

Documentary Appraisal of Democratic Governance and Freedom of the Press for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study evaluated Nigeria's democratic government and press freedom in order to strengthen sustainable development. In a nutshell, it was determined how to guarantee that people have the freedom to perform their "modus operandi" without interference by analyzing the condition of the press under Nigeria's constitution. The study's data came from official sources including books, journal articles, newspaper articles, websites, the Nigerian constitution, and other pertinent publications. The study's goal is to comprehend how press freedom has been maintained for democratic governance. The work also looks at Nigeria's press freedom and democratic government practices. However, social responsibility and libertarian ideologies serve as the study's theoretical pillars. The study's findings demonstrated that, if it is not violated by established authorities or forces of the elite, press freedom—which also ensures individual freedom—will be the most effective instrument for fostering sustainable development and ensuring democratic government. There have been calls for the country's democratic government and press freedom to be enhanced in order to promote sustainable development. The study did come to the conclusion that the independence and freedom of the press—which is regarded as the fourth estate of the realm—are essential to Nigeria's democratic governance and sustainable development. Without press freedom, democratic governance is actually difficult to experience.

Keywords: Democratic Governance, Freedom of the Press, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

I. Introduction

Various disputes predominate in Nigeria's public sphere, particularly in light of the nation's return to democracy under the fourth republic since 1999. Democracy is defined as a form of government that allows participation by all citizens of a country without the use of any form of discrimination; however, it is also associated with the freedom of speech and debate, which

has, in a sense, allowed the press to participate in various contentious issues that are on the government's daily agenda. The Nigerian press has been a crucial ally in the struggle to bolster democratic governance, it suffices to say. Nigerians typically hold the media in high regard, especially given the dubious democratic credentials of our political parties as the pioneers of democratic consolidation. Press coverage of national importance is typically substantial, informing the public and the government.

Democracy is the preferred system of government on the entire earth. The public should be encouraged to participate in politics and to respect human rights, according to the administration. The critical press's assessment is entirely necessary for society's survival and overall advancement and is a crucial aspect of democratic governance. However, in order to have a trustworthy and just society, communication is an essential component of governance required for the encouragement of socio-political growth. In order to have good sustainable growth as well as enduring democratic government, there is an essential need for an admirable inter-relationship among the various elements of society. This also affected the sphere of citizens and states and their continual interaction, as well as other areas, in a well-established democracy.

Considering its essential roles in democratic governments around the world, the press has always been involved in the fight to advance the rights of a credible democratic process in particular and in governance generally. In a non-democratic environment, the press won't be able to function regularly. This does not, however, imply that the press has always handled crises appropriately. Press also has teething issues, which are assumed to be the product of both internal and external factors. It has been observed that the press circle's professional and ethical facets cause internal variables to emerge. The ethical issues, professional misconduct offenses, blackmail, defamation, and fabrication of data have affected their expertise. On the other hand, the external factors may be considered as pressures that originate outside of the media and unduly affect the press sector. This influence could come from a range of interest groups in the political, economic, cultural, and other spheres.

An independent, pluralistic, and free press must be formed, maintained, and promoted for a nation to flourish economically and develop democracy. Information is a public good in every country. Because of this, Section 22 of the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 accords media professionals the prestigious position of being part of the fourth estates of the realm and Nigeria's national conscience. Since the law is supposed to take precedence over all other rules

in a constitutional democratic process, these professionals should use their respective newspapers, broadcast stations, online and social media platforms to promote the upholding of the rule of law and respect for the supremacy of the law. Information is crucial and should be used, or rather, the media should be deployed, to ensure that there is accountability and openness in government and to ensure that no one establishes themselves above the law.

The "Freedom of Information Act" and press freedom are not viewed as public goods by many governments around the world, especially in developing nations. Because of corruption, government officials withhold important information from the general population and the media. Some people considered allowing access to public relations data that promotes their brand, but they will do all in their power to prevent the free flow of information. They do this in an effort to impede the use of information for the greater benefit. No government in the world—whether it be in America, Britain, or Nigeria—wants a completely free media, according to Oso (Ojo, et al., 2021) who made this claim at one of the African Journalists Conferences. Every government in the world is only interested in trying to control or influence the media. As a result, talks and strategy are constantly involved in the government's relationship with the media.

In Chapter 4, Section 39 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, it is stated that "Every person shall have the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and the freedom to receive and impart ideas and information without hindrance," emphasizing the significance of free speech to democratic systems and procedures within Nigeria's borders. A number of pieces of extant literature, like the well-known African Media Barometer of Nigeria report published in 2019 have discussed the existence of a legal framework protecting freedom of expression and the media (Ojo, et al; 2021). The study, however, aims to understand the relationship between press freedom and Nigeria's democratic government. Democratic consolidation, in accordance with Ojo (2003:5) and Sarton (1992), is the ability of a society to promote and preserve democratic standards over a protracted period of time with little to no threat of distorting the democratic process across all areas of effort.

II. Conceptual Clarifications

The conceptual clarifications to be examined here are the three important variables, namely, democratic governance, press freedom, and sustainable development.

a. Democratic Governance

The idea of "democratic governance" is now used to influence public sector change in many nations around the world. The majority of academics viewed the idea as a novel theory of governance that had made great headway in the academic community. On the other hand, the perspective on public administration considered the significance of public management, public policy, and local government institutions. But only a small number of academics had tried to outline the idea of democratic governance. Ndwakhulu (2022) defined democratic governance as a system in which people and other stakeholders, like civil society and the commercial sector, are actively involved in decision-making. This is what he meant by "democratically elected structures." Responsibility and accountability are essential to democratic governance. In this type of government, institutions interact with one another and conduct their own business in line with democratic values and procedures. On the other hand, a democratic nation, government, or political system is always led freely by elected representatives.

Sarton (1992) and Ojo (2003:5) define democratic consolidation as the capacity of the polity to promote and uphold democratic values throughout time with little to no threat of distorting the democratic process across all fields of activity. Beyond the development of democratic institutions and accepted democratic practices, democratic governance is a culture. It entails promoting democracy's long-term viability, which includes preserving the capacity for the separation of powers and the independence of the executive and legislative branches, the ability to exercise power in accordance with the rule of law, the respect for fundamental liberties and rights, and the openness and accountability of the civil service at both the national and local levels. An entire range of political involvement is adopted by a nation-state that upholds democratic governance methods, and it accepts a pluralistic system of political parties, a robust civil society, and the press..

Through strengthened democratic institutions, women and minorities are assisted and incorporated into all facets of the government and society. Again, a nation-state that upholds the dignity and rights of children is an example of democratic government. In order to promote a culture of democratic government, a comprehensive plan for efficient, sustainable government for and by all citizens is required (<https>). To strengthen democratic principles, the European Committee on Democracy and Governance has listed the use of artificial intelligence by public administration, multi-level governance, emergency response, local social services, and electronic voting. These new forms of deliberative and participatory democracy, green

public administration, and the principles of good democratic governance have also been mentioned (Civil Society Portal).

b. Freedom of the Press

The meaning of the word "freedom" varies depending on who you ask. For instance, the opinions of Liberals and Conservatives on the subject vary. But before we examine freedom in connection to "Freedom of the Press" in further detail, let's define freedom here. Due to its sincerity, this will help avoid the topic from being completely misconstrued. Therefore, "freedom" simply means having the power or right to act as desired without restriction or interference from outside sources. Freedom is frequently equated with liberty and autonomy in the sense of making one's own rules. To put it another way, "freedom" refers to freedom that is unfettered in the present.

Press freedom has developed into a key indicator of political stability and a driver of individual and societal development on a worldwide scale. However, neither press freedom nor censorship or other forms of control that are exclusive to governments apply just to journalists. It is recognized as the open flow of information and unlimited access to information. In another setting, press freedom is considered in terms of society involvement or the individual's right to free expression, subject to restrictions in accordance with the country's constitutional rights. The right of the public to know is fundamental to press freedom, and its denial weakens other freedoms. Press experts, academics, and even members of the general public are deeply worried about the issue of whether press freedom exists in Nigeria or if it is merely an ideal. The press, which is seen as the fourth arm of government, is believed to reflect the political, economic, and social aspects of the environment in which it functions, which is why it is considered to do so.

One of the widely accepted measures for determining the degree of democratic or national development of a polity is the protection of press freedom. In developing nations, press freedom refers to the right of everyone to freely express themselves verbally, in writing, or in any other original or personally significant way. This was ratified on December 10th, 1948, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Saliu, 2010):

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and seek to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.”

However, "freedom of speech" is typically safeguarded by the same laws as "freedom of expression," giving both the public and the media equivalent legal protection.

To be clear, the terms "freedom of the press" and "freedom of the media" as they are used in this study refer to the fundamental notion that everyone's right to freely express themselves and communicate through a range of media, including printed and electronic media, should be upheld. This is crucial to how we comprehend the study. Such freedom indicates the absence of interference from a power-hungry state; its preservation may be sought through the constitution or other avenues of security and immunity from the law. In contrast, towns, law enforcement organizations, and governments receive payment for their copyrights in paid media. For instance, Section 39 (1) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution in Nigeria protects the freedom of expression. Despite this constitutional guarantee, the government in Nigeria has long controlled the media and continues to do so today (1999 Constitution of Nigeria). However, the press freedom can only continue to exist if it is given the authority and freedom to educate the public of everyday social events through recording and the use of modern media, including radio, television, social media, newspapers, etc., in addition to its own expression. Every member of society should have the right to expect that the press's right to free expression also applies to them. This will demonstrate how the democratic process works.

c. Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has become more popular in today's development debate. The idea nevertheless raises questions from a number of people who want to know what it is all about and what it implies for development theory and practice, despite being widely used and gaining huge popularity over time. On the other hand, sustainable development is a guiding philosophy that seeks to accomplish human development goals while also allowing natural systems to fulfill human demands for vital natural resources and ecosystem services. The outcome is a society that meets human needs without endangering the stability and integrity of the Earth's natural systems (Mensah, 2019). "Inter- and intra-generational equity," the central concern of sustainable development, is founded on three key pillars: the environment, the economy, and society.

Sustainable development is defined as meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, according to the Brundtland Report from 1987. In the current sense of the phrase, it has mostly focused on economic development, social

development, and environmental conservation for future generations. This concept is connected to the normative idea of sustainability. Based on this, UNESCO created the distinctions between the two concepts as follows: Despite the fact that "sustainability" is generally seen as a long-term goal, "sustainable development" refers to a number of approaches and plans for getting there (Purvis, et al., 2019).

III. Theoretical Framework

a. Social Responsibility Theory

Several concepts provide justification for the philosophical and analytical foundations needed to appreciate the critical functions played by the press in society. The "social responsibility" idea, which is congruent with the study's setting among other things, will be accepted in this work in light of the aforementioned. Given this, the social responsibility theory sees the media as an institution that performs a number of significant roles, some of which include making positive contributions to the overall improvement of society. While performing this responsibility and subject to external regulation on the other, the press enjoys freedom. According to Christian (2004), the notion of social responsibility encourages professionalism in the media as well as press objectivity and accountability. The theory can be appropriately described as a byproduct of the industrial revolution and the emerging multi-media society that provided the favorable environment for the press. It is predicated on the idea that while the media should be given freedom, it must still be held accountable for her professional actions (Senam, 2014).

The social responsibility idea, it should be noted, argues that everyone has the right to free speech, subject to some limitations, and that the media should demonstrate a strong commitment to the public good and the welfare of society as a whole. This would provide the media the chance to have a big impact on how democratically society is now governed.

b. Libertarian Theory

The libertarian interpretation of the free press, on the other hand, advocates for the press's right to criticize any institution, including the government, but also holds them responsible for maintaining public order. It is crucial to support press freedom and the spread of trustworthy, accurate information in order to determine what comprises the society's general interests. Regardless of the disagreement over the concept of the public interest, McQuail (2007:165) points out that it is obvious that the press has been subject to extensive control and regulation

by the law and other formal or informal means everywhere, with the aim of getting them to do what the public wants or to hinder them from doing what it doesn't.

In this situation, it is feasible to argue that press freedom is protected by the public interest since it is an essential human right that gives people the unassailable right to discuss anything that the law does not expressly exclude. According to the social responsibility thesis, the public interest is defined by press freedom and liberty. In order to assess the level of public interest, it is anticipated that certain factors will need to be highlighted. These include the right to freedom of the press to publish, the diversity of information, opinion, and culture, the plurality of press ownership, widespread broadcasting, the promotion of national security and public order, the avoidance of harm and offense to society and individuals, the respect for individuals and universally fundamental human rights, the professionalism and accountability that the press is expected to uphold, and the standard of information that is made available to the public.

IV. Overview of Democratic Governance in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the majority of the governments don't operate in accordance with democratic principles. This has been Nigeria's biggest problem. It would be challenging to accomplish sustainable development in such an environment. Despite academics' failure to agree on a definition for the term, corruption continues to be a crucial example of unfavorable behavior. Scholars have, however, offered a variety of definitions for the idea because what constitutes corruption and what is excluded from it varied from one institution or culture to another. In order to support the idea that corruption is related to norms and the prevalent political culture in each context, the Nigerian case might be used. For instance, Olusegun Obasanjo, the former president, awarded the Abuja Rail Project in 2007 without a memorandum of understanding or an engineering design, according to Etim Abak, the project manager of a Chinese civil engineering and construction company, who testified before the Senate Committee on the Federal Capital Territory on Monday, 16 February 2016. The former Minister of the FCT, Mallam Nasir el-Rufai, was accused of signing a contract of \$841.645, 898 million, according to another claim. The length of the project, which was originally to be 60.67 kilometers, was later cut to 45 kilometers without paying back the money for the 15.67 kilometers that were cut from the project, according to information provided to the committee (The Punch, Tuesday, 16 February, 2016:9).

The most obvious sign of Nigeria's continuing corruption, however, is the "Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index," which placed Nigeria as the 144th least corrupt

nation out of 180 nations in 2018 with a score of 27 over 100. This is still a bad scenario in the land of countries. Due to the quantity of stolen wealth the country encounters each year and the lack of openness, a democratic tenet, Nigeria will find it difficult to document a sustainable development. The political elites are in charge of a sizable percentage of the money that has been stolen from Nigeria, working hand in hand with their corrupt bankers, lawyers, and bureaucrats (The Punch, Wednesday, October 18, 2019:22).

When speaking with the Queen of England in 2016, former British Prime Minister David Cameron referred to Nigeria and Afghanistan as being "fantastically corrupt" due to the country's corruption and the corrupt Nigerian authorities' mishandling of the nation's resources. This claim was reiterated in an article from the Economist Magazine from October 10, 2019, which showed that since Nigeria's independence in 1960, roughly \$582 billion had been stolen from it (The Punch, Wednesday, October 16, 2019). Corruption has incalculable costs. In addition to promoting economic redundancies, corruption has the power to thwart actual growth and sustained development. A staggering number of households are impacted by corruption, which also undermines public trust in their government and reduces the opportunities accessible to diligent residents. It weakens a country's capacity to lead in national and sustainable development and poses a serious threat to its security. However, it is now known that corruption is one of the pervasive issues that has hampered Nigeria's sustainable growth and undermined the meager developmental advancements that Nigeria was meant to have accomplished in the twenty-first century.

It is clear that, despite knowing that corruption has the potential to undermine the economy and aggravate poverty, government officials routinely engage in it, and that citizens who are expected to oppose it frequently do so because of the benefits they receive from it. However, transparency will only be successful in ending corrupt behaviors if it occurs in the context of widely acknowledged social values. The corrupt can only be uncovered and brought to justice when the general people of a country views corruption as morally abhorrent. According to Thomas Hobbes, there are no moral or legal repercussions in man's natural condition of lawlessness, therefore one can be openly corrupt without being concerned about the justice system.

Regardless matter how long it has been organized, Nigeria, like every other nation, still struggles to enhance its democratic nature. In this setting, the concept of "democratic governance consolidation" has become a serious roadblock. This idea implies taking steps to

firmly maintain democracy. It also has to do with supporting all democratic ideals to the point where they are resilient and unaffected by setbacks. It also has to do with how far a democracy may advance before taking preferences and aspirations into account when determining election outcomes. Consolidating democratic governance can also mean that a democracy is functioning in a way that election results, particularly those involving the triumph of an opposition political party, can be forecast without the use of force to undermine democratic ideals. However, a setup that guarantees free and fair elections is referred to as the consolidation of democratic rule (Saliu, 2009).

Democracy's main underlying aspect is how each political system and the ruling class institutionalize, domesticate, internalize, and perpetuate its core principles before combining them with democratic government. The democratic practice entails applying democratic ideas to the actual administration of government. However, the idea triggers a wide range of responses and counterresponses in Nigeria from both groups and individuals. The responses show how the laws of opposites develop strength and conditionally direct human behavior and conduct in many realms of existence. In the Nigerian context, the ruling class applauds a system that tolerates corruption and guards their own entrenched self-interests, regardless of how it harms the general welfare. On the other hand, based on the recurrence of system-induced violence, violations of fundamental human rights, and a lack of the most basic essentials of existence, the public who suffer from poor leadership and the pains of mistaken priorities in governance generally criticize the. The latter category frequently appears vulnerable to the effects of deteriorating infrastructure and becomes the proximate victims of all the country's negative effects of systemic failure and corruption.

The consequences are that good governance in democratic systems is threatened by openness, accountability, respect for human rights, and adherence to the rule of law, but these are largely absent in Nigerian systems. It provides as evidence of sincere dedication to democratic practice when there is unrestricted respect to fundamental democratic principles (Okibe, 2017). Constitutionalism and the principle of the rule of law are essential for democratic governance and the safety of people's lives and property. The rule of law is one of democracy's guiding principles. However, democracy as a concept and a system extends beyond popular sovereignty. According to the applicable nation's constitutional framework, it signifies a significant and inclusive contest for public office through routine free, fair, and credible elections. The rule of law, which is supported by an independent judicial system, implies a functional legal framework that ensures the resolution of disputes between organizations or

persons and the state on the one hand, and between the two on the other. Additionally, the rule of law helps to ensure that contracts and property rights are respected through democratic governance, preventing the government and powerful individuals from acting arbitrarily (Adamolekun, 2016).

Since gaining independence in 1960, the nation's historical antecedents have seen ups and downs on the road to democratic rule. Inter-tribal wars, military takeovers, civil wars, electoral crises, census crises, riots by Aba women, kidnappings, terrorism and counter-terrorism, among other severe blows to the nation since its independence in 1960 have prevented lasting development. Abati (2006) asserts that the administration lacks the political will to address the contemporary problems associated with democratic governance. Nigeria, an oil-rich country, experienced sociopolitical upheaval, high levels of corruption, extensive social unrest, and poor macroeconomic management; all of these issues contributed to emphasize Nigeria's weakness as a non-democratic state (Akinola, 2008). Remember that Nigeria's multi-ethnic conglomeration fractured its multi-party system and legislature during the first republic to the point where the prime minister needs the support of a political alliance to obtain the requisite power to administer the newly independent country. The Agency or Commission in charge of the electoral process must genuinely uphold its independence in order to firmly establish democratic governance. Such an agency should take all necessary steps to become independent in all circumstances in order to enforce the proper rules or laws pertaining to electoral conducts. In actuality, such an organization shouldn't make partisan remarks that would imply that the public is losing faith in its independence. The public's perception of the legitimacy of the electoral organization or commission is ultimately influenced by the funding method employed by the electoral agency. If the funding for the independent commission in charge of the electoral process was not strongly impacted by politics, its programs and reputation would improve.

For democratic governance to be firmly established, every citizen, regardless of geography, must be guaranteed the right to exercise their civic responsibility to vote and to be elected (franchise). Denial of fundamental human rights has the potential to erode democracy's foundation. Everyone is believed to have some talent, thus it makes sense that in order to have a sustainable development, each citizen's talents and creative energies must be effectively utilized. Without providing every citizen a chance to express their opinions, it will be difficult to determine whether democracy has been strengthened. Public opinion is crucial to democratic governance.

The separation of powers as articulated by its proponent, Montesquieu, in his work "De l'esprit des lois (1748; The Spirit of Laws)," must be codified and enforced by legislation in order for each division of authority to operate successfully. Democratic consolidation might not succeed without the notion of the separation of powers, according to which each component of government runs independently. People's freedom in any given government is guaranteed by the separation of powers philosophy. The proponent of this theory contends that the executive, legislative, and judicial parts of government ought to exist and be exercised by independent groups of people. Each branch of government should only be allowed to operate within its own jurisdiction (Chaturvedi, 2006:282).

Since it is considered that eliminating secrecy and allowing for unrestricted access to information is a crucial prerequisite for the eradication of corruption and the advancement of accountability, predictability, and justice, transparency is helpful to "democratic governance." Democracies in transition emphasize openness as a way to keep public officials responsible and fight corruption, emphasizing that immoral behavior would flourish in obscure social and political circumstances. Transparency hence enables the exposure of previously corrupt behaviors and prevents the formation of fresh ones that corrupt individuals are prone to engage in. Seumas Miller et al. (2005) claim that invisibility is frequently present in cases of corrupt behaviors carried out by rational people, despite the fact that agents may engage in a corrupt way openly in morally corrupt situations. Seumas Miller et al. (2005) claim that invisibility is frequently present in cases of corrupt behaviors carried out by rational people, despite the fact that agents may engage in a corrupt way openly in morally corrupt situations.

Understanding that early political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Harrington, Locke, Montesquieu, and others believed the concept of the separation of powers was a solution to get rid of the arbitrary powers and curb the inclination of the government to become authoritarian is vital. A prerequisite for liberty is the development of distinct legislative and executive departments as well as a fair and independent judicial system. Because of this, Montesquieu thought the concept of the separation of powers was an essential defense for liberty. "There is no liberty," he said, "if the judiciary power is not separated from the legislative and executive." Given this, Gettel argued that the three governmental functions should be carried out by separate groups of people, with each department being independent of the others and supreme within its own sphere of influence (Chaturvedi, 2006:282).

On the other hand, it is believed that the separation of powers ensures that the three branches of government—executive, legislative, and judicial—cannot interfere with one another. For instance, it is proposed in theory that the judiciary and the legislative both exist and operate apart from the executive branch. It's important to put these concepts into action. According to the rules, the same group of people functioning in these roles shouldn't also hold posts in more than one of the three branches of government. The functions of one branch of government shouldn't be carried out by another, in other words. For instance, the executive branch should refrain from enacting legislation that belongs in the hands of the legislature.

The aforementioned factors make it abundantly evident that the rule of law is crucial to the maintenance of democracy; without it, democratic systems cannot be considered democratic, but rather ones of more civil rule. Although only in theory and not in real practice, the rule of law principle is enshrined in the constitutions of the majority of nations today, including Nigeria. It is very difficult to consolidate democratic government in such a society. The freedom to hold divergent or contradictory opinions is a "sine qua non" of constitutional practice in all democracies. To the contrary, Section 38 (1) of the 1999 Constitution states:

“Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion, belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.”

Despite their seemingly opposing perspectives on democracy, they share several fundamental ideas. These include, among others, the supremacy of the law, the equality of all persons before the law, personal freedom, the will of the people, the fair allocation of resources in society, and equal opportunity for all individuals.

V. The Freedom of the Press in Consolidating Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Any particular nation's press has contributed to the development of democracy in a way that is both supportive of and influenced by the social norms of that country. A supportive environment is necessary for the press to operate effectively. Since most media outlets are owned and controlled by governments and politicians with political biases and leanings, the presence and participation of the private sector and civil society organizations would go a long way in achieving a balance. The press cannot only serve as a silent observer of society while carrying out its tasks. They must act as the watchdog of society and the reformers at the same time. However, the press should be independent and given a free hand to operate in accordance

with the ethics of their profession even when owned by private individuals, the government, and nonprofit groups. The press must also act responsibly, treating information and viewpoints with a strong sense of justice and respect for the truth. More importantly, the press must successfully manage a system of self-control and self-monitoring.

Under President Buhari's government, the press has had some degree of freedom. Although complete freedom is lacking, to some extent, the existence of social media has allowed for such freedom of the press. It is exceedingly challenging to keep information out of the public eye because of the way social media functions. It is incredibly likely that someone may see something significant and important and decide to publicize it without going through the proper press channels. This fact has helped to increase the quantity and quality of information published. With the help of social media, the globe has become a small, interconnected community, and thanks to this system, nothing can be kept secret from the public or restricted in any way by the government or anyone else. It is important to highlight that the government does not simply provide the public the right to freedom of the press; rather, this freedom of expression can be seen as an inherent right of the people, and any attempt by any authority or political force to restrict it is futile.

But the existing "Freedom of Information Act" is comparable to a flower that has just been put in a flower vase and is still in its infancy. It needs to be transported to the ground so that it can germinate and produce fruits for everyone. The environment is not yet ripe for it to take root if it is not put into practice. Comparatively speaking, it can be claimed that the government's collaboration with the media has not yielded many results. It is more important to state clearly that under President Goodluck Jonathan's government, the media enjoyed greater freedom of operation. During that time, journalists were free to report on any topic without fear of persecution. This is not to suggest that Jonathan's administration was fault-free. Some of "The Punch" correspondents were abruptly fired from their jobs at Aso Villa by the Buhari administration. Under the administration of President Jonathan, such would not have occurred (The Punch, Tuesday, May 9, 2017:2).

Many journalists have faced intimidation or harassment in the past for their work. This goes against the press freedom that a nation ought to grant its people. People should have the freedom to communicate factual information, not falsehoods that can incite a civil war. It is also expected of a person, group, or state-owned power to come out boldly with enough facts and data to prove the former incorrect, even if one believes the material released is incorrect.

This is what will enable the nation to continue developing. The government is not the only entity trying to muzzle the press; corrupt individuals are also involved. Some powerful people in the society have tried to manipulate or block some press releases from being published when the material is contrary to their preferences and not in their best interests.

Sometimes, the media hasn't helped the situation. Sometimes, problems are not fully researched and vetted before being used as a source for information. However, people should feel free to release the veracity of their own side of the story on such a hot-button issue and if there is some disagreement, this should not result in animosity and press harassment. As the "Fourth Estate of the Realm" that serves to balance the powers of the Executive, the Legislative, and the judicial branches of government, the press should be highly respected. Some would counter that the press is now free because it has the ability to disseminate or present news as expected thanks to the "Information Act". Because of certain personalities or politicians, the press shouldn't be utilized to support a particular position. Some news sources have occasionally been repressed by powerful people or the government. Numerous accusations have been made against the media based on stories that some media outlets have published that are sensational without even doing a thorough investigation (The Punch, Tuesday, May 9, 2017:2).

Media entrepreneur and public affairs analyst Emmanuel Ado, who is headquartered in Kaduna, once said that it is impossible to evaluate media freedom based just on public statements. Beyond physically preventing reporters from doing their professional jobs, which serve as their constitutional obligations, the restriction of media freedom extends much farther. When press freedom is violated under democratic rule, the people is completely denied access to the knowledge they need to make decisions about their general quality of life. In Nigeria, it is still challenging to get information in accordance with the "Freedom of Information Act" spirit. The ministers and heads of agencies in Nigeria are showing this kind of attitude toward the media, which seems to be more about tolerance than collaboration. In Nigeria, some regimes tolerate the media to a certain extent but do not view it as a partner in progress. During the Buhari administration, there was an altercation in Aso Rock between the Chief Security Officer of the President and "The Punch" Correspondent over a matter that led the CSO to use their veto power to stop "The Punch" reporter from covering the villa news; this CSO went above and beyond his limited constitutional authority. The majority of CSOs in Nigeria acted in a strong manner, but the Nigerian Press has outlasted them all (The Punch, Tuesday, May 9, 2017:2).

The Nigerian Press has received high marks from neighboring African nations for its investigative reporting and tenacity in the face of overwhelming difficulties. For instance, by disclosing information to keep Nigerians informed of the expense to sustain the President's health with tax payer money during the Buhari administration between 2015 and 2023, the Minister for Information, Lai Muhammed, has not been fair enough to Nigerians. This knowledge should not be kept a secret. The press need to have been given a more equal opportunity to inform Nigerians of the costs associated with maintaining the President's health. The administration's performance in this area can be characterized as lacking; there have been additional examples of improper information management and journalist treatment.

To uphold the fundamental objectives outlined in the chapter of the constitution as well as the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people, it is essential to maintain press freedom at all times through the use of radio, television, and other mass media outlets. Nsikan and Idongesit (2015) contend that this clearly represents a legal empowering of the media to play a key role in democratic governance, responsibility, and accountability. Momoh (2002) provided evidence to support this assertion by showing that democratic administration had already been firmly established when the Nigerian Constitution was adopted in 1999. The driving forces behind the democratic spirit are dynamic political campaigns focusing on issues and principles, intellectual diversity, electoral etiquette, a variety of target audiences, and respect for the rule of law and order. It is necessary to remember that the press still plays a significant part in maintaining successful democratic governance. Because of this, it is believed that the press plays an active role in obtaining, analyzing, and disseminating information on political issues.

The media in Nigeria is appropriately focused on and alert to official activities. The fourth branch of government acts as a conduit between the executive branch and the general public by promptly disseminating information of public concern. As part of the process of constructing democracy, the organ is intended to expose and criticize bureaucratic inefficiency, dictatorial tendencies, and the misuse of authority by public authorities. This is made possible by reporting truthfully and with critical writing. By bridging the gap between the public and the government, the media helps people create their own perspectives (Singer, 2000). According to McQuail (2007:207), the press's right to freedom of expression is all about the voluntary and coercive ways that the media are made directly or indirectly accountable to the society that they are a part of. The highest degree of trust and confidence underpins the intimate relationship between the press and society.

By defending the fundamental human rights that the constitution has guaranteed to all of Nigeria's inhabitants, the press actively contributes to the effort to improve democratic governance in that country. To ensure that people whose rights are violated must bear the repercussions of the law, the institution fought tenaciously and appropriately. This responsibility is given to investigative journalism in order to learn the facts and circumstances surrounding human rights breaches. The press can expose every matter of their discoveries to the public by employing investigative journalism and reportage to reveal the truth since the public has a right to know the truth about each event that takes place in society. As a result, the press may effectively monitor and report on human rights infractions because to her function as a watchdog. During the statewide "End SARS" march in Nigeria in 2020, numerous civilians suffered torture and other types of abuse at the hands of security personnel (Ukachukwu, 2023).

The media in Nigeria is also given the power to influence and develop public opinion by the constitution. The press employs "agenda setting" as a tactic to facilitate public discourse on significant contemporary political issues. This will improve democratic participation and give the people a clear signal of whether to favor or oppose planned government actions. When President Obasanjo's third term agenda was in place, this was the situation. By teaching Nigerians about the need to reject the narcissistic presidential objective of running for a third term in office, which was against the law, the media engaged Nigerians. Feature articles and broadcast media programs were used to accomplish this. Through the press campaign, the public was sufficiently informed to object to the president's action and overzealous ambition, which ultimately did not materialize (Santas, 2016). This was just one of many examples.

In order to ensure that everyone feels a sense of justice, equity, and personal and social peace, critical journalism in the press is crucial for the long-term growth and consolidation of democratic governance in Nigeria. The press, as a component of the social institutions operating within some economic and political domains in the society, enables this through objective, unemotional interpretation and analysis of information about political significance to the society. Unquestionably, the media broadens the definition of the public sphere to encompass issues like sustainable development and sound governance. It performs this critical duty by contesting the morality and behavior of important figures in democratic administration. But it is proper and undeniably commendable that the press plays such a significant part in society in supporting democratic governance.

As part of her vital role in building democratic governance in Nigeria, the press engages in policy advocacy. A well-known and accepted role of the media is press advocacy. Since the editorial page is the main focus of this role, advocacy is delegated to the editorial page even if most reporters discuss it as a task that the newspapers must perform rather than something they do themselves. According to Okpoko (2003), the dissolution of the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact in the first republic and the pro- and anti-Sharia sentiments in the fourth republic have shown that media support for policy advocacy has increased since the time of nationalists' agitation for independence.

VI. Recommendations

The study consequently suggested that the following recommendations be followed in order to consolidate democratic governance and press freedom in order to advance sustainable development in Nigeria:

1. The rule of law must be guaranteed without discrimination in the area of social stratification;
2. Separation of powers must be properly implemented, meaning that each branch of government must have its own autonomous "modus operandi";
3. The constitutional authorities must defend the rights of the press and persons;
4. To ensure free and fair elections, the Electoral Body must continue to be impartial toward the political parties' actions and the electorate and all citizens must have faith in its independence; and
5. The institutions in charge of the security of the state must function impartially and be able to fulfill their respective obligations.

VII. Conclusion

The study recognises with great attention that democratic governance and press freedom are essential for sustainable development to succeed in Nigeria. Indeed, democratic governance would be difficult to experience without the press. Over the years, the institution has been able to actively and significantly contribute to shaping its operations and direction. It captures the democratic nature of Nigeria, with all the flaws and shortcomings that have plagued the country's democratic governance throughout the years. There is no doubt that the media has the power to strengthen democratic government. The group has received recognition for its work in educating, informing, and enlightening citizens on how to engage in political activities

including voter registration and other electoral processes. The press was crucial in establishing the principles and other pillars of democracy and in fortifying democratic governance. In essence, a free press is necessary for the growth of democratic governance in any nation-state.

A society's capacity for survival and sustainable growth is influenced by a number of factors, including its communication infrastructure. As a result, communication has a significant impact on a variety of socioeconomic and political development factors. To achieve sustainable development and long-term democratic governance, society's diverse parts must link and relate to one another admirably. The press is a successful institution for bridging the gap between the populace and the government, which is essential for long-lasting and sustainable democratic governance. It might be challenging to solidify democratic governance for long-term development in a nation without press freedom, which would be disastrous.

The role of the press in the development of democracy in any given country is facilitative, supportive, and influenced by the social norms of that nation. A supportive environment is necessary for the press to operate effectively. Since most media outlets are owned and controlled by governments and politicians with political biases and leanings, the presence and participation of the private sector and civil society organizations would go a long way toward achieving a balance. The press cannot only serve as a silent observer of society while carrying out its tasks. They must act as the watchdog of society and the reformers at the same time. However, the press should be independent and given a free hand to operate in accordance with the ethics of their profession even when owned by private individuals, the government, and nonprofit organizations. The press must also act responsibly, treating information and viewpoints with a strong sense of justice and respect for the truth. More importantly, the press must successfully manage a system of self-control and self-monitoring.

The inclusion of press freedom in the Nigerian constitution, however, is done so, among other things, to strengthen the citizens' rights when dealing with any government, ensuring that none will turn autocratic and intimidate or harass them when they exercise their basic human rights under the whims of democratic governance.

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