequences. Strengthening electoral-offence enforcement, legislative oversight, judicial independence and mechanisms for public accountability would help alter the incentives surrounding political competition.

DECLARATIONS

Author's Note: This article draws on research originally conducted for the author's undergraduate dissertation (B.Sc.) at Lagos State University, Nigeria, in 2021. The research has been substantially revised, updated, and expanded for publication.

Funding: This research received no external funding from any grant, institution, or organisation.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this research or its publication.

REFERENCES

1) Adeoluwa, B. M., & Adedayo, A. M. (2023). Mass media, press freedom and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–2019). British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies, 4(2), 77–91.
2) Aka, P. C. (2014). Judicial independence under Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Problems and prospects. California Western International Law Journal, 45(1), 1–79.
3) Agbude, G. A., & Afolabi, T. (2022). Political leadership and democratic sustainability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. FUDMA Journal of Politics and International Affairs (FUJOPIA).
4) Amnesty International. (2021). Nigeria: No justice for victims of police brutality one year after #EndSARS protests. Amnesty International.
5) Animashaun, M. A. (2008). Civil society and accountability in governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Ibadan Journal of the Social Sciences, 6(1), 22–33.
6) Baba, Y. T. (2019). Executive–legislature relations: Evidence from Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In J. Y. Fashagba et al. (Eds.), The Nigerian National Assembly (pp. 143–164). Springer.
7) Burton, M., Gunther, R., & Higley, J. (1992). Introduction: Elite transformations and democratic regimes. In J. Higley & R. Gunther (Eds.), Elites and democratic consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe (pp. 1–37). Cambridge University Press.
8) Dan-Azumi, J. D. (2024). Political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, 1999–2019. In T. Poguntke & W. Hofmeister (Eds.), Political parties and the crisis of democracy: Organization, resilience, and reform (pp. 512–536). Oxford University Press.
9) Dahl, R. A. (1971). Polyarchy: Participation and opposition. Yale University Press.
10) Dahl, R. A. (1989). Democracy and its critics. Yale University Press.
11) Diamond, L. (1999). Developing democracy: Toward consolidation. Johns Hopkins University Press.
12) European Union Election Observation Mission. (2007). Nigeria 2007: Final report: Presidential, National Assembly, gubernatorial and State House of Assembly elections. European Union Election Observation Mission.
13) European Union Election Observation Mission. (2019). European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2019 final report: General elections 23 February, 9 and 23 March 2019. European Union Election Observation Mission.

14) European Union Election Observation Mission. (2023). European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2023 final report: General elections 25 February and 18 March 2023. European Union Election Observation Mission.
15) Fatai, A. S. (2017). Elections and democratic consolidation in West Africa: Comparative study of Nigeria and Senegal, 1999–2012 [Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal].
16) Freedom House. (2023). Nigeria: Freedom in the world 2023 country report. Freedom House.
17) Human Rights Watch. (2011). Nigeria: Post-election violence killed 800. Human Rights Watch.
18) Human Rights Watch. (2021). Nigeria: A year on, no justice for #EndSARS crackdown. Human Rights Watch.
19) Ibietan, J. I., & Ajayi, O. O. (2015). The governing elite and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: An appraisal of the Fourth Republic. Journal of Human and Social Science Research, 6(1), 14–21.
20) Ikeanyibe, O. (2014). Internal party democracy, party candidature, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Politics & Policy, 42(5), 769–804.
21) International Republican Institute, & National Democratic Institute. (2019). IRI/NDI Nigeria international election observation mission final report. International Republican Institute & National Democratic Institute.
22) Katsina, A. M. (2016). The politics of presidential elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Paper presented at the National Conference on the Dynamics of Democratic Practice in Nigeria: 1999–2015, Aminu Kano Center for Democratic Research, Mambayya House, Bayero University, Kano.
23) Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. (1996). Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe. Johns Hopkins University Press.
24) Michels, R. (1915). Political parties: A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy. Hearst's International Library.
25) Modibbo-Umar, A., & Isumonah, V. A. (2023). Presidential leadership styles in the Fourth Republic. In W. Adebanwi (Ed.), Democracy and Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Governance, political economy, and party politics 1999–2023 (pp. 168–191). Boydell & Brewer.
26) Mosca, G. (1939). The ruling class. McGraw-Hill.
27) National Democratic Institute. (2015). Statement of the National Democratic Institute's international observer mission to Nigeria's March 28 presidential and legislative elections. National Democratic Institute.
28) Nnani, N. E. (2022). The politics of national leadership and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy, 12(2).
29) O'Donnell, G., Schmitter, P. C., & Whitehead, L. (Eds.). (1986). Transitions from authoritarian rule: Prospects for democracy. Johns Hopkins University Press.
30) Ogbeidi, M. M. (2012). Political leadership and corruption in Nigeria since 1960: A socio-economic analysis. Journal of Nigeria Studies, 1(2).
31) Omotola, J. S. (2010). Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic. African Affairs, 109(437), 535–553.
32) Omotosho, F. (2013). Governance crisis and democracy in Nigeria, 1999–2012. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 4(14).
33) Oni, E. O., Erameh, N. I., & Oladejo, A. O. (2017). Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Electoral administration and the challenge of democratic consolidation. African Journal of Governance and Development, 6(2), 38–72.
34) Pareto, V. (1935). The mind and society: A treatise on general sociology. Harcourt, Brace.
35) Przeworski, A. (1991). Democracy and the market: Political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Cambridge University Press.
36) Schedler, A. (1998). What is democratic consolidation? Journal of Democracy, 9(2), 91–107.
37) Schreier, M. (2012). Qualitative content analysis in practice. SAGE Publications.
38) Sklar, R. L., Onwudiwe, E., & Kew, D. (2006). Nigeria: Completing Obasanjo's legacy. Journal of Democracy, 17(3), 100–115.
39) Ugbudu, M. I., & Jev, A. (2021). The role of civil society organizations in achieving transparent and accountable governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Jalingo Journal of Social and Management Sciences, 3(3), 227–238.
40) Villalón, L. A., & VonDoepp, P. (Eds.). (2005). The fate of Africa's democratic experiments: Elites and institutions. Indiana University Press.
41) Wani, H. A., & Suwirta, A. (2013). Democratisation in Nigeria: Problems and future prospects. SOSIOHUMANIKA: Jurnal Pendidikan Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan, 6(2), 143–158.